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Book Reviews

Pre-Christian Gnosticism. A Survey of the Proposed Evidences: by EDWIN YAMAUCHI. Tyndale Press, London, 1973. Pp. xi-208. Price £ 2.25.

Few problems in recent years have proved so persistent an irritant to New Testament scholarship as that of Gnosticism in its relation to New Testament thought. Was there a pre-Christian Gnosticism which influenced the formulation of the New Testament? Or is Gnosticism a wholly post-Christian phenomenon, merely a debased, 'orientalized' form of Christianity, in fact? The problem has been with us at least since 1750, when J. D. Michaelis in his *Introduction to the New Testament* suggested a gnostic origin for John's theology of the 'Word'. It is with us still. For a time indeed, in the post-war years, the general abandonment by German scholarship of the more far-flung outposts of the History of Religions School brought a lull on the gnostic front; and C. Colpe's masterly *Die religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (Göttingen 1961) with its quite devastating critique of Reitzenstein's pre-Christian gnostic redeemer myth (a 'myth' in more senses than one!) even seemed (like Schweitzer's survey of the 'Quest of the historical Jesus' a generation earlier) to have brought the conflict to an end. But with the discovery of gnostic elements in the texts from Qumran, suggesting that a pre-Christian Gnosticism may have grown out of (and in reaction to) Jewish apocalyptic, and of Nag-Hammadi finds (notably the *Apocalypse of Adam*) with apparent traces of a pre-Christian redeemer myth, the battle is on again.

It is not easy to discern the shifting fronts of this confused and spirited debate. The manoeuvre of arguments and counter-arguments is blurred by the cloudy ambiguity of the question round which they turn. For Gnosticism is really an extraordinarily nebulous term. When indeed do we speak of a pre-Christian Gnosticism? Only when we have stumbled on an articulated system like that of Valentinus or Basilides? Or already at the first hint of gnosticizing tendencies, as soon, that is, as we detect traces of a radical spirit-matter dualism, or of a theory of redemption through gnosis? Scholars do not agree. And attempts at bringing precision by distinguishing between Gnosticism and the more general Gnosis, or between 'pre-gnostic' (for gnosticizing tendencies unrelated to Gnosticism proper) and 'proto-gnostic' (for incipient forms of Gnosticism) have not met with success.

The problem of a pre-Christian Gnosticism is thus an unusually complex one. But the non-specialist looking for an entry into this challenging field will now find in E. Yamauchi's *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* a clear, competent and reliable guide. The book professes to be a 'survey of the proposed evidences': it is just that. An introduction.

to the problem of pre-Christian Gnosticism (ch. 1) is followed by a brief negative report on the attempts that have hitherto been made to interpret various New Testament passages in terms of Gnosticism (ch. 2), and then by a thorough and extensive survey of the available evidence on the problem (chs. 3-9). Successive chapters examine the evidence for a pre-Christian Gnosticism in Patristic, Hermetic, Iranian, Syriac, Coptic, Mandaic and Jewish writings. The surveys are admirable. Each introduces the relevant documents, with enough historical and archaeological information to make them intelligible, and then attempts to assess their evidential value. The assessment inevitably turns into a survey of 'expert' opinions. Scholars who recognize pre-Christian gnostic elements in the documents are pitted against scholars who do not. There is some discussion of the arguments *pro* and *contra*, but the strength of the book lies not so much in its rather meagre argumentation as in the fulness of its opinion surveys. Very little of significance in the recent writing on Gnosticism has escaped Yamauchi's far-flung net, and all this vast mass of material, which might have overwhelmed the reader by its variety and bulk (as indeed it still does to an extent), has been deftly marshalled into a clear, orderly and readable text.

This long and informative survey of the evidence is followed by a rather disappointing, because much too thin, refutation of the pre-Christian redeemer myth (ch. 10), and by a far more telling critique of the often prejudiced and circular methodology used by the protagonists of a pre-Christian Gnosticism (ch. 11). An extensive bibliography, and subject and author indices, contribute to making the book a valuable introduction to a complex and topical problem.

Pre-Christian Gnosticism, then, is a useful and informative book, but not a particularly original one. It opens no new doors. The author's voice is drowned in the clamour of the discordant opinion he relays; and we miss those personal and creative insights that make even so wrong-headed a work as Käsemann's *The Testament of Jesus* (London 1968) a delight. In its survey of opinions the book is refreshingly objective, though Yamauchi's own position is never in doubt. The 'imposing scholarly edifice of Reitzenstein's and Bultmann's pre-Christian Gnosticism is but little more than an elaborate multi-storied, many-roomed house of cards, whose foundations have been shaken, some of whose structures need buttressing and others have collapsed, leaving a mass of debris with but few solid timbers fit for use in reconstruction' (p. 184f). This stance, explicit in the conclusion, is implicit throughout the book, appearing subtly in the arrangement of its material. Opinions favouring a pre-Christian Gnosticism are always followed by opinions against, giving these, as it were, the last word.

Yet one wonders whether the evidence he has so assiduously collected really does justify Yamauchi's position. The impression left by his extensive surveys is rather one of inconclusiveness. Much obviously can and has been said on both sides, and the situation appears still too fluid to permit a categorical decision. There is need too, one feels, of extending the discussion to a wider field than the Jewish-Greek-Egyptian-Iranian world to which it has till now been

confined. No one in India can fail to be impressed by the many similarities between Gnosticism and Upanishadic thought. Typically gnostic motifs, like cosmic dualism, a historical redeemer, salvation through gnosis, and even the three types of men (*pneumatikoi*, *psychikoi*, *kylikoi*=*sāttvikāḥ*, *rājasāḥ*, *tāmasāḥ*), were commonplaces of Indian religious thought well before the third century before Christ. And while the ancient world wasn't yet McLuhan's 'global village' with its instant electronic communication, neither were its cultures quite as isolated as biblical scholars like to believe. In his *Art and Thought of John* (New York 1961), E. J. Brunns has suggested that the Gospel of John may have taken over Mahayana Buddhist patterns of thought, and has made out a plausible case for Indian influences on pre-Christian Hellenism. Interaction between Gnosticism and Indian thought is admitted too, among others, by R. McL. Wilson in his *Gnosis and the New Testament* (Oxford 1968) and by J. Doresse in *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York 1960). It is likely, then, that characteristically 'gnostic' motifs (if not indeed a full-fledged gnostic system), long current in the East, would have been familiar to the Hellenistic world in which the Gospels were formed. Yamauchi's conclusion that 'the evidences which have been adduced to prove the priority of Gnosticism over Christianity have been weighed in this study and found wanting' (p. 186), would then be at least premature.

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G. M. SOARES PRABHU S. J.

Christenheit und Weltverantwortung ('Christianity and responsibility for the world: a History of the Tradition and systematic Structure of the Doctrine of the two Realms'): by ULRICH DUCHROW. Ernst Klett Verlag, Stuttgart 1970. Pp. 647. DM 38.50.

This book has been published in a series of research reports by a group of scholars belonging to different faculties on the topic of peace research. But this sizeable volume is essentially the work of a thorough German systematic theological scholar with all the advantages and disadvantages of this type of book. It shows a thorough and profound knowledge in vast fields ranging from Greek philosophy, apocalyptic and wisdom literature in the bible, pauline theology, Augustine, the mediaeval political struggle between popes and German emperors, ending up with Martin Luther's famous concept of the 'two realms' of Christ, in which every Christian has to live. This doctrine has recently become the shibboleth of Lutheran theologians in the ecumenical discussion on social ethics, up to now rightly or wrongly defended against the concept of the 'universal kingship of Christ' on the Calvinistic side. Duchrow shows the earliest roots and the development of this basic Lutheran doctrine. He points out the various misconceptions held by scholars up to now, who derive from it a separation of the spiritual and worldly affairs, a non-interference of church and theology in public and political matters, thus leaving politics in the hands of politicians alone without guidance by the church.

After a short description of aims and methods, the book starts with the earliest dualistic ideas in the Biblical tradition, the apocalyptic and wisdom literature. Duchrow has worked up the latest research done by German scholars in this field (by von Rad, O. Steck, E. Brandenburger), which has shown that the apocalyptic concept of history comes out of the deuteronomistic concept, which is centered around the catastrophe of 587 B.C. and calls for repentance. Likewise apocalyptic ideas are centred around God's coming judgement and call for repentance but now both are enlarged in a cosmic scale. The empires are understood as tools in God's hand to punish Israel for her sins, but later they exceeded their legal task and will be punished in return, thus bringing about the eschatological judgement over the Gentiles and the final salvation of the holy remnant. The cosmological ideas of the apocalyptic writers come from Israel's wisdom tradition. This apocalyptic concept of the present and the coming age forms the basic material leading to the later doctrine of the two realms.

The next step is Paul's concept of the outward and the inner man, the earthly and the heavenly man. The roots of this dualism can be traced back upto Plato's philosophy. In Plato's 'Politeia' however, there is no strict dualism of body and soul, but according to him there has to be a balanced relationship between the urges of the body and the upper parts of the soul represented through the reason. So, the upper parts of the soul have to guide and control the lower parts. This changes in Stoicism, where the reason has to suppress the urges of the body, which are regarded as bad now. Paul did not know Plato's teaching directly, but through Philo of Alexandria. Philo himself adopts the platonic idea of the inner man, which controls the whole body, in the shape which it had got through stoic popular philosophy, which had already isolated the virtues from reality, thus making the former an artificial effort and not a natural thing. Philo now equates the virtues with the divine law of the Old Testament and also adopts the dualistic traditions of Judaism with the antagonism of spirit and flesh.

How does Paul deal with this problem of the discord between reason and desires?—Firstly, he understands this gap even more radically. There is no way out of this absolute conflict, not for the wise man as Plato thought, not for the desireless sage of the Stoics, but also not for the perfect follower of the divine law as Philo held. Neither law nor wisdom can help us. The only way out of the calamity is through a new creation brought about through God's spirit adopted by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul has applied the apocalyptic dualism of the two ages on the human existence as well. He has overcome the Stoic and Philonist dualism of spirit and body by introducing the third category of the flesh ('sarx'), which means the sinful man. For him the body is the place where the new creation has to take shape. The distinction of old and new goes right through body and spirit of the new existence. Furthermore, the judgement by works shows the responsibility of the renewed man for his fellow creatures.

In a detailed interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 Duchrow shows that Paul refers to the 'natural law' as a common basis of action for all men, thus opening the whole Greek ethical tradition for the church.

This 'natural law', however, is by no means to be misunderstood in a Thomistic or modern static sense, which Paul did not know. Like Paul, Jesus also used the wisdom tradition in his own teaching to free the ethics from the Jewish bonds and narrowness.

A third main chapter deals with Augustine's two 'cities' (*civitates*). The author describes the development of Augustine's thought from the early neo-platonic period up to the later stages when the apocalyptic ideas of Tychonius were adopted by the great North African theologian, finally culminating in his book: 'The City of God'. The basic categories of Augustine's thinking are worked out clearly: 'to use the world' and 'to enjoy God' (*uti* and *frui*). In his reaction to the fall of Rome in 410 A.D. Augustine dismisses the claim of the non-Christian Romans that Rome fell because her inhabitants had given up the old gods of the city. For him the highest good for a happy life is a life according to God's will. Not that the flesh and its desires are bad in themselves, but their combination with human pride is harmful. Above the human realms is the city of God. This cannot be created through us, and it is not yet revealed. For Augustine the kingdom of God cannot be simply equated with the church. The church always remains a mixed body. It is also wrong to think that Augustine is only concerned with the relationship between God and the individual soul. In the body of Christ we find the new 'policy' of the Greek tradition, the final aim of which is eternal peace. The Christian love in principle is the fulfilment of peace, which all men desire. Although in this world there can only be 'the peace of Babylon' the Christians also share this peace and regard it as a gift of God in our present situation. If Augustine propagates a persecution of pagan religions, this is a deplorable sidetrack of his thoughts, which unfortunately cannot be denied. The reason for it is the fact that Augustine derived public authority from the authority of a Roman family father, who had the responsibility for the piety and religion of the whole family. So he understood the sacred law as part of the public law as well. In combination with the ancient idea that punishment is for the betterment of a person, this resulted finally in legalising compulsion in religion.

Augustine has tried to combine apocalyptic ideas with Greek philosophy and failed in the end mainly because the god of Greek philosophy is not the same as God in the Bible. Augustine was right in criticising the absolute validity of Greek ontology by making it subject eschatologically to the element of time, but retaining the positive values of the Greek traditions for the Christian church. His weakness was, that he did not clarify the relationship of justice and earthly peace. He passed on to the middle ages a dualistic frame for Christian behaviour in worldly things and all the later developments have to be seen in this context.

The fundamental change in the middle ages was the evolution of national churches. In these churches the problem of the relationship of Christianity to the World no longer existed, but changed into the problem of the two powers, the clerical and the political, within the Christian society. But in practice this was not a question of spiritual freedom of the church, but of an increase of clerical influence in the

mediaeval society, which can be seen in the attempt to impose the canonical law on king and nobility. Gregory VII and later Boniface VIII developed the formula of the two swords, the spiritual and the secular, which God has instituted among men. At the beginning both were regarded as independent of one another, but finally Boniface VIII claimed the supremacy of the pope over all spheres of human life. As a reaction the newly emerging nations tried to establish their right to rule on an independent foundation. In contrast to the papal theory, a Christ-centered kingship was put up, i.e., the king was deriving his authority over both state and church directly from Christ as the popes had done earlier in the opposite way.

In a final historical chapter Duchrow deals with Martin Luther. Again we find an outline of the development of Luther's political thought, which started by accepting the mediaeval concept of two powers, the spiritual and the secular, both prevailing in their respective fields. But after 1520 Luther denied the right of any secular power or jurisdiction in the spiritual field. He discerns now the spiritual power or 'Christ's right-hand realm', where he is reigning through the word alone (*non vi, sed verbo*) and the secular power or 'Christ's left-hand realm' the area of state and politics, where the sword has to be used, because the evil has to be punished. Luther justifies the use of the sword, he accepts just wars, but nevertheless he puts reason and peaceful settlement much higher. The final aim in politics is peace. To maintain peace, punishment and violence may become necessary, but they are not the main task of the secular authority. The right of the secular authority ends exactly there, where religious matters are concerned: no compulsion in matters of faith! 'Wherever any government tries to use force in religious matters, Christians have the right and the duty to disobey. Human beings have a free will in worldly things, but not in relation to God. They must use this free will according to common sense. As Paul, so Luther also stresses the judgement by works and so our responsibility for the world.

Luther does not advocate a double morality, but he tries to distinguish two spheres in our life: one as far as we are concerned, and the other as far as others are concerned. So far as we are concerned we have to live according to the Sermon on the Mount and rather suffer injustice than do it; as far as others are concerned we have to protect them against evildoers, even using violent means if necessary. So Martin Luther has spelt out a new relationship between the spiritual and secular power, safeguarding the freedom and independence of both in their own spheres. Both are Christ's realm. There can be no real autonomy of the secular power, no real separation of religion and politics, faith and works. Both are done by the same person. Christ is reigning in both spheres, but in a different way and with different means: within the church and in spiritual matters, there can be only spiritual authority; in the state and public affairs the ruling has to be according to Christ's will, but the means may be force and violence as well. There should be no mixing of both, neither a control of the spiritual life through secular means nor a clerical predominance over political decisions.

In a final evaluation Duchrow states clearly the limitations of Luther's doctrine for our modern times. Luther could not yet foresee the tremendous problems created through the concentration of power, both political and economic, and the enormous development of modern science and technology. He did not see the necessity of changes and the planning of these changes. New ways of mutual criticism and guidance between theology and politics must be found today to make our world more human and free and prevent all sorts of suppression.

This could be only a rough outline of the basic arguments of Duchrow's book on the doctrine of the two realms. The reader should remember that this is elaborated in 600 pages with a bibliography of about 800 titles! Not all parts are equally good. Especially those about the mediaeval period and Luther's own doctrine are lengthy and trying to read. But that means nothing in comparison to the really excellent, brilliant, inspiring and original chapters on intertestamental literature and Greek philosophy where he works up quite a number of recent publications and so far unpublished material, which makes this book attractive not only for the systematic theologian, but for church historians and biblical scholars as well. The style is never easy and pleasant to read, but the author manages to capture the interest of the reader through his concern and involvement in the problems he deals with.

One thing has to be regretted, however. The book gives a fairly complete picture of the recent discussion in German theology, but publications in the English language are virtually not mentioned at all. This is a pity for the ecumenical discussion and especially for the English speaking reader.

The print is excellent on the whole, only the headlines of the subdivisions might be marked more clearly. Sometimes they are difficult to recognize, which affects the readability and reduces the value of the book for quick reference. But the index of subjects and persons is excellent and the above mentioned tremendous bibliography is invaluable.

Ranchi

DIETER HECKER

The Salvific Value of Non-Christian Religions according to Asian Christian Theologians: by ASANDAS BALCHAND, S. J.; E. Asian Pastoral Institute, Manila 1973. Pp. 81.

Although limited by its strict terms of reference to writings in Asian theological journals published between 1965-1970, this careful investigation brings forth in compact form a large amount of recent materials concerning a missiological field of theology vigorously ploughed anew during recent years, and producing new growths which men of different theological temperaments look upon as either promising or disquieting. After examining what the writers concerned say about the presence of God and of Christ in the non-Christian religions, the author considers

their opinions concerning the presence of revelation, faith and grace in those religions, and the mode, type, quality and degree of this presence. This is followed by a painstaking account of what they think of the salvific role of the world-religions not only in general but in particular as they approach this topic. This approach is fourfold: religions are held to be either pre-Christian, or preparatory to the Gospel, or to be fulfilled by it, or anonymously Christian but to be made explicitly and 'sacramentally' Christian by the Church which is the total Sacrament (sign and instrument) of the Kingdom. The author further shows that, for many, religions are ambiguous or in some regards antithetical and even inimical to Christianity, yet few maintain the view that if the non-Christian is to be saved it is altogether in spite of his religion. If the majority of the authors considered are positive in their appraisal of the salvific value of the religions, most of them are only cautiously bold when they try to be more specific. While articles for reviews and papers for seminars are important, inasmuch as they help towards creating a new theological mood and bolstering advanced opinions, it is probable that they should not be given undue importance as compared with theological books which can be more elaborate and deep-searching. The theme of this booklet is so important that it requires the mustering of all possible theological resources by scholars of deep faith and love-stimulated insight.

Poona

R. DE SMET, S. J.

Violence—Reflections from a Christian Perspective: by JACQUES ELLUL. S.C.M., London, 1970. Pp. 180. Price £1.50.

It is not surprising that Ellul has not been given much attention in our country, for we are altogether too subservient to fashions and despite the prominence of Marxist-Christian dialogue as well as the widespread violence in our country, the fashion does not seem yet to have caught up with Ellul.

This may be because Ellul is a convert from Marxism to Christianity (one prominent Christian, director of a fairly well known Christian Institution, told me that he was more interested in Christians who had become Marxists than in Marxists who had become Christians!); or it may be that we find Ellul's radical Christianity disconcerting ('Christianity must be accepted in its revealed totality—accepted absolutely, intransigently, without cultural, philosophical or any other kind of accommodation or adaptation'). Whatever the reason may be, it is crucial for us to recognise his importance. Ellul was born in 1912 and holds degrees in history, sociology and law. During World War II he was a leader in the French Resistance and afterwards served as Deputy Mayor of his home town, Bordeaux. He is at present Professor of Law and Government at Bordeaux, and is the author of some two dozen books of which *Propaganda* and *Technological Society* are the best known. The latter provided the controversial framework for the discussions at two international conferences in 1963 and 1966 at Santa Barbara, where Robert Jungk, Bertrand de

Jouvenal, Marshall McLuhan, Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Roszak were present. Aldous Huxley has stated that *Technological Society* is a more effective social critique than his own attempt in *Brave New Worlds*.

Violence is a hard-hitting book, and one that is controversial in the best sense of that word—it takes issue with all inaccurate thinking. Kenneth Slack says in his Foreword that 'This is a devastating book'. For people who came of age in the 1940's perhaps it is. For a generation of 'peaceniks' like ours, it is a welcome book, though perhaps not as 'devastating' as Slack might feel it to be, and nowhere near as comfortable as one might imagine it to be for being against violence.

In tracing 'Traditional Views', the author points out that there has never been unanimity among Christians on the issue of violence: rather, there have been three positions, i.e., Compromise, Non-violence and Violence. Chapter 2. ('Today's Christians for Violence') will be unpalatable to many, but honesty demands at least an unprejudiced hearing. 'Violence', says Ellul, 'seems to be the great temptation among Christians today . . . as it was non-violence thirty years ago. A century ago it was fashionable to be nationalistic and Christians went along . . . introducing every imaginable kind of Christian motif to justify their stand. We find that stupid nowadays. But can we be sure that, fifty years hence, today's pro-revolutionary position will not also seem stupid? . . . What troubles me is that Christians conform to the trend of the moment without introducing into it anything *specifically* Christian. Their convictions are moulded by their social milieu, not their faith in the revelation. . . . We must therefore stand at a distance from our society, its tendencies and movements. But we must never break with it'. Thus it is that Ellul proceeds to launch a lucid and cogent attack on the theologians of revolution. He enumerates their pre-suppositions as being: (1) That *material* want is the most important problem, (2) that man has come of age ('This is that very old attitude, described in the Bible, of human pride. . . . What is new is that instead of realising that all this is a manifestation of the lost condition of mankind, Christians today find this prideful attitude consonant with the dignity of man'). In Ellul's view, these pre-suppositions lead to the end of the possibility of reconciliation.

Ellul makes it clear that he himself belongs to that group of Christians who regard Christianity as a revolutionary force, without implying that this necessarily implies violence. Christians are 'revolutionary' because they constantly seek to assess present situations and all new developments by God's standards. He criticises the 'theologians of revolution', and those for whom 'revolution becomes more important than the faith': 'Christians', he insists, 'must never identify themselves with this or that political or economic movement . . . the political and revolutionary attitude proper to the Christian is radically different from the attitude of others; it is *specifically* Christian, or else it is nothing'. In defining the character of Christian participation in violence, Ellul emphasises that 'recourse to violence is a sign of incapacity' (1) to solve, perhaps even to see, the fundamental problems, and (2) to discern the form Christian action ought to take. Ellul

understands, and approves, the revolt of the underprivileged and oppressed, for 'they have no other way of protesting their human right to live'; but what he cannot condone is that Christians should believe that violence will secure fundamental change. 'Christians ought, above all, to interpret for society the meaning of events. But of course that is much more difficult and much less exciting than to plunge thoughtlessly into revolutionary action'. It requires a ruthless realism to face and grasp facts; but the Christian is in a position to do this, because however terrible the reality, he can accept it without ultimate despair.

Ellul's most important contribution may well be his analysis of the 'laws' of violence. The first is *continuity*. Once violence is resorted to, there is no getting away from it: violence expresses the habit of simplification of problems—and a habit is not easily broken. The second is *reciprocity*. Violence begets and creates violence, without bringing any kind of freedom; and the victorious side in a struggle splits into groups which perpetuate violence. The third is *sameness*. All kinds of violence are essentially the same. Once begun, violence has no limits; and condoning it means condoning all forms of it. Once we consent to use violence ourselves we have to consent to our adversary's use of it too; and Ellul points out that 'violence never attains the objectives it originally set up' (quoting the case of both Mao and the U.S.A.). Finally, it is a 'law' that men who resort to violence always try to justify it. It is something so basically unappealing that every user of it has produced lengthy apologies to prove that it is just and morally warranted.

'The first duty of a Christian', according to Ellul, 'is to reject idealism'. And by 'idealism' he means the revolutionary idealism which sees violence as liberating and purificatory, the generous idealism which naively believes that when violence has done its work reconciliation will be possible, the pacifist idealism which thinks that it stands outside society but 'exists in fact only thanks to the productiveness, that is to say, violence, of that society', and the Christian idealism about the goodness of man which ignores the double Biblical affirmation about the radical evil of man as well as the radical love of which he is capable. On this basis the Christian must reject all kinds of violence; but he cannot counsel the poor and oppressed to be submissive either. The Christian is necessarily on the side of the poor, not to incite to violence but to plead his cause before the powerful. He cannot avoid involvement by escaping into the realm of spiritual values, nor side by default with the dominating party. But he can use his spiritual weapons; and he must use these if he is to escape the opposite dangers of violence on the one hand, and connivance on the other.

Ellul's parting shot is against our 'joining struggles that are three quarters over' and whose adherents can be counted in millions. 'If Christians have any prophetic vocation, they will fulfil it by speaking out on behalf of those whom nobody knows, but whom Christians can learn to know because the Holy Spirit guides them'.

Shillong

PRABHU S. GUPTARA

Journey to Gorakhpur: Reflections on Hindu Spirituality: by JOHN MOFFITT. Sheldon Press, 1973. Pp. 304. Price £3.50.

To Live Within: The Story of Five Years with a Himalayan Guru: by LIZELLE REYMOND. George, Allen and Unwin, 1972.* Pp. 238. Price £3.75.

'I am a Christian, but I can no longer say I am *not* a Hindu or a Buddhist'. That is the opening sentence of *Journey to Gorakhpur*, and the rest of the book is a commentary on it. The author, John Moffitt, was for twenty five years a monastic member of the Ramakrishna Order in the United States. 'Then in 1963 some inner necessity cut me loose from my Eastern moorings and piloted me back to the Christian sphere of influence', and he became a Roman Catholic.

In 1970 he visited India and the Far East in order to gather material for the present book. During the course of a journey from Varanasi to Gorakhpur four episodes took place which 'symbolise the various types of spirituality to be met with in India'. These four types or 'voices' are also to be found in Christianity but in a different way:

In the modern Christian these approaches, flowing naturally from his faith in Christ, are seldom if ever manifested in isolation. It may nevertheless be helpful to study the voices as if they could be separated. This is what the Hindus have done: in fact, they have often temporarily separated them in practice. As a result, even the average Hindu has a lively appreciation of nuances and subtleties in the spiritual life that Christians often miss. (p. 29).

The main body of the book (pp. 31 to 236) works out this argument in detail and devotes a chapter to each of the four voices in turn. The first is the voice of intuitive wisdom which is to be found in the experience of the Buddha and in the Non-Dualist Vedanta of Shankara. 'In Christian terms the voice of intuitive wisdom bears witness to God's dwelling in the depths of the human soul where he is to be known'. The second voice is that of devotional self-giving, or 'love inspired by a personal God or a personal Saviour.' For this voice there is of course ample evidence in the New Testament and in the literature of Hindu *bhakti*. Next comes the voice of conscious discipline which must be followed if the first two experiences are to become real. The author points out that detailed schemes of inward discipline are described in the Hindu though not in the Christian scriptures. This is because 'in the East far more stress has been laid upon experience than upon faith'—to which point we shall return. Last comes the voice of service and human community.

These chapters are packed with an impressive galaxy of Hindu saints, ancient and modern, including some whom the author has met himself. The lives of these saints are all used to illustrate the argument. This makes for a vivid presentation and the book thus admirably

* Available from Blackie & Son (India) Ltd., Publisher's sole representatives in India.

fulfils its primary intention which is to help 'Western Christians with no knowledge of Hindu or Buddhist thought'. The author modestly claims to be a poet rather than a theologian, but this is no cause for complaint for his book is refreshingly free of the tortuous prose and abstract jargon which disfigures so much contemporary Christian writing in this field.

Nevertheless he does put forward a theological argument which deserves to be taken seriously. The book 'records my search for evidence of Christ's working beyond the bounds of organised Christianity'. With that aim this reviewer finds himself in very deep agreement. What one has to question, however, are the presuppositions which govern the search and the methods by which it is pursued. Moffitt is all the time looking for *similarities* between Christianity and Hinduism. Thus we are invited to see a similarity between the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and certain aspects of Shankara's teaching about the nature of the universe; between *avatara* and incarnation; between Patanjali's *Yoga Sutrās* and the teaching of St John of the Cross; between the life of Christ and the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Patently, this search for similarities is closely bound up with the author's own spiritual pilgrimage, but is it convincing, and is it the best way for Christians to try to understand and enter into Hinduism?

Moffitt himself does not claim that his conclusions are any more than tentative, yet in the end they do not convince because of the limitations of his perspective. Two people may use similar language to describe very different experiences—or different language to describe a similar experience. This relationship needs to be explored. Again, the fact that Moffitt limits his enquiry to the journey of the individual soul to God frequently leads him to impose his own frame of reference on the Bible instead of allowing it to speak for itself. This leads him to make some extraordinary statements, for example: 'We read that Jesus allowed himself to be baptised by John the Baptist—an action that suggests that ordinary men need a spiritual director' (p. 159). He ignores the biblical categories of promise and fulfilment which create a new pattern of spirituality of which the key words are faith and obedience. The archetype of this pattern in both Testaments is Abraham and it is very difficult to see how he can be fitted into Moffitt's scheme of four voices. That takes us back to the sentence quoted above: 'In the East, because far more stress has been laid upon experience than upon faith, disciplines have always been recognised as of prime importance'. That difference between faith and experience takes us very far indeed, much further than Moffitt has felt able to go himself.

To this he would reply that to look for differences would only lead to 'confrontation' and a 'campaign of conquest' (p. 237). For:

Provided, of course, the voices that speak to the faithful in other religions do not contradict the truth of Christ, are we doing violence to people when we ask those already committed to a spiritual and cultural tradition other than our own to adapt themselves to our historically determined theological scheme and our theory of what happens after death? (p. 246).

Indeed we are, but is this the point? To invite people to adapt themselves to our scheme is to be guilty of spiritual imperialism, but to invite them (*and ourselves*) to meet a Person and make their own response to him in their own terms is nothing of the kind. Moffitt is surely right in saying that Christ is already there among Hindus and others—but surely not just in their spiritual experience—yet is a Christ who is as yet unrecognised truly known as he is? If and when such recognition comes must it not include an element of confrontation, of judgement, as it undoubtedly does in the pages of the Gospels? On the author's own terms one is left asking, what was the nature of that 'inner necessity' which brought him back to the Christian sphere of influence, why did he not stay in the Ramakrishna Order? Perhaps in a future book he will answer that question for us.

To Live Within also describes a Westerner's experience of Hinduism. Lizelle Reymond had lived in India for many years before she heard of Shri Anirvan, who was to become her Guru, and she had to make a journey of four days and sixty miles through the mountains in order to reach him. When she finally got there she was 'neither prepared for the welcome . . . received nor capable of understanding it'. In Part I she describes how she gradually learnt to communicate with this man and how eventually she helped him set up a small centre of study and retreat to which others could also come. Having gradually felt her way into a new and unfamiliar relationship she eventually got the Guru to tell her his life story. This serves as background to the main part of the book which consist of talks on *Samkhya* given by the Guru and written up by the author from notes which she made at the time.

To read these addresses is to enter a world where one is baffled and illuminated by turns. Like the author when she too first met the Guru, one 'is neither prepared nor capable of understanding'. Yet the attempt must be made and at the end of it one is brought up against a humbling fact. There is a vast world of Hindu spirituality which we have barely begun to explore, much less to comprehend, to meet or to experience.

The first of these two books is the fruit of the author's wrestling with the meaning of his own experience. The second simply allows the experience to speak for itself. Both in their different ways can help us to get beneath the surface of Hinduism, and it is to be hoped they will encourage others to make their own pilgrimage. The only trouble of course is the price. The reader who is opulent enough to consider buying either book is recommended to choose the first!

Varanasi

R. H. HOOKER

A Guide to the Psalms: by JOHN HARGREAVES. London, S.P.C.K., 1973. Pp. 184. £1.10 (in Africa and Asia, £. 55 p).

This is the 6th 'Study Guide' published by the Theological Education Fund, and is designed to meet the needs of students using English as a second language. The effort of the T.E.F. in this regard commends our appreciation.

The author of the book chooses a new method to communicate the spirit and message of the Psalms. Since the historical background of many of the psalms is unknown, the hermeneutical task becomes difficult. Moreover the psalms echo the heart beats of living situations about which we have very little information. Taking the problems into account, the author successfully uses his new method to explain the meaning of the psalms, and to make them relevant to our situation.

Only twenty psalms, belonging to different types, have been selected for detailed consideration. In each case the author deals with

- (a) the *experience* from which the writer wrote his psalm,
- (b) the *recognition of God* through that experience,
- (c) the psalm itself: i.e., the *response* of the writer and worshippers to God,
- (d) the *use* of the psalm, and notes on significant phrases,
- (e) *study-suggestions*, based on words, content, discussion and research.

Since the sections on 'experience' and 'use' both essentially suggest the original living situation, a combination of the two might have been better than a separate treatment. The 'experience' section is often rather long—but not dull. Monotony has been broken by the insertion of interesting illustrations drawn from life-situations, particularly from Africa and Asia. It is significant to note that where dubious and difficult passages occur, 'Christian insight' tends to supplant clear exposition; and in this venture a tendency to sermonise the text is not wholly absent (cf. p. 74).

The selected psalms have been given titles which do not always agree with the theme of the psalms. Apropos Ps. 72, for example, the author claims that the whole stress of the psalm is a recognition of God as 'Supreme King'; but this does not coincide with the actual content of the Psalm. (The author himself admits that the name of God occurs only twice in this text, p. 89).

There are places where one would expect a thorough and comprehensive explanation of some of the important passages and phrases. For example, on Ps. 96:10 ff and 130:1 ff (pp. 113, 160); reference could have been made to the mythical notions of the ancient Near East concerning the powers of the primaeval flood. The psalms did not originate in isolation, but reflect the cultural, religious and literary language of the milieu in which they took shape.

The general notes in the book are useful. They show acquaintance with modern scholarship. But there are significant omissions in the bibliography of those who have contributed much to the study of the psalms in our era: e.g., H. Gunkel and S. Mowinckel.

Towards the end of the book a section is given over to a selection of psalms for particular subjects and occasions; and added to that another section is appended with a *key to study suggestions*. These should evoke the interest of the reader for further study.

The book is written in simple language. There is no doubt that it is a great asset for Old Testament studies. Pastors, students of

theology and laymen who are keen to share the conviction of the psalmists who experienced situations entirely human, will certainly welcome this guide-book.

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Courtesy and Morals: The Treatment of Virtues and Vices in the Courtesy Literature of the Sixteenth Century: by AUGUSTINE G. PALLIKUNNEN. Pontifical Institute Publications, Alwaye, 1973. Pp. 300. Price Rs 12.50 (paper covers Rs 10.00).

We are used to tracing the secularisation of human life to the European Renaissance. Father Pallikunnen's book, *Courtesy and Morals*, based on a doctoral thesis, presents a mass of material which, when interpreted, yields some points of interest about the nature of Renaissance secularity. From the evidence in his first chapter, we are reminded of an already strong secularity of knighthood during the Middle Ages, which absorbed into itself and re-interpreted the Christian virtues of charity and humility. We are also reminded of how the Church in turn took up classical classifications of virtues and vices for her own pastoral purposes. But again these were worked over, to be used not as part of the discipline of penance or the life of monastic contemplation, but as a preparation for public life as a courtier or politician. Father Pallikunnen asks the interesting question, what differences in interpretation are educed by these different aims.

He confines himself to studying a type of literature which became widely popular in sixteenth-century Europe, the 'courtesy-book', and several of his texts are English translations of Continental works in Latin, French and Italian. They range in depth and seriousness from Elyot's *The Governour*, Lipsius' *Six Bookes of Politickes* and Hurault's *Politicke, Moral and Martial Discourses* to rather lighter discussions of what every-man-about-the-palace should know. If these books have any similarity in their discussion of the virtues, it is in their respect for classical authority and example (the pattern in Cicero's *Offices*, prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, was most popular) blended with individual liberty in combining and interpreting the traditional elements. The sixteenth-century penchant for an encyclopedic approach to knowledge is much in evidence, and one has often the impression that ingenuity of arrangement is substituted for any more radical attempt to meet the new and often tormenting questions of the times. The classification of vices is mostly closer to the pattern established by Gregory the Great, but there is less of an emphasis on moral struggle than in medieval writings on virtue and vice. Most strikingly, the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity are on the whole out of the discussion, and one finds charity classified under either justice or fortitude. (One would like to know how far this continues earlier chivalric ideas.) This is not however to be interpreted as open irreligion, but rather in terms of a proper time and place for everything. The courtesy-writers appeal to the Bible and the Fathers as well as to the classics—after all, was it not St Jerome

who wrote that justice comprises the other virtues? The secularity of Renaissance men was not on the whole anti-religious, and these books are an attempt to marshal inherited wisdom to meet the challenge of social change.

Father Pallikunnen's book is itself rather too encyclopedic. Some of his points have relevance in the history of moral theology; his other findings need a more thorough-going interpretation than he offers, in relation to the momentous changes in sixteenth-century society. Moral ideas do not exist in a vacuum. Those of us who write about the history of ideas would do well to mark the contrast set up by the distinguished Benedictine historian Dom David Knowles between different types of scholar (in his essay, 'The Humanism of the Twelfth Century')—between the humanists who 'scrutinize the lives and emotions of the ancients, imitate their modes of expression and seek to reach the heart of their thought by long and sympathetic examination', and the scholastics, to whom 'the skeleton of (ancient) thought was all'.

Calcutta

KITTY DATTA