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Book Review: "The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link Between East and West"

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failure to recognize radical evil. Just as the traveller whose sights are set on distant heights is most likely to fall into a chasm, so Gandhi, with his fixed focus on non-violence, adopted a simplistic view of violence – one that lumped together uncritically colonialism, warfare, and all forms of human inhumanity. This led him, says Chatterjee, “to preach the efficacy of non-violence in a host of situations of which his own experience had left him quite ignorant” (p.119).

Of particular interest to Christian readers is Chatterjee’s chapter entitled “Prophets and Horizons”, in which she examines Gandhi’s correspondence with Martin Buber and where she concludes that Gandhi shares characteristics with the Judaeo-Christian prophetic tradition. Like Buber, Gandhi is drawn away from otherworldly mysticism, whether it be the esoteric realms of the Kabbala or the Theosophists’ desire to ascend the levels of consciousness. Although Gandhi and Buber never met, nor reached any meeting of minds in their correspondence, Chatterjee concludes that there is common ground between Buber’s “prophetic spirit” and Gandhi’s “prophetic politics”. It is found in concern for the conditions of the least privileged members of society. But Buber remains critical of Gandhi’s attempt to bring religion fully into

politics. Although Gandhi held for rigorous self-criticism, he was not always sensitive to the need for a prophetic critique of all politics, all nationalisms. Gandhi had double standards for judging Jewish and Arab nationalisms, and within India, supported Indian nationalism while denying Indian Muslim nationalism. Although Chatterjee agrees with Nehru who suggested that there was something prophetic about Gandhi’s ideas and his style of putting them across, she critically observes that at times “the white light of vision blinds the perceiver” (p.158). Thus Gandhi’s close equation of politics and religion falls short of Buber’s full prophetic critique.

This is a thoughtful, stimulating book which brings to the fore fresh insights regarding Gandhi’s strengths and limitations. Margaret Chatterjee is to be thanked for further deepening our understanding of Jewish and Christian influences on Gandhi and the prophetic critique of him. Although it contains some overlong detours into Theosophy and Kibbutzim, *Gandhi and His Jewish Friends* is a fine piece of original scholarship which no Gandhi collection should be without.

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The Divine Matrix: Creativity as Link Between East and West.

Joseph A. Bracken, S.J. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995, xi+179 pp.

CREATIVITY, DIVINE ENERGY, the Infinite as act and not entity – *The Divine Matrix* uses these categories to explain what religion is all about, how philosophical categories are best used in comparative work, and on what basis interreligious understanding can best proceed. Bracken wants to give us basic insights into religious traditions, and ultimately “to determine the nature of the Infinite that is thus revealed in

all the finite persons and things of this world...” (p.129). Though rooted in Bracken’s own Christian theological and philosophical training, the book’s goal is ecumenical: not “to indicate the superiority of one view of the Divine over the other, but rather to indicate that they are inseparable dimensions of one and the same august mystery” (p.137).

To further this ambitious project,

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Bracken borrows two related insights from the process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. First, the divine source, the "creator", is not an entity but a process,

the underlying activity which serves as the ontological ground for everything that exists" (pp.2-3). Second, the created world must be understood not as the sum of various created things, but rather as an "extensive continuum"... which underlies the whole world, past, present, and future in that it provides a "relational complex" in which all entities, both actual and potential, have their standpoint or niche" (p.3).

Bracken accepts these insights as universally true, and he undertakes comparative exercises to demonstrate them. To insure against a naive cultural imperialism, he heeds Robert Neville's cautions on how philosophical comparison should proceed. According to Neville, comparativists inevitably and rightly use categories rooted in one tradition – usually their own – but they must generalize them in a way that opens them up for fruitful comparison and facilitates an understanding of philosophies framed in other categories. The comparativist must develop sufficiently vague categories, by which "a conception from some one tradition is extended, abstracted further, and purified of its particularities to serve as a vague ground for comparison" (p.1). Bracken argues that Whitehead's "creativity" and "continuum" are two such categories, and uses them accordingly.

The first part of the book develops his position on divine creativity in regard to Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Eckhart, Shelling, Heidegger, and Whitehead; Bracken is obviously expert and at ease here, and his expositions are informative and subtle. The second part shows how the same principles operate in three Asian contexts: The Non-Dualist *Vedānta* view of the identity-in-difference of personal self and absolute, cosmic Self, the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising, and the Chinese

Tao. In regard to each, Bracken makes a judicious use of secondary sources to support his view that "creativity" and not "entity" is the best category by which to understand what is going on in religious traditions.

This is a fine book, carefully conceived and argued, skilfully articulating philosophical questions and seeking to illustrate their answers in a variety of contexts. It shows us how a strongly philosophical approach to comparative study can be of great use in cross-cultural philosophy and theology. Indeed, it is so carefully and earnestly accomplished that it seems mean-spirited to note what *The Divine Matrix* does not accomplish; but in the spirit of Bracken's evident openness to dialogue, I raise the following points regarding what he gains and loses by the ambitious sweep of the book.

By skimming multiple traditions – by not focusing on a more limited range of materials; by not reading primary texts – Bracken deprives himself of valuable and challenging resources. While he successfully gleans important points of philosophical interest from the Asian traditions he treats, he does not really get involved with their philosophizing in any broader sense; rather, he simply subsumes things said elsewhere into an already-fashioned philosophical apparatus, and thereby limits the philosophical value of his own work. As fine as it is, this book is not so much a philosophizing across cultural boundaries as an established philosophy which draws examples from traditions other than its original one. For example, his treatment of Vedānta is mediated through a reliance on the work of Raimundo Panikkar who, in turn, distilled his treatment of the Upanisads into six "great sayings" drawn primarily from several Non-Dualist Vedānta sources. Bracken uses these sayings as a handy way to assess what Vedānta is all about, but the result seems too neat and simple: generalizations about generalizations, without a sense of the historical choices

involved on the Vedānta side. He might have done better to read one or another whole Upaniṣad, along with a traditional commentary, to see how claims regarding the identity of the human self and the ultimate Self functioned in some actual context. This process would obviously have been more time-consuming, and other comparisons would have been left out, but the result would have been more fruitful.

Since Bracken legitimately relies on secondary sources, he would have strengthened his case by evaluating the philosophical status of this borrowing. Just as he uses Whitehead's categories in a legitimately vague manner, he needs also to assess the philosophical status of the secondary and derivative representations he makes of Asian traditions. It is one thing to generalize from materials in which one is expert, and quite another to draw conclusions about less familiar traditions, based on summations gleaned from secondary sources. Though such conclusions are inevitable, it is important not to think of them as "windows" on the actual philosophical thinking of the culture. Rather, they represent a complex cross-cultural derivation in which concepts such as "Vedānta" and "Taoism" vacillate in status between being iterable entities and elusive

processes. In the end, perhaps, the entire comparative philosophical process is itself properly ambiguous and properly vague; this is fine, but it must be noted as such.

Since the core of this book is very much his own philosophical adventure, perhaps Bracken should have been more autobiographical too, so that we could better assess the creative and dynamic nature of his project. Has his notion of "creativity" changed due to the studies undertaken in this book? Does he read Whitehead differently, because of his readings of Vedānta and Taoism? No indication is given here of what changes might have taken place. Is this because Whitehead got things right in the first place?

In any case, *The Divine Matrix* invites us to undertake further comparative philosophical and theological exercises: for example, a focused rereading of Whitehead in light of the categories of some particular school of Buddhist thought; or a more prolonged and focused reflection on the Thomistic language of being, in light of Vedānta. Indeed, we look for such works from Bracken's own pen.

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Briefly Noted

Inter-Faith Dialogue and World Community. Ch. Sreenivasa Rao (Ed.), Madras: The Diocesan Press, 1991, xxxix+282 pp.

This collection of 27 articles represents papers given at a five-day International Seminar on Inter-Faith Dialogue for National Integration and Human Solidarity, conducted at the Madras Christian College in 1986. The Seminar focused on two central problems of religious pluralism in modern society: one at the social level, the other at the theological level.

The editor, a scholar of comparative

philosophy and religion, in particular Hinduism and Christianity, provides an introductory overview of Hindu-Christian dialogue during the past 150 years which he concludes with a brief outline of Hick's theory of pluralism. The book contains five parts beginning with "Inter-Faith Dialogue and World Community", followed by "Religious Pluralism and Peaceful Co-Existence", "Dialogue and Religious Studies", "Inter-Faith Dialogue and World Community", and "Dialogue of Religions for Communal Harmony and World Peace".