

Book Reviews

Religion and Politics From Subaltern Perspective, Thomas Kadankavil, CMI. (Editor), Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999, pp. viii + 142, IRS 60.00.

The nine essays incorporated in this volume are from the Proceedings of a seminar (October 23-25, 1998) organized by the Centre for Dalit Solidarity at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. In the Preface, the Editor highlights the focus of each author. The issues studied are diverse. Most deal with the Christian Dalit reality. The essays are of varying length, mostly stating issues, seldom discussing them in depth. The case studies of J.J. Pallath on the Christian *Pullayas* and of P.T. Mathew on the Christian *Mukkuvars* of north and south Kerala respectively bring in a fresh perspective. The two-part article of Roger E. Hedlund is quite an eye-opener about the Christian movement at the periphery of the Indian society. The task of identifying the Indian Christians of indigenous origins seems a difficult process judging by the fact that the author leaves the reader with various perspectives and hardly a definitive identity in the first part.

The articles and topics as dealt with by the respective authors have limited value and restricted space in the overall subaltern studies. Among the Dravidians, the mention of Tamils and their numerous attempts, religious as well, at establishing their separate identity from the Aryan culture is quite informative. At the same time the reader is left with the question as to what happened to the rest of the southerners.

The issue of reservations in the course of the political history of independent India has become somewhat vexed. Raju Thomas has restricted himself to the identification of the Dalits by Dr B.R.Ambedkar. In recent

times, reservations and its beneficiaries identified by the Mandal Commission and even the Karnataka Government have entangled the debate even more.

The next set of four articles concerns the issue of caste in the Christian community. A point that could have enhanced Raja's article, somewhat descriptive, seems to be the evaluation of the achievements of the Dalit Decade (p.57) declared by the Church. Dr Maria Arul Raja, rector of *Arulkal* (sic), has made a commendable effort at seeking common ground between the biblical (*grande histoire*) and Dalit world (*petite histoire*). The recent anthropological studies of the Christian Pulaya and the Christian Mukkuva by J.J.Pallath and P.T.Mathew respectively highlight the subaltern cultural values transplanted into their Christian life by the Dalit Christians of Kerala.

The volume has an article by Ruth Manorama on Dalit Women. She focusses on their status in society and the way they let their voice be heard in social and political issues that affect them. Finally, Antony Kalliath analyzes the ills of globalisation, and, in the latter part of his article, enumerates some approaches and responses to the threat of globalisation. He suggests that "what is needed is to act locally and think globally with a sense of commitment to social justice" (p.142).

The reader is in for a disappointment with the editing of the work. The style of editing leaves much to be desired. Note the glaring inconsistency with the same name even within the same article and the same page. The revered E. V. R. may be turning in his grave that his last name is Nicker and Naiker in the same breath (p.7). The lack of exactness in the spellings is rampant; leave alone desired syntax and apt

expression. Check out page 1 line 1 for Dravidavrutta which would be correctly Dravidavarta and the cover page at the back where the Editor becomes Dr. Thomas Kadandavil (sic). Such countless mistakes throughout the text are a real distraction and undermine the value of this work.

Rosario Rocha SJ

Philosophy in the New Millenium: Quo Vadis, Philosophie? Antoworten der Philosophen: Dokumentation einer Weltumfrage, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, Editor, Concordia: International Journal of Philosophy Monographs, Vol. 28. Aachen, 1999, pp. 343 (price not mentioned).

Since its inception in 1982, Concordia has sought to promote exchange between thinkers of different cultures on relevant issues. Themes like various aspects of Philosophy of Liberation, the Preferential Option for the Poor and Religion as the Poetry of the World to Come indicate that no mere sterile academic exchange between academicians in ivory towers has been envisaged. This volume, as the Latin title suggests, focuses on the role of philosophy in the XXth century, with a view to discerning whence it should proceed in the new millenium.

Accordingly, Fornet-Betancourt addressed a series of questions to various philosophers, chosen from all over the globe. The five pertinent and provocative questions are the following:

- In your opinion, which are the historical events that have more strongly influenced the development of philosophy in this century, and which of these events should become subject of philosophical reflection?

- Which are the events in this century that have influenced your own philosophical development the most, and which in particular have made you change

your philosophical positions?

- Which issues, ideas, currents or works would you say are essential to the philosophy of the twentieth century?

- Which philosophical trends from this century do you think should continue to be developed in the future?

- Which tasks do you think should be given priority in philosophy at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

The responses of some 103 persons have been assembled and juxtaposed into this volume, without any naïve attempt to streamroll them all into one allegedly coherent consolidated report. The addresses of respondents are listed at the end, but regrettably no brief biographical notes are appended to each reply: one is left to guess at the nationalities (and even the sexes of those with exotic names), let alone the posts they hold in their respective Universities.

As to the criterion of selection, every effort was made to “keep in mind the plurality of thoughts” and a choice was made of “those philosophers who have contributed with their work to point out the direction of philosophy in this century.” “Unfortunately,” the editor informs us, “we did not receive answers from many philosophers whom we would have liked to include in this survey,” and, on the other hand, answers came in “from people whom we did not invite” – and presumably these were included. This effectively forestalls any criticism as to who was admitted and who was left out: for all we know, those whom we miss were among those who were requested but didn’t send a response and those whom we would prefer had been excluded were not among those originally chosen in the first place!

As to the philosophers whose answers have been gathered into the 300 odd pages, among the more well-known are Emerich

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jnanadeepa

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It is undeniable that there is a crisis of authority in the world today. What can we do to develop a new understanding of and a new approach to authority? What contributions can different traditions and disciplines make towards this goal? These are some of the questions the next issue, July 2001, of *Jnanadeepa* will discuss.

Back numbers of *Jnanadeepa* are available with us:

Vol. 1, No. 1: Our Commitment to a United India

Vol. 1, No. 2: Beyond the Colonial Past

Vol. 2, No. 1: Vision of a New Society

Vol. 2, No. 2: Contemporary Quest for Freedom & Liberation

Vol. 3, No. 1: Conversion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Vol. 3, No. 2: Formation of Religious Leaders



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of Metaphysics at Innsbruck), Enrique Dussel (the Latin American philosopher of liberation), Raimon Panikkar (advocate of diatopical hermeneutics, born of a Keralite father and a Spanish mother) and Paul Ricoeur (that great bridge between British linguistic philosophy and Continental phenomenology – existentialism). There are at least five Indians (and nary a woman among them): Pradeep Bandyopadhyay (“Toronto, Canada”), Sidney Mascarenhas (“Bangalore, India”), Giridhari Lal Pandit (“New Delhi, India”), Johnson Puthenpurackal (the nearest to a JDV representative) and Srinivasa Rao (also of “Bangalore, India”).

As for their answers, most mention the two World Wars, the establishment of the UN and the Fall of the Berlin Wall, with the consequent collapse of the Iron Curtain as key events that impacted on World History as also their own personal philosophies. None mention Vatican II which, in my opinion, was no mere religious event, relevant only to Catholics, but an epoch-making moment which had repercussions far beyond the pale of the Christian Churches. It gave great impetus to the growth of inter-cultural dialogue and the promotion of justice.

Responses are printed in the language in which they were sent in. Panikkar’s is in Spanish, Ricoeur writes in French and Coreth in German. One has, therefore, to be something of a polyglot to appreciate the work.

Dussel, writing from Mexico in Spanish, recalls the impact of the World Wars, Heidegger’s “*analitic existenciara*,” the philosophy of language inspired by the Vienna Circle and, above all, the “events of 1968,” that led him to develop his philosophy of liberation. Levinas’ “ethics as first philosophy” is a significant inspiration for him as to many others. Panikkar, as may be expected, calls for “*filosofía intercultural*” and a greater respect

for “*pluralismo*.” He also wants philosophy to become less an *opus rationis* and be animated by a “love of wisdom” as much as by the “wisdom of love”! “What has metaphysics to say in the face of the war in Rwanda,” asks Tanelle Bondi Kondé of Abidjan. “We are making test-tube babies, but have no remedy for death!” she (?) chillingly observes. There must be a decentralisation of the Ego, Reason, the One, the Father, God and Man (i.e. the Male), she continues: they dominate speaking and writing, they alone act, give orders and exclude – the rest may merely listen, remain silent and obey! John Puthenpurackal lists, besides the World Wars and the Fall of Marxism, also the Movement against Colonialism as also the forces of neo-Colonialism as significant events affecting Religion in the West, which is already making its presence felt in India. He wants a breaking down of the strict and exclusive “‘boundary’ that separates *truth* from *untruth*, *right* from *wrong*, *sacred* from *profane*.” “We have had enough of “perenniality and “dogmatism,” he avers. These must give way to an authentic “*philosophical humility* that takes man (sic!) and human knowledge in its essential finitude” (all emphasis original). This is echoed by Coreth who wants more serious reflection on the One and the Many, on Thinking and Living (i.e. Theory and Praxis). Shallow and uncritical assumptions about all these have led to lots of confusion. I would also add the need for a closer study of the causes at work in the decline and fall of Communism as we know it. Naïve ideas use this fact as a “proof” that Globalization and the Free Market are the unique and only saviour available to the oppressed masses of the Third World.

Certainly a thought-provoking book to delve into, even if one cannot read all the responses with equal fluency!

Cyril Desbruslais SJ