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Book Review: "Inter-Faith Dialogue and World Community"

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Research Library," which, besides the proceedings of the abovementioned symposia, has published also major monographs, text-editions and translations, including Anand Amaladass' own thesis: "Philosophical Implications of Dhvani: Experience of Symbol Language in Indian Aesthetics" (1984). Dr. Oberhammer, before devoting himself to Indian studies, studied philosophy at the Jesuit College in Innsbruck at a time when Karl Rahner was at the height of his fame. Many of Karl Rahner's pupils began imitating his very style and language, something which made them difficult to read in their native German. It is all the more admirable that Dr. Amaladass was able not only to read Dr. Oberhammer's difficult Rahnerian prose but to translate it into lucid English—making it much easier to follow than in its original German. The pieces which are collected in *Philosophy of Religion in Hindu Thought* are certainly worthwhile studying, especially for scholars engaged in Hindu-Christian Dialogue. They deal with important issues, are based on thorough familiarity with Indian texts and treat more often than not little known aspects of Indian religious systems or rarely mentioned Indian thinkers. They are amply documented and contain substantial extracts from Sanskrit texts.

While the eight papers contained in the work have originally not been written with a view to form parts of a single book, one can identify a central concern in all of them: salvation. Some, like "Manifestation of Salvation" (No. 2) and "Transcendence as Salvation in Early Nyāya" (No. 4) directly address the issue, others like "Experience of Transcendence in

Hinduism: The Testimony of Paramasamhitā" (No. 5) or "The transcendental structure of human bondage (samsāra) according to Pakṣilasvāmin" (No. 6) implicitly deal with it. The rest, such as "The Structure of Tradition and Revelation" (No. 1), "Man as the Place of Revelation" (No. 3), "God-Experience in Yogic Meditation" (No. 7), "The Use of Mantra in Yogic Meditation: The Testimony of the Paśupatas" (No. 8) offer substantial investigations of issues closely linked to salvation. This should come as no surprise to the student of religion, least of all to the student of Indian religions, in which salvation is and has remained the central issue, towards which all reflection is directed and which gives "religion" its very meaning.

Several of the papers were presented as introductions to symposia organised by the Indological Institute Vienna. Having made such a successful translation of Dr. Oberhammer's contributions, Dr. Amaladass might perhaps be persuaded to try the others as well. Such work not only removes the linguistic barrier between those who publish in German and those who read only English but also fosters intercultural and Hindu-Christian dialogue in and by itself.

The translation has provided in the appendix to the book a brief C.V. of Gerhard Oberhammer and a bibliography, which shows the wide range of Dr. Oberhammer's scholarship.

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Inter-Faith Dialogue and World Community. Ch. Sreenivasa Rao (ed). The Christian Literature Society, 1991, xxxix + 284p., Rs. 75.00 paper.

THE PRESSURES OF contemporary history throw together people of various faith traditions, cultures and ideologies. At the same time, people of all faith traditions cultures and

ideologies are seeking new forms of community in the search for freedom, justice, dignity and self-respect. In this context the great religious traditions, with their visions for the future of

humanity, are in interaction today as perhaps never before. They are also faced with the promise of abundance as well as the threats which science and technology bring. Certainly, there can no doubt about the timely relevance of the International Seminar on "Inter-Faith Dialogue for National Integration and Human Solidarity" conducted at the Madras Christian College in January 1986, of which the contents of this book are the fruit. The participants in the seminar included a remarkably wide spectrum of persons—religious leaders, philosophers, theologians, social scientists, educators and others—who have been and are being nurtured by one or another from among the major religious traditions of the world, but Christians were present in greatest number. Among the participants were a number of experienced practitioners of inter-faith dialogue, e.g. Bed Griffiths, Karan Singh, Gopal Singh, Stanley Samartha, S. Vahiduddin, K. Klostermaier, R.R. Raghavachar, Pema Rigzin, Wesley Ariarajah, to mention a few of the more well known. Indeed, the over all variety is indicative of the immensity of the problem of religious pluralism in the world today.

The collection of articles is divided into five seemingly arbitrary sections which do not appear to reflect a prior well thought through conceptual framework which would give a much needed structure to the seminar, but rather an attempt, after the fact, to break up the mass of material into manageable units. The belated dedication of the volume to the memory of the late Bishop A.J. Appasamy and the inclusion [Appendix II] of the text of a lecture on the good bishop delivered by the General Secretary of the Christian Literature Society half a decade after the original seminar was held adds to the lack of coherency of the collection. Nor does the lengthy rambling Introduction by the editor of the volume help in this regard. Here the author attempts to trace the birth of inter-faith dialogue to "the conflicts and challenges between Christianity and Hinduism for supremacy, during the 19th and early 20th centuries." In the process the author dilates on, among other things "the beginnings of Christian missions," "the negative reactions of Hindus and the vigorous activities of the missionaries in return," how in the process of

struggle and competition "the two religions got transformed into Universal Religions." The reader will also find here "some possible solutions offered by Religious leaders and Philosophers of the World to the grievous problem of Religious Pluralism in the Modern World," ending with a "brief outline of Hick's Theory of Pluralism." Indeed, the rather disparate character of the Introduction seems symptomatic of the wide ranging variety of articles which contributes to the lack of coherency of the collection. One also experiences a numbing sense of *deja vu* as one reads through "Inter-Faith Dialogue—A Hindu Perspective," "Inter-Faith Dialogue—A Catholic Christian Perspective," "Inter-Faith Dialogue—A Sikh Perspective," "Religion and Religions—An Islamic Response," "Ecumenical Issues in Dialogue." There is also a pall of doctrinaire dullness resulting from, among several things, the recitation of oft repeated cliches which seem to bear little specific relationship to the particular realities of our present several situations. Perhaps part of the problem lies in the day—five years—in getting the papers published after their initial presentation.

This is not to say, however, that there are no new perspectives and concerns to be found in the collection. A case in point is Stanley Samartha's article on "Inter-Religious Relationships in the Secular State." Basically, Samartha argues that to reject religious beliefs as unsecular is to empty public life of its moral and social base. Rather, in pluralistic societies it is necessary to reject the **secular** tolerance which is indifferent to all religious values. Likewise, it is wise to repudiate the **religious** tolerance which affirms that all religions are the same when in actual fact they are distinct, different, even 'unique.' Only when different religions are recognised as distinctive and different responses to the mystery of Truth can dialogue become a genuine relationship between different communities of faith and open up possibilities of mutual enrichment in the larger life of the nation. There is need for both a commitment that requires sharing one's faith with one's neighbours and a tolerance that makes mutual enrichment possible. "Interfaith dialogue helps us hold together in balance both commitment to our particular faith and open-

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ness to those of our neighbours." There are other examples of well-researched and precisely argued articles that explore the central elements of the theme of the seminar in a creatively realistic manner.

Other valuable reflections are to be found in the piece on "The Contribution of religion to the Harmony-Conflict Process" by the social scientist Ram Singh. Countering the commonly held belief that for peace and prosperity people communities must function harmoniously, Ram Singh argues that harmony and conflict both are necessary to keep a society vitally stable. The Thai Buddhist savant, Saeng Chan-Ngarm, has some refreshingly relevant things to say in his article on "The Human Grounds for Religious Unity and Harmony." The same is true of the piece on "Theological Elitism" by Daniel White. But each of these is an individual piece and there is no dialogue among them. Maybe it is too much to expect from an anthology of this type that it have any significant degree of interactive coherence. Even if this be admitted, there still are serious questions with regard to various understandings of the elements in the title of the volume. There is fairly wide spread throughout the articles a degree of basic, underlying assumption of what is involved in "inter-faith dialogue." Karan Singh, in his article, states what is by other authors a widely assumed, if not explicitly stated, understanding of dialogue as an interaction of religious groups in order to solve/settle problems in a harmonious fashion. He even distinguishes traditional categories of "internal" and "external" dialogue, and accepts the wider scope of dialogue beyond the specifically "inter-faith" to include dialogue between religion and ideologies, between religion and science. But how are we to understand the term "world community?"

There is, of course, no gain saying the fact that the contemporary historic context in which the participants in the seminar met was one of increasing conflict and tension. This seems even more pronounced now in the early years of the final decade of the 20th century. Both within nation states and in the international community old structures that held communities together are disintegrating and new groupings are forming. The energy crisis has

further complicated the process and in doing so has manifested sharply not just the "inter-dependence" but an almost one-sided dependence of certain parts of the world on raw materials produced in other parts. The economic control and political use of these resources has thrown out of gear the older relationships within and between communities of nations. However, fresh criteria for new human relationships that go beyond economic and political structures have yet to emerge. Surely values that sustain personal life within the community, giving a sense of freedom and participation in larger communities need to be defined. Virtually none of the contributors to the present volume—Wesley Ariarajah, Russell Chandran, Stanley Samartha, and Ram Singh being notable exceptions—seem to recognise that unless justice and peace are transformed into a concrete sharing of power in the community of nations, there are signs that we may witness merely a rearrangement of old positions and relationships. Indeed, one would have thought the theme of the seminar becomes particularly significant insofar as the search for values and criteria involves not only the religious or transcendental dimensions—of which there is ample detailed discussion—but also the more mundane socio-economic, political dimensions of world community—to which distressingly little attention is paid. The term world community is ambiguous at best, and is likely to be misunderstood. The peril of this ambiguity, distortion, confusion has not been adequately addressed by any of the participants. Perhaps it was not sufficiently recognised and articulated by the organizers, or the participants.

True, the absence of clear-cut definitions need not necessarily be a hindrance for seeking community provided there is genuine struggle to discern resources and recognise responsibilities for living together. Indeed, one would have hoped that greater attention would have been paid to the business of identifying responsibilities and restating resources that are available in the long histories of the several religious traditions in terms of meeting these responsibilities. While this process is part of the ongoing life and continuing search for renewal within each community of faith, the crucial factor in the

contemporary situation, symbolised by this international, interreligious seminar, is that whether we like it or not we are thrown together in this task. Sometimes even those of us who live daily in multi-religious contexts forget the implications of this "togetherness." The search for new patterns of relationships is not the prerogative of any one particular community of faith.

However, despite its shortcomings, there is much to be gained in terms of fellowship and insight from such dialogue meetings and the publication of their proceedings. Both the meetings and the sharing of wisdom need to be encouraged, pressing forward towards the ful-

fillment of the vision of a world community characterised by peace with justice which is a guiding light for all religious communities. In this quest, there are things to be learned from the present undaunted attempt to shed light from the various religious traditions on the articulation of this vision in the expectation of furthering the struggle for its achievement. We are in the debt of both the participants and the editor.

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The Role of Pramāṇas in Hindu-Christian Epistemology. K.P. Aleaz.
Punthi-Pustak, Calcutta, 1991, 154p.

THE AUTHOR STATES his objective as discovering the six Indian *pramāṇas* as "an authentic aspect of Indian Christian Theological method vis-a-vis the Christian *pramāṇas* as understood by some Indian Christian theologians." (p.3) He finds that the earlier attempts in this direction do not take into account the six *pramāṇas* of Indian philosophy and their possible use as Christian *pramāṇas*. As the title of the book stands, the project itself is laudable and one would expect a breakthrough in a theological method building upon the earlier attempts.

In the process of inculturation there was a stage where equivalents of Christian tradition were sought in Hindu tradition, to adapt, if not adopt fully, for the enrichment of the Indian Christian theology. And in that sense it is valuable to look into the six traditional sources of knowledge—*pramāṇas*—from which Christianity could gain some insight into its own tradition. So the author examines the six means of knowing and appeals to the Christian community that these should be used in theological reflection. But as such it

does not offer any further reflection on the possible gains through this method.

It is high time to go beyond this stage and see what response the metaphors of one tradition evoke in another tradition, with a view to develop an inter-cultural and inter-religious concept of *pramāṇas*—as a precondition for the meeting of cultures and religions, so that dialogue between traditions is possible without losing their identity. But the author tends to be descriptive rather than addressing himself to the larger issues of Hindu-Christian epistemology while dealing with the role of *pramāṇas*.

Any theological method takes into account revelation, reason, and experience. Even within a particular religious framework, for example in Hinduism, revelation is differently interpreted, depending on the specific tradition one comes from—as in the case of the Vedantins. Tradition is always a complex whole. In Christianity what is meant by religious tradition depends on the core of the basic beliefs which have their point of reference to scriptures, teaching authority, saints and enlightened leaders of this tradition, liturgy