

BOOK REVIEWS

Ben Witherington III and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, pages xxxviii+422, Cambridge: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004, ISBN: 0-8028-4504-5.

Here is an in-depth study of Paul's Letter to the Romans with fully blossomed scholarship and reverence to the text. To know the Romans and to understand the epistle one should have the knowledge of the first century Jewish and Greco-Roman world. Witherington and Hyatt's Socio-Rhetorical commentary is giving us the same in this deep-studied, reflected and analyzed work. The post-reformation interpretations and influences of Augustine on Romans is one of their main concerns. The attraction of this work include the 12 arguments in favour of a Rhetorical approach, 'A closer look' section facilitating a deeper analysis of the facts and figures and a concluding section in each unit titled, "Bridging Horizons" to have a comparative study of the Romans in the present era.

Study of Romans, as mentioned in the introductory part, is like beginning a long journey. Paul's letters are the oldest Christian documents, which are comprised of three unavoidable elements: Paul's faith, his understanding of what and who Jesus Christ is, and what Jesus Christ is meant for the life of ordinary Christian. He writes the letter to the Romans in order to pave the way for his visit to that unseen church, as he had started preaching in the Western Mediterranean world. Romans is one of the fullest statements of Paul's faith. He explains how Christianity which was deeply rooted in Judaism became the faith for all humanity. Letter to the Romans is a book full of the power and grace of God that has been an inspiration for many generations.

Now Witherington and Hyatt could withstand the temptation any other scholar would have succumbed to, to read and interpret the Romans in an exclusively restricted way. One should know the actual *propositos* and *peroratio*s to know the emphasis of Paul. Romans is an ambassadorial document than a letter, though it has a rhetoric structure. There has been a debate on the integrity of the letter – whom did he really aim at – Christian or Pagans? Romans is, again, a tradition-laden letter.

The twelve arguments, brought in by Witherington and Hyatt, provide enough basis to prove Romans as the rhetoric, and they highlight the unique attraction of this work. The first argument is based on the guilt of humankind in which Paul reassures that salvation is obtained always by grace and not by merit. It also stresses the righteousness of God's judgments. Bringing in Karl Barth's example of the man struck up in a blinding snowstorm and providentially being brought ashore safe, the author emphasizes that Christians are more accountable to God. The second argument states that no one is perfectly righteous and the teachers should be on their guard against self-complaisance. To bridge the horizon of today and Romans the authors put forward a suggestion to condemn anti-intellectualism and use the gift of teaching with prudence. The third argument finds Abraham as the forefather of all righteous and bring in the bridge of "Hope against hope" to connect us with the Romans. The fourth argument finds justification as the result of rectification and proposes reconciliation as the sign of greatness. The fifth argument is an Adam-Christ comparison and contrast. It sheds light into the broken Christian families of today as a result of the brokenness in Adam-Christ relationship.

The sixth argument has four sections: (i) Should we sin in order to increase grace? (ii) Analogy of marriage and sanctification, (iii) Man repeating Adams' fate, and (iv) Adam's story being repeated in one's own life as and when one wishes good and does evil. All these symbolize the spiritual crisis of existential situation. The seventh and eight arguments are based on a new life in Christ (Sprit). The examples from the daily life make things more clear and comprehensive. The ninth argument forces us to look at the world from the point of view of the most discriminated people of world – Jews. The tenth argument speaks on the living sacrifice and loving services for a new life in Christ and, hence, to build up a healthy self-esteem. The eleventh argument exhorts us to be submissive to the authorities and warns us against the tendencies to misuse authority and power. The twelfth and the final argument is on judging others. The concluding part analyses Paul's reason for writing so boldly to the Christian community in Rome.

Witherington and Hyatt's work is praise-worthy in its structural division and systematic presentation. He has made a penetrating analysis on the introductory salvation to explore the emphasis and audience of St. Paul. The frequent use of complex Latin terms (though a pointer to the

original texts), however, make the reading a laborious task, especially to a non-specialist.

The whole work is a picture of "Romans through history and cultures." The lack of a consolidated and comprehensive conclusion in the strict sense draws our attention at end of the work. May be the authors are tired of the orthodox style of such patterns or else have taken the readers for granted to conclude it for themselves. However, Witherington and Heyatt have achieved a great feat when they brought in such a commendable work – a total study of the Rhetoric in Romans. Any serious reader will find it highly informative, interesting and rewarding.

Biju Tharaniyil

Hans Waldenfels, *Buddhist Challenge to Christianity*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, pages 127, ISBN: 81-86861-71-8.

Professor Hans Waldenfels is a renowned scholar on Buddhist-Christian studies and an ardent promoter of inter-religious dialogue, especially in the field of dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. He has been Professor of Theology of Non-Christian Religions at the University of Innsbruck, St. George's Institute at Frankfurt, and at the University of Bonn. There are so many books published on Christian-Buddhist Studies to his credit. At present, he has undertaken the erudite work of editing the Encyclopaedia of Religions in German language.

The present work, *Buddhist Challenge to Christianity*, is a collection of a series of lectures given by the author in the "Dharma Dialogue Lectures" under the auspices of Chavara Institute of Indian and Inter-religious Studies in Rome. The style, as the author admits, is that of a dialogue and is colloquial in presentation.

Discussing the challenges Christianity faces in the process of dialogue with Buddhism, the author suggests that as we enter into dialogue with Buddhism, there is need for a deeper and common silence on issues that are, perhaps, divergent than catalyst for merging, especially on the notions of God. To make the dialogue more effective, "it needs a special effort to leave the own point of view and to move to the place of the other. Unless we do so, we always feel inclined to understand and to judge whatever we meet, from the own standpoint" (43). Our inter-religious

dialogue must lead to “the deeper levels of our consciousness and understanding” (116). With this insight, he penetrates into the ways and means by which one may respond to the challenges raised by the Buddhist doctrines and comes out with certain creative suggestions. He brings out the structural similarity, as a starting point for dialogue, through the comparison of the three precious jewels of Buddhism such as the person of Buddha, his Teachings, and the Community with the three Christian treasures such as the person of Jesus, his Teachings, and the Church. The question “whether there is anything more than these similarities” is left open for further deliberation and research. While peeping into the possible areas of dialogue, he also keeps a critical view on the methodological folly of hiding the essence of faith for the sake of dialogue as the people engaged in the inter-religious dialogue sometimes do. In his opinion, “true inter-religious dialogue will be an encounter on the basis of the religious experience which is given by the Spirit to anybody who is open and yearns for it” (10).

I am certain that this book will be a source of enlightenment for the people who are involved in inter-religious dialogue as well as for those who wish to know about the meeting point of two major religions, Christianity and Buddhism.

Thomas Muppathinchira

Kenneth K. Tanaka, Pure Land Buddhism: Historical Development and Contemporary Manifestation, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004, pages 294, ISBN: 81-86861-72-6.

The work under review is the outcome of the talks delivered in 2003 for the annual Dharma Endowment Lecture Series at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. This scholarly work is brought out in a worthy manner by Dharmaram Publications. It is really a remarkable contribution to the branch of Buddhist Studies of Philosophy and Spirituality, which deserves appreciation.

Dr. Tanaka is Professor of Buddhist Studies at Musashino University, Tokyo, Japan. He has written extensively on Buddhist philosophy and spirituality, especially on Pure Land Buddhism. The present study explores the origins and the basic tenets of Pure Land

Buddhism and its present development in different parts of the world, especially in Japan and the United States.

What is Pure Land Buddhism? It is a distinct form of Buddhism which follows a set of beliefs and practices that helps its aspirants to be reborn in a Buddha Land called *Sukhāvātī*, which means "Land of Bliss." Perhaps this branch of Buddhist spirituality may not be so much known as Zen and Tibetan forms of Buddhism. The ideas of Pure Land Buddhism are contained in the *Sukhāvātī sūtras*. According to these *sūtras*, Pure Land is a realm located billions of Buddha lands to the west. It was established by Amitabha Buddha (Ch. *O-mi t'o*; Jpn. *Amida*). It is a land of splendour, beauty and charming nature with trees, lakes and magnificent palaces.

Monks and laity alike strive to attain their rebirth in the Pure Land, where they can enjoy the vision of the glorious Amitabha Buddha with his attendant bodhisattvas. In order to attain this goal they engage in a broad range of ascetical practices, which include meditation, precepts, virtuous acts, *stūpa* building and contemplation. Those reborn in the Pure Land are assured of not retrogressing to lower spiritual levels and of realizing the ultimate Mahāyāna goal of perfect enlightenment (*samyak-sambodhi*).

The 15 Chapters of this book are divided into two parts. Part I deals with the historical development Pure Land Buddhism in different parts of Asia – India, China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet and Nepal. Part II describes present practice of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan and the United States. The author discusses various doctrinal questions, social, cultural and ethnic challenges in the practice, propagation and growth of the Buddhist communities in non-Asian situations. It also focuses on Shin Buddhism (Japanese Pure Land School), its theology and historical evolution on the American soil. In Shin Buddhism, according to him, one may find striking parallels to Christianity, especially with the Protestant Christianity.

The book is well printed and presented with notes and a subject index, but without a bibliography of works referred to. It is, no doubt, a praiseworthy contribution to the branch of Buddhist wisdom.

Sebastian Elavathingal

Pachauri J. P. and Chakkanatt J. D., eds., *Religio-Cultural Plurality and Nation-State*, Srinagar: Sadharmyam Publications, 2004, pages 367.

The book is the outcome of a two-day national seminar organized by Sadharmyam Research and Dialogue Centre, Srinagar (Garhwal) on "The Role of Religion in National Integration." It, indeed, was meant to 'communicate', 'to make known', 'to pierce' and 'to study' the role of religion in this country, when the nation sat on top of a 'communal bomb'. It contains around forty valuable articles on the subject by literati of the academic and religious circle, which participated in the seminar from various parts of India.

The papers are presented on three different categories, namely, Role of Religion in the Advancement of Peace, Religion and Manifestation of Violence, and Contribution of Religions in the Human Development. These three major categories deal with the mystical and harmonious roles of religions, its outburst as hindrance of peace and harmony, and the contributions of various religions in history, respectively. The notable credibility of the work lies in its comprehensive and inclusive view on the subject from all major religion's perspective. Thus, the book contains articles by Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain and Sikh literati. The articles also vary in respect of the sections of the society they deal with, from children to modern man. While most of the articles are philosophical, some contain important psychological and sociological analysis as well. It is, indeed, inspiring to see throughout the presentation that the book maintains the decorum of targeting national integration through inclusive religious as well as secular view.

The editors have done a creditable job in compiling the articles and in venturing into publishing the book bilingually. The book's annexes that contain the speeches of the inaugural and valedictory sessions of the Seminar give the reader a view of the context within which the articles are presented.

Sebeesh Vettiyadan

Augustine Thottakara, *Indian Spirituality, Hindu Spiritual Traditions: A Christian Interpretation*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2005, pages 376, ISBN: 81-86861-79-3

This volume gives an excellent introduction to Hindu spiritual traditions. The work has three parts. The first part provides some general information about Hindu religion and spirituality. The five sections of this long introduction are: (i) Historical overview of the development of Indian religions and spiritualities, (ii) Salient features of Hindu spirituality, (iii) A short description of the Hindu scriptures, (iv) Important concepts and categories of Hindu religions, philosophies and spiritualities, and (v) Glossary.

The main section of the book is the second part. It deals with the nature and characteristics of a spiritual aspirant and the spiritual means (*sādhanas/mārgas*) he/she employs for spiritual perfection. Seven *sādhanas* are explained: The path of detached action, the path of knowledge, the path of loving devotion, the path of meditation, the path of *nāma-japa*, the path of *sannyāsa*, and the path of total self-surrender to God. The author bases his deliberations and interpretations of these spiritual themes on the classical Hindu scriptures, especially the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*, and tries to dig deep into the spiritual treasures of India. The philosophical foundations of these spiritual paths are also investigated.

The third part contains some general essays on Indian spirituality, like *ahimsa*, *tapas*, *guru*, etc. These are well-studied and documented research articles.

One of the greatest merits of this work on Indian spirituality is that it gives Christian interpretations to Hindu spiritual concepts and traditions. The Author finds striking parallels between Hindu spiritual doctrines and practices in the Christian theology of spirituality.

Inter-religious dialogue and inculturation are, according to the author, two important concerns and duties of the Indian Churches. Churches need to enter into loving and creative dialogue with Hindu majority religion, especially in our times where the aggressive Hindutva movement within Hinduism is gaining momentum. Churches also have the obligation to incarnate Jesus Christ and his message into the religious, cultural and spiritual milieu of India. Works of this kind would give inspiration and impetus to these two obligations of the Church.