

BOOK REVIEWS

G. C. Nayak, *Nirvana in Candrakirti's Prasannapada: A Study in the Madhyamika Concept of Nirvana in the Context of Indian Thought*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2006, pages 107, ISBN: 81-7986-066-3.

G. C. Nayak's book entitled *Nirvana in Candrakirti's Prasannapada* is a serious attempt at analyzing the concept of *nirvana* in the Madhyamika philosophy, especially in the philosophy of Candrakirti, the great commentator of the *Mula Madhyama Karika* of Nagarjuna, the founder of Madhyamika Buddhism. Candrakirti's *Prasannapada* occupies a central place in the development of Madhyamika Buddhism in the Mahayana tradition. Nayak has chosen the central concept of *nirvana* in Candrakirti's *Prasannapada* not only to highlight the genius of Candrakirti as an original philosopher, but also to clarify and elucidate the meaning of the concept of *nirvana*. The concept of *nirvana*, like the concept of *sunyata*, has evoked many – sometimes conflicting – interpretations in the hands of the Buddhist scholars. The scholars have not only disagreed on the meaning of the concept of *nirvana* and *sunyata* but also have conflicting approaches to the understanding of the basic content of these concepts. Nayak, however, has successfully steered clear of these conflicting views and has attempted to provide a clear and unbiased account of the basic concepts of *nirvana* and *sunyata* in Buddhism.

It has been popularly believed that Buddhism is a form of nihilism because it not only denies the soul-substance but also leads to the dissolution of the individual self which is itself a complex of five elements (*skandhas*). The attainment of *nirvana* is believed to be synonymous with the dissolution of the self itself. This nihilistic interpretation of Buddhism is not only antithetical to the basic doctrines of Buddhism but also it undermines the foundations of the moral teachings thereof. G. C. Nayak has very aptly and logically argued that the Madhyamika *sunyata* and *nirvana* do not stand for emptiness or void and do not culminate in negation of the individual self. According to him, *nirvana* stands for the annihilation of the desires and the bondage created by our ignorance, while *sunyata* stands for essencelessness of the individual and the world.

The author demolishes with equal force the argument of those who believe that the Buddhist *nirvana* and *sunyata* are part of an absolute ontology that aims at establishing the existence of a transcendental reality,

much like the Advaitic Brahman. He shows with textual evidence from both Nagarjuna and Candrakirti that *sunyata* does not imply a transcendental reality and that *nirvana* does signify a realm of absolute bliss promised in the Vedantic philosophy. The absolute interpretation leads towards making *sunyata* itself a positive reality, thus, denying the very meaning of the Buddhist dialectic of dissolving the *catuskotis* of being, non-being, both being and non-being and neither being nor non-being. Madhyamika logic is well known for its dialectical removal of all worldviews (*drsti*) in order to make man free from the thought-constructions (*kalpana*). Nayaka takes into account Candrakirti's *Prasangika* method to demolish the absolute metaphysical constructions. He contents that Candrakirti, more than any one else, has made it dialectically clear that *sunyata* does not mean any positive reality nor does it mean denial of reality altogether, but it signifies essencelessness (*nishvabhavata*) of things. Similarly, *nirvana*, for Candrakirti, means cessation of all "essentialist thought-constructions." This argument is central to *Prasannapada* which holds that *nirvana* is the annihilation of suffering through the removal of the thought-constructions.

One of the most significant aspects of G. C. Nayak's interpretation of Candrakirti's *Prasannapada* is his view that there is a strong anti-essentialism in Madhyamika Buddhism. He goes on to argue, as already stated, that *nirvana* itself is the cessation of the essentialist thought-constructions which create mental and spiritual bondage. This argument is based on the fact that the Madhyamika dialectic is essentially a critique of the thought-constructions. The Madhyamika dialectic rejects the idea that the individual entities have any essence (*svabhava*) of their own. All entities are part of a chain of a chain of interdependence or conditional origination (*pratityasamutpada*) and have, therefore, only contingent existence. In view of this, the Madhyamika thinkers declare that all objects and concepts are ultimately without essence (*sunya*).

Brining parallel from the Western thought, Nayak very aptly shows that Candrakirti's anti-essentialism has much affinity with that of Wittgenstein. Throughout his book, the author maintains that the key to the understanding of Madhyamika *sunyata* lies in the fact that concepts and entities lack essence and are to be understood only conditionally and so contingently. This is the way the doctrine of *pratityasamutpada* has to be interpreted without committing oneself to essentialist ontology. This novel interpretation of *pratityasamutpada* and *sunyata* are worth taking note of, since traditionally it has been believed that there is an ontology involved in

this doctrine. The ontological approach to Buddhism, especially Madhyamika Buddhism with Advaita Vedanta, has been the result of the ontological or metaphysical approach to the Buddhist doctrine of *sunyata*. *Sunyata*, as the word stands, can never signify any obscure metaphysical entity, be it the Absolute or any other entity. Buddhism moved away from this gross ontologism in favour of a moral framework that stands on its own without metaphysical commitment. The Buddha's silence on the metaphysical question is a reminder of this fact in the whole Buddhist tradition.

The position which Nayak drives at could be characterized in the words of Hilary Putnam, i.e., "ethics without ontology," meaning thereby that the ethics of compassion can be freed from any metaphysical position regarding man and the world. The whole Buddhist ethics, according to the author, can be summed up in "compassion" (*mahakaruna*). The Buddhist singular ethical message was that love and compassion alone can save the world. The ideal of *Bidhisattva* is the ideal of saving the world from suffering and pain. Citing Candrakirti's anti-ontological stance, Nayak goes on to prove that the ethics of compassion has no need of any ontological props as the immortality of soul, the permanence of substance, etc.

The ideal culmination of philosophizing in Candrakirti, as shown by G. C. Nayak, is the cessation of all thought-constructions. This is ultimately the realization of the supreme truth. This is also the *nirvana* in the sense of the realization of the essencelessness of everything (*sunyata*). Candrakirti, thus, does away with ontology and makes room for the possibility of metaphysics. However, the question may arise: Does Candrakirti not retain some minimalist ontology, namely of one's own existence, the existence of the world and the existence of others even to facilitate the realization of *nirvana*? Of course, one can argue that there is no metaphysical thought-construction in this ontology; it is but accepting the things as they are (*tathata*), or in the Wittgensteinian sense, leaving "everything as it is." Therefore, there is no ontology in the strong sense which Candrakirti rejects.

In a sense, one cannot be absolutely free from a minimalist ontology even while distancing oneself from metaphysical constructions. Besides, one cannot be free from a minimal set of concepts even in the state of philosophical illumination which is called *nirvana* because there can be no *nirvana* in a conceptual vacuum. It seems that Candrakirti would not find

it repugnant to admit the minimalist ontology because it does not threaten his main argument that we must be free from all conceptual constructions.

For Candrakirti, *nirvana* does admit of communication and transmission, even through silence. That cannot rule out the possibility of making the supreme truth codified into language, however, minimalist linguistic articulation. This may be the reason why both Nagarjuna and Candrakirti do not see any difference between the *nirvana* (*paramartha satya*) and the *samsara* (*samvrti satya*). That is, it makes no difference whether *nirvana* is realized here and now or hereafter. *Nirvana* has no reference to space, time, and language, but the human beings who realize it are all in space, time, and language.

Thus, G. C. Nayak has made the most original and laudable attempt to make Madhyamika Buddhism intelligible as a coherent philosophical position. He has shown that in Candrakirti, Madhyamika Buddhism stands out in the clear light freed from the blemishes of mysticism and obscurantism. This work must be admired for its illuminating presentation, perspicuity of the method, and deep understanding of the Buddhist thought. *Nirvana in Candrakirti's Prasannapada* is a must for every serious scholar of Indian philosophy and especially of Buddhist philosophy.

R. C. Pradhan

Patrick Crasta, *Spiritual Accompaniment according to St. John: The Beloved Directee*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007, pages xvii + 181, ISBN: 81-7086-418-6.

Spiritual Accompaniment according to St. John: The Beloved Directee, by Patrick Crasta, is an intuitive and a visionary book which can be seen as an inevitable book to be read by all who are involved in the field of spiritual formation. The author, through this book, shows his depth in the biblical studies as well as his competency in psychological counselling. He unveils his wisdom of being the formator and, at the same time, to be sure of the mission of being an eternal formee. This book is the product of deep reflection and a by-product of spiritual assimilation. There is a connecting link in all through the chapters of this book and the sequences are so well arranged that its central theme can be understood step by step. The different stages of life and the need of spiritual accompaniment are depicted in a very special way. This makes the book a unique one and the

language used is very simple that the readers will relish to read and will be nourished through its rich content. This book will also deepen the minds to know the Gospel of John in a different way.

This book is divided into 8 chapters in which the central theme is the relationship between the spiritual companion and the directee or the directees. In the very introduction, the author clarifies what he means by "spiritual accompaniment." He writes: "Spiritual accompaniment is basically a relationship. It is a process of 'being with', 'learning from' and 'feeling at home' in the company of the spiritual companion" (2). The ways and methods of Jesus, the Supreme Spiritual Companion, are human and the directee has been given the freedom of journeying with him or to stop on the way. The first seven chapters are seen as spiritual journeys in seven stages or steps in the school of spiritual accompaniment, according to the evangelist St. John (4).

The first chapter can be compared to a person who sees the well from a given distance. The second chapter is seen as one who comes secretly to see whether there is water in that well. The third chapter can be depicted as those persons who come to draw water from the well. The fourth chapter may be seen as a situation of having water and enjoys the taste of this particular well. The fifth chapter deals with the attitude of guards, who want to be by the side of the well even in the troubled times. The sixth chapter shows the touching scene of the helping hand of a spiritual companion who wants his directee to get water from the well and how to keep it filled and make it clean. The seventh chapter can be seen as effects of the water from the well, which purifies different attitudes.

In this book each chapter has a unique nature. The first chapter shows how a stranger is being made a companion. The starting point of a communication and the techniques of accepting the communicating partner are seen here. The gradual progress of a relationship is shown wonderfully and certain psychological terms, which have to be taken care in a conversation, are clarified. The second chapter depicts the character of Nicodemus, who accepts Jesus as his companion. The total change of a person is picturesquely portrayed here. His growth has been mentioned in the following words of the author: "The maturity of his personality becomes evident further in what he does in the context of the burial of his Spiritual Companion" (40). Sitting at the feet of Jesus and paying heed to the voice of the Spiritual Companion are made the duties of the directee in the third chapter. Different characters of Martha and Mary, and the

attention of Jesus towards them, are elegantly portrayed. Here, more touching is the love of Jesus towards this family. The fourth chapter gives a different picture of spiritual accompaniment. It is shown in this chapter how, in the modern situation, a spiritual companion has to behave in the process of accompaniment. In the farewell meal and in the washing of the feet, Jesus' attitude towards his disciples is clearly visible. Here the author opens the new path of relationship which has to be taken care of in spiritual formation.

In the fifth chapter, there are beautiful picturing of the cross, and those who stood at the cross, including the beloved disciple. The blessed Mary has been portrayed as a faithful directee and John is seen as the beloved directee. The divine logic and the unconditional love of the spiritual companion are depicted in a beautiful way. The sixth chapter is a fantastic presentation of accompaniment as a process of walking like a child. The need of timely help and the need of leaving alone are dealt with. There is a mentioning of independence and dependence. The great talent of the spiritual companion and the different faces of the weak formee are exemplified through Peter. The humility and the self-sacrifice of the spiritual companion as well as the transformation of the formee constitute the content of this chapter. The existence of various types of demons is discussed in the seventh chapter. The question regarding demons has been put as an inadequacy of belief. In an indirect way, the author makes some critique of lapses in faith formation: "Casting out the demons is the primary task of the directee as the extension of the person of the Spiritual Companion" (130). Here, the great role of the spiritual companion is given. The victims of negative forces are also shown in this chapter. The theme of the last chapter is lifting up of the spiritual companion from the earth. He or she has to be different. It is possible not only through one's talents, but naturally through the gift of God. The qualities of a spiritual companion are given in detail. It is centred on Eucharist.

This book will, indeed, deepen the horizon of those who are engaged in formation. Formation has to be redefined as spiritual accompaniment. The new insight on formation is the intent of this book and it would facilitate a contrast between the old mentality and the mentality of Jesus. I hope that this book would enable better awareness among the formators and new perspectives among the formees, both of which would break new grounds in the field of spiritual formation.

Ambrose Puthenveettil

Jose A. Pulickal, *Dynamics of Jesus Community: Towards the Discipleship in Lucan Theology*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2007, pages xxvi + 345, ISBN: 81-7086-420-9.

Dynamics of Jesus Community is an attempt to theologise Christian discipleship from a communitarian perspective presented in the Gospel of Luke. The first chapter provides an introduction to the Lucan 'way' by analysing the concept of pilgrim theology where human beings are not only the thinking subjects but also the thought-objects of theological reflection. In order to explain pilgrim theology, the author provides an analysis of 'paradigm shifts', as these shifts have led to the development of praxis-oriented pilgrim theology, which is said to be effective to deal with various crucial problems that the church faces today. One of the important characteristics of Jesus community, based on the Gospel of Luke, is its 'pilgrim theology'. To facilitate effective understanding, the author undertakes its analysis from various angles and its contextualization, especially from the pluralistic Indian milieu.

In the second chapter the author explains the concepts of *Derek* (meaning, road, movement on the road, etc.) and *hodos* (meaning, way or street in its many possible forms). These concepts are developed through analysing the usage of these words in the OT, the NT, and the Qumran literature and show how these words had evolved. Further, the author undertakes an analysis of *hedodos* as Jesus community in the Lucan literature under the headings of "Jesus community in Luke-Acts," "Background to the Lucan Theology of the Way," "Structure of the Travel Narrative in Luke," and "Ministry of Jesus as *hehodos*." By basing on the Lucan theology, the author establishes that the Christian movement is *hehodos* and Jesus community is the archetype of the church.

The following chapter is devoted to an exegetical analysis of Lk. 4:16-30, the Nazareth Manifesto, with special reference to 9:51-56 and Acts 1:8 to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic spirit of Jesus community. Here the writer calls our attention to the setting and social structure of Lk. 4:16-30. The time of Jesus' ministry was rightly characterized by multifaceted crises that affected all areas of Jewish life due to the colonialism. The Jewish society was tormented culturally and the poor were exploited. The Lucan community predominantly consisted of gentile Christians who had been facing the challenges of integrating with Hellenistic culture along with political economic oppressions. Thus,

the passage proclaims the liberation of the oppressed and challenges the unjust social relationships. With this background, the author makes a detailed exegetical analysis of Lk. 4:16-30. He has taken great pains to explain the passage in relation to the Book of Isaiah. Here I would like to state that the author insistently brings out the contextualized meaning of the passage with special reference to the poor, especially in the context of poverty experienced in the Indian context. Thus, this chapter turns out to be the crux of better and deeper understanding of the Lucan vision of the pilgrim community of Jesus.

Jesus community is studied with the help of relevant Lucan texts related to Jesus' ministry and his vision about the disciples, keeping in mind, that it is the very same Gospel community that had been growing as *ekklesia* after the ascension. The major themes explained here are the poor, table fellowship, compassion and mercy, prayer and sharing, etc. The concept of poor includes all the less-privileged and the abandoned people; Jesus' solidarity with them can be seen throughout his proclamations and ministries. Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners has great relevance in understanding his radical approach towards the marginalized ones of the society. Jesus, the incarnate compassion of God, expresses his mercy through his ministry and proclamation. The author highlights the theme by explaining the parables of the lost sheep, prodigal son, etc., and deeds such as pardon for the sinful woman, incident of Zacchaeus, etc. The foundation of this sharing community is the Abba-experience and the vision of kingdom. The Gospel of Luke ends with the exhortation of Jesus about the universal mission and of the Acts of Apostles, written by himself, shows the growth of the church from particular to universal, from exclusiveness to inclusiveness, and from being that of Jews to the Gentiles.

After building scientific and logical foundation based on Lucan theology the author takes the reader to the Indian context. In the first section of this contextualization of Jesus community, the author explores the dynamism of the *Margasastra* of early St. Thomas Christians in India, which had no hierarchical discriminations among the faithful, but the differences were in the ministries; either way the unity of the community in Jesus Christ was thoroughly maintained. The author presents the '*marga*' to draw inspiration from that lived-reality for conceiving an ecclesial community in the contemporary India, which can effectively face the challenges such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, oppression of dalits, terrorism, exploitation of women and children, neo-colonization

through globalization, etc. Some of these sections are of critical nature and they throw light on institutionalization of the church, clergy's identification of themselves with the church, church's association with the middle and upper classes, etc. The discussion concludes with the dynamics of Jesus community for the church in India.

In the conclusion, the author most powerfully establishes the fact that hierarchical and institutional system of ecclesial paradigm must be shifted to collegial, communitarian, and people-oriented methods which would have resonance and impact upon the practical realms of people's ecclesial life.

Dynamics of Jesus Community is an admirable study that incorporates both theory and praxis; it inspires the Indian church with rich insights to build up a Kingdom-centred ecclesial community which is rooted in the unconditional love of Abba, the Father. The book has the potency to get a wider readership, especially from different platforms of Indian mission and theological deliberation.

Samji Vadakedam

Zacharias Mattam, *Not I, but Christ Lives in Me: Spiritual Life as Mystical Union with Christ*, Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2007, pages: xix + 406, ISBN: 81-87370-42-4.

Not I, but Christ Lives in Me is a profound study of God's presence in human life. Scholarly reading is made easy with lots of references from different sources. The author, in the initial part, clarifies the terms and concepts, such as 'spiritual life', 'Christian', etc., by providing novel insights.

I liked the way the author starts to introduce the topic to the reader. He has put the theme as "walking with God" and gives a satisfactory answer quoting St. Paul. According to Paul, the Christian at baptism is so deeply united with Christ that it is not an individual but Christ who lives and acts through him. The presentation part of the theme is simply the best in the text.

The search in the scriptures is quite deep and interesting. The author begins with God's presence with Adam, Noah, etc. As we dwell on this topic further, we see God's assurance to Moses saying, "I will be with you." The prophets such as Elijah, Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah had personal experience of God and lived in constant communion with Him, listening to His words, speaking in His name and proclaiming His will to the people.

This experience shows that the presence of God with the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Old Testament is a dynamic presence, transforming their lives and making them fruitful and instruments of blessings and salvation to others.

The author also presents the goodness of God towards human beings, though many a time man failed and went astray from God and out of His love for them; repeatedly He has forgiven them. In the Book of Exodus, we are reminded of Moses' prayer for forgiveness of the people. He goes on to explain the existence of the temple which becomes the centre of the life of Israel and also the centre of all Messianic and eschatological hopes. So, the author rightly expresses quoting Hos. 6:6: "I want love and not sacrifice the knowledge of God and not holocausts." The author goes on to explain how each incident is related to the new Adam and new Moses, that is, Jesus. He holds that the mission of the prophets represented the prophetic aspect of the Messiah and the new temple is Christ's body.

Christ's presence with us is a grace available for all of us, an invitation to enter into personal communion with God. This presence transforms our barrenness to fruitfulness, leading to a new life for the glory of God and His people. Therefore, the whole Christian life becomes a liturgy of holiness offered on the altar of the will of God for the salvation of the world. This idea is well presented at the end of first chapter.

The second chapter speaks about living in communion with God through feasts, through His Word and His Spirit in the OT and its fulfilment in Christ. Here, as the author speaks about the communion through feasts he gives possible details; it, however, sounds to me not very convincing (he uses the expressions such as 'some have suggested...'). At the same time, his analysis and explanation of Passover, Pentecost, Feast of Tabernacle and even the Feast of Dedication seems to enjoy more authenticity.

Secondly, the idea of 'the presence of God through His Word' is presented beautifully. He speaks about the Word that enlightens, calls to conversion, a Word that consoles, a Word that loves, and a Word that reveals itself. The author explains the journey God made to reveal Himself to human beings, starting with the OT and climaxing in the NT. The whole idea that the Holy Spirit who was revealed in the OT is 'Spirit of God' is revealed in the NT as 'Spirit of Christ'; in this connection, the author seems to explain how Jesus was conceived and, later, led by the power of the Holy Spirit, how Jesus passed on the Holy Spirit to his disciples and

“... became a life Giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). Thus, he concludes this chapter affirming that Christian life is a mystical union with Christ.

The third chapter invites us to know what this Christian mystical union with Christ is like in the NT. The author rightly says that Jesus Christ is the Promised Messiah, the living Temple and Tabernacle of God’s presence, the eternal life. Through Him all families of the earth are blessed. In chapter three, the author opines that the word ‘election’ may not be an appropriate word because the disciples of Jesus were the choice of Jesus Christ Himself and they were selected and not elected. Secondly, the confession of Peter and the revelation at the transfiguration are the proofs that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. This knowledge of Christ is possible only with a radical conversion.

Further he depicts in the gospel of John the significance of what the mystical union of the Christian with Christ is. He says that the disciple is called to abide in Christ and Christ abides in him in this way becoming one being with Christ. To remain in Him is the essence of discipleship and of the Christians’ mystical union with Christ, according to Jn. 15, 1-8. So, the Eucharist remains as the mutual indwelling of Christ and the Christian. He dwells on this topic showing how Christ becomes the bridge between God and the people and how Christian mystical union with Christ implies fellowship with the Father. Quoting letters of St. Paul, he shows how Jesus Christ reveals the Father, making a gift of His own relationship with the Father to the Christian: “... for God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are” (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The resurrection of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit are the guarantee that the spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are sons of God. In conclusion to this chapter he invites the reader to see how the community of Galatia concretely lived this mystery and responded to the problems they had faced. This becomes the heart of the authors thesis which goes on to prove that “*not I, but Christ lives in me.*”

Chapter four explains how the Christian is transformed into Christ. He narrates Paul’s journey to Damascus – his conversion, call, and commission. Paul was made new; he spoke not of himself anymore but of Christ the risen Lord. According to him, man is justified by faith in Christ and not by good works (Gal. 2:16). By the very baptism he says that the Christian is transformed into Christ. The new life that the Christian lives is made possible by the self-gift of Christ and so the Christian’s mystical union with Christ implies the gratuitous, unconditional and personal love for Christ. To conclude, he says that every Christian is called to respond to

Christ's love, for the supreme gift a person can make to another is gift of his life.

Chapter five explains the invitation that every Christian intimately receives. Therefore, it is of supreme value to live in intimate relationship with Christ. He gives Mary as the model of our mystical union with Christ; for, she was the temple of the living God at the annunciation and the living Ark of the Covenant at the visitation. The final stage of the Christian's mystical union with Christ is the transformation of the Christian into Christ and the gift of entering into the life of trinity, living in filial relationship with the father through Christ in the Spirit.

Finally, the author makes a brief theological synthesis by summing up the main characteristics of the Pauline concept of Christian life as mystical union with Christ. This is made possible to every Christian, as we are given the fullness of faith, hope, and charity. Indeed, all other virtues of Christ are made possible only in being united with Him.

Not I, but Christ Lives in Me is a work of high theological value; its interpretations are of great value to understand the dynamics of Christian living, especially in terms of the intimate relationship that is expected of every Christian disciple. May this work bring cheer and joy in the lives of many a Christian, especially in the trying times that Christians are passing through in various parts of the globe.

Roque D'Cunha