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The raft is not the shore: conversations toward a Buddhist-Christian awareness

Andrei S. P. Brennan

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undertaken for the sake of the scholarship itself, or for the sake of the church.

Hall seems to accept the achievements of postmodern critique and deconstruction with a certain resignation that critique must occur in order for reconstruction to happen, but with annoyance that, to borrow Brunner's language, deconstructive subjectivism has for the most part only led to theological dissolution. He seems eager, if not impatient, for his students to recapture the theological work of integration, construction, even system-building, with the self-critical edge that only faithful discipleship can bring to the task. His conviction that the legacy of Neo-Orthodoxy can serve as a guide in this task is compelling, and borne out in his own (autobiographical) reflections on the theological vocation, and in his occasional commentaries, within this book, on the challenges facing the Canadian churches today. Immensely readable, this book can be enjoyed by the theological specialist for a breath of fresh air, and welcomed by others as an engaging introduction to the theology of "Neo-Orthodoxy."

Eileen Scully
Waterloo, Ontario

The Raft is Not the Shore: Conversations Toward A Buddhist-Christian Awareness

Thich Nhat Hanh and Daniel Berrigan

Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001

153 pages, \$15.00 US Softcover

Originally published in 1975, just as the horror in Vietnam was coming to its final climax, this book became immediately popular in the peace movement. A series of conversations recorded in Paris between an exiled Vietnamese Buddhist monk and an American Jesuit priest who had spent time in prison for burning draft records, the book is primarily a political piece with strong spiritual dimensions. Republished 25 years later, many of the topics discussed are still relevant to our current world scene, while it remains a fascinating period piece that gives insight into the "spirit of the times."

Conversations are organized as chapters with headings that include *Memory, Eucharist, Death; Religion in the World; Exile; Priests and Prisoners; Self-Immolation; Government and Religion; Economics and Religion; Jesus and Buddha; and Communities of Resistance*. Each conversation is intensely personal, with the recounting of stories from the lives of both men, as well as ready reference to events reported in the news media at the time. The orientation

of both men is to a deeper level of common awareness of a spiritual unity between all persons. Each author is sympathetic towards and knowledgeable of the tradition of the other, and both Buddhist and Christian ideals are upheld as compatible at the deepest level. Both men are unapologetic activists, and in many ways seem to have anticipated the development of the quasi-Marxist "theology of liberation" that became more elucidated in the Latin American context later in the same decade.

I must confess that some of the conversations caught me off-guard. In various places, Father Berrigan is profoundly critical of the state of Israel, particularly for its treatment of the Palestinian people. At points he seems to be dancing close to what in our current "politically correct" context might be perceived by some as anti-Semitic, although his critiques are really founded on a larger concern for human rights. One chapter, entitled "self-immolation," is very sympathetic to this form of suicide as a rational act of protest. I admit that I was a little shocked when both men spoke in support of a 14-year-old American boy who burned himself to death in protest of the war in Vietnam, but their point that self-destruction as an act of sacrifice for the greater good (openly drawing comparisons with Christ's sacrifice on the cross) is one worthy of debate. Our "post-modern" concern with language and the effects of offending others with words did not exist in the 1975 context of these discussions; so if you read the book, be prepared to be tolerant of forceful language and biased activist ideals.

The spirituality represented in the book might easily be labelled "New Age," and it is likely that this volume will be very popular in the New Age movement. Nevertheless, it is an interesting study of interfaith dialogue at the "grassroots" level – both men speak from within their own traditions with a deep and abiding mutual respect. It is important to note, though, that neither author can be said to be "mainstream." Thich Nhat Hanh is very popular amongst many Westerners for his attempts to link Buddhism with Christianity, but he is not so popular in many more orthodox Buddhist circles for being "activist" in a tradition that is primarily monastic in its ideals. Similarly, Daniel Berrigan is viewed with derision by many "mainline" Roman Catholics, who have found his behaviour scandalous and his opinions extreme. Despite these qualifiers, both men remain high-profile within their religious traditions and in the larger political world at the turn of the millennium.

I recommend this book for several reasons, even though I heartily disagree with many of the ideas represented in the various conversations. Firstly, it is a valuable period piece that gives living, personal perspectives on a time that is still influencing modern political and social realities in North America. For those who remember the Vietnam war era, it will provide a means to reflect on the meaning of those events in your own life. For those too young to remember, it provides a valuable historical context to understand what key events shaped the "baby-boom" generation that is now dominating the world stage. Secondly, the book

remains a witness to the potential value in interfaith dialogue at the personal level, and reveals some interesting parallels between the Christian Gospel and the Buddhist Dharma. Thirdly, it is a powerful apology for activism amongst religious persons who are committed to their ideals and wish to see them realized in the world around us. As the title of the book suggests, the “raft,” whether it be our faith-tradition or our lives in general, is not the “shore” – it is not the ultimate destination of unity in love and peace.

Andrei S. P. Brennan

The Monastic Community of St. Silouan the Athonite

Canadian Archdiocese, The Orthodox Church in America

The Heart of Black Preaching

Cleophus J. LaRue

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000

250 pages, \$22.50 Softcover

LaRue excavates what could be termed as a homiletic hermeneutic distinctive to black preaching. As such, the author argues that a confluence of several essential dynamics shape black preaching. They include: the sovereignty and power of God, direct attention to the history and culture of African Americans, and competence in addressing Scripture to contemporary black life. A critical facet of this preaching hermeneutic is a biblical hermeneutic which reveals that God acts within human history on behalf of the marginalized and powerless. LaRue underscores that this biblical hermeneutic is shaped, in turn, by black cultural dynamics of interpretation functioning at the level of sacred story.

LaRue identifies five realms which comprise this cultural hermeneutic. He calls these areas “domains of experience.” The first domain is personal piety, which emanates historically from nineteenth-century American revivalism. Personal piety focuses on religious devotion and personal discipline often associated with an emphasis on personal salvation. Second, the “care of souls” depicts the domain of experience concerned with traditional aspects of pastoral care and counseling: healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. Next, the third domain aims at social justice. However, in addition to issues regarding race, this domain includes various concerns as gender, age, economic class, and social reform. Fourth, LaRue characterizes the domain “corporate concerns” for the particular interests and experiences common to black life and its culture. Especially important here is his emphasis on those things that are best “spoken to blacks by other blacks.” And lastly, the “maintenance of the institutional