

Book Reviews

Mission Today: Challenges and Concerns. Abraham P. Athyal & Dorothy Yoder Nyce, (eds.) Chennai: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, 1998, pp. viii, 230, RS. 100 (\$ 10).

This book is a collection of articles put together as an expression of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute's search to facilitate the Indian Church in its task of Christian witness. It is the first publication of the College's newly established Department of Mission, Ecumenism and Dialogue. It deals with the basic challenges and concerns relating to mission in the Indian context.

The book consists of 14 articles arranged in three parts. Part 1 has four articles centred on Church in God's Mission: These are: "Church-in-Mission Facing Contemporary Challenges" by David Udayakumar; "Crisis of Pastoral Ministry and Search for Holistic Spirituality" by K.C. Abraham; "Church: An Obstacle to God's Mission?" by Leelamma Athyal and "Mission and Ecumenical Vision" by P. Victor Premasagar. The thrust of Part 1 is that the Church has no mission independent of God's mission. Hence, the Church must be open to renewal according to Jesus' vision of the Kingdom. There is no mission of creating a spiritual world isolated from the daily struggles of life.

Part 2 has five articles and deals with the multifaith context of mission and the need for dialogue. These are: "Missionary Research of Tamil Bhakti Religions of the Eighteenth Century" by Daniel Jeyaraj; "Dialogue-in-Praxis" by Ravi Tiwari; "Interreligious Dialogue: Our Privilege and Responsibility" by Dorothy Yoder Nyce; "Mission in a Multi-Faith Context" by Monica J. Melanchthon and "God, the Gospel and Human Truth" by Charles C. West. The developments in the country since independence and in Missiology as a whole have brought about a fresh understanding of dialogue. In this the Church's preoccupation must be to build a new community based on mutual trust and fellowship. All religions are committed to life and this must be an incentive for the Church to collaborate with all religions.

Part 3 is entitled Spirituality for Mission and has five articles: "Prophetic Insights for Contemporary Mission" by M. Mani Chacko; "Jesus of History: Insights into His Liberative Mission" by Abraham P. Athyal; "A Relevant Spirituality for Mission Today" by Vinita Manchala; "Mission Experiences in Urban Industrial Contexts" by Paul Siromony and "Mission Priorities Today" by Jesudas Athyal. The authors argue for the need to evolve a new spirituality characterized by prophetic courage and faith in God's presence and activity in history. Jesus' own mission must serve as a paradigm for a liberative spirituality.

As such the unifying element of the book is its search to provide a biblical and theological basis for the Church's engagement in God's mission. Individual articles will reward the reader who is interested in the topics. Frankly, some are shallow while others are stimulating, like "Jesus of History: Insights into His Liberative Mission". Care could have been taken to give the correct names of the authors in references and to avoid certain printing mistakes.

Jacob Kavunkal, SVD

Hindu Thought and Carmelite Mysticism. Swami Siddheswarananda, Tr. William Buchanan, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, Delhi, 1998, pp. xvi + 172 Original Title: *Presee Indienne et Mystique Carmelitaine*

This book is a collection of lectures delivered by Swami Siddheswarananda in different parts of France some fifty years ago. The author passed away in 1957. But the book has not lost its freshness in the contemporary search for comparative studies of the varieties of religious experience and interreligious dialogue, especially theological reflection.

The purpose of these lectures, according to the author, is to bring out some points of agreement between Christian mysticism, particularly Carmelite, and Hindu thought. The author does not make any claim to be definitive, but aims to offer some degree of comparison of these two currents of religious thought (p. 1), especially on three points, namely, prayer (the discipline of purification), the gift of self to God accompanied by suffering, and union with God.

In the lives of great mystics, the author sees a kind of spiritual realization which transcends the barriers of religion and makes all humans brothers and sisters in the outpouring of human compassion. A careful study of the writings of St Thresa of Avila, St John of the Cross, St Thresa of the Child Jesus and Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity reveals to Swami Siddheswarananda a genuine kinship with Hindu mysticism.

The first two chapters of this book prepare the ground for diving deep into the remaining four chapters which are devoted to a penetrating search for parallels between the *Yoga*, so the author names it, of St. John of the Cross and Hindu mysticism. The specific focus of comparison is on the writings of St. John of the Cross under four characteristic subtitles: "The Study of *Yoga* in St John of the Cross", "*Bhakti Yoga* and St John of the Cross", "The *Yoga* of St John of the Cross and the Theological roots of Faith", and "The *Raja-Yoga* of St John of the Cross". The author establishes that there are similarities and differences between the *Yoga* of St John of the Cross and the classical *Raja-Yoga* of India, but the presentation follows an order which reverses the traditional one.

The author starts with the premise that the similarities and parallels are not to be found in doctrines and theological interpretations but in the psychological content of their experience. It is true that we can note similarities in the transformation of character. All the truly great mystics abided in love; they saw the world and directed themselves towards it in a manner totally different from the rest of us. In the process of comparing, the author is fair and does not take the best of his tradition to oppose the worst in the other without at the same time implying '*All that is the same thing*' (p. 117). The language is respectful. There is a mystical touch in the way he engages in comparisons, and that is perhaps what adds to the freshness of the content.

As the different chapters were originally lectures, one need not look for a scientific research style in the book. It is not clear whether the author had in mind any conceptual difference between '*thought*' and '*mysticism*'. In the lectures, it would seem that these two words are used interchangeably. "In Christian thought, the highest state one can attain consists in betrothal and spiritual marriage, . . ." (p. 23). While it is true that Carmelite mysticism is Christian, Christian mysticism cannot be identified with the

Carmelite mystical experience which is but one of its expressions. To restrict *askesis* to the practice associated with the life of monks or others who live in monasteries (p. 22) is to overlook its wider perspective which is applicable to all others who are outside the stream of monastic spirituality. In the same vein, to see the way of the beatitudes as reserved for rare souls (the author quotes Mt. 10:38-39) in this connection, p. 32) is to restrict the universal significance of Christ's call to his disciples to respond creatively to the way of reunification and holiness. Since the Second Vatican Council, the attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religions has changed radically from what it was when these lectures were given. So the author's observations and comments on conversion, Christianizing, paganizing etc. (pp. 100-101) have to be read discerningly. At times, one gets the impression that the comparison is rather diffuse and not sufficiently pointed.

William Buchanan deserves to be congratulated on this highly readable translation and making it accessible to the English-speaking audience. He has provided a select glossary of Sanskrit words used by the author. The special feature on *Notes on Persons and Books*, also by the translator, is indeed a thoughtful gesture which helps the reader to enter into the mystical universe of the exemplary work of Swami Siddheswarananda.

Varghese Malpan, SJ

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