

Reviews

KARL RAHNER SJ: *Theological Investigations*. Vol. 11: *Confrontations I*. 1974. 257 pp. £4.75. Vol. 12: *Confrontations II*. 1974. 331 pp. £5. Vol. 13: *Theology, Anthropology, Christology*. 1975. 235 pp. £4.75. All translated by David Bourke. *Darton, Longman & Todd*, London.

These three solid volumes are the excellent English translation of Vol. IX and the first part of Vol. X of Rahner's *Schriften zur Theologie*. They contain some 42 essays, mainly concerned with questions of ecclesiology, christology and anthropology, but ranging from 'Does traditional theology represent guilt as an innocuous factor in human life?' to 'Theological observations on the concept of time'. Yet no matter how unusual may be the topic upon which Rahner writes, one constantly has a strange feeling of *déjà lu*: there is a curious sameness about nearly all these essays and it derives, I suspect, in part from his almost obsessional return to the problem of theological pluralism.

Theology today is articulated within a wide variety of discourses which are irreducible to each other; there is no single theological discourse which can resume the whole truth of the gospel, and from within which the diversity of theological discourses may be criticised and evaluated. However, although Rahner accepts the fact and inevitability of this pluralism, he clearly experiences it as alien, as a threat to the unity of the Church. Now, given the situation of pluralism, there will, of course, be a pluralism of evaluations of the situation. Even so, I think it not unfair to say that Rahner appears to

have misjudged the nature of the problem. He tends to see pluralism in purely quantitative terms: there are so many theological and philosophical systems being employed today that no individual theologian, or even team of theologians, is able to master them all and produce an overall synthesis; it is the experience of one's inability to understand and therefore evaluate the theological position of others. But surely the phenomenon of pluralism is far more deep-rooted than that. It lies not merely in one's inability to understand 'the other' but in the intrinsic plurality of the discourses that one uses oneself, a pluralism that is not so much the experience of incomprehensibility of what other people say as the condition of the possibility of any creative and meaningful discourse.

Although Rahner is clearly disturbed by many developments in modern theology ('The alien is close to us', Vol. 11, p. 8), yet he tries to achieve a sympathetic understanding with a quite remarkable openness and honesty, and occasionally he can be very illuminating, for example, on 'Human aspects of the birth of Christ' (Vol. 13, pp. 189-194). But it must be said that these essays add very little to what he has already said in the earlier volumes of his *Schriften*.

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE OP

TRUTH AND DIALOGUE, edited by John Hick. *Sheldon Press*, London, 1974. 164 pp. £3.25.

THE ASIAN JOURNAL OF THOMAS MERTON, edited by Naomi Burton, Patrick Hart and James Laughlin. *Sheldon Press*, London, 1974. 445 pp. £6.50.

The collection of articles edited by Professor Hick offers substantial food for thought in the present climate of inter-religious dialogue. The fare provided is worthwhile not so much for the insights offered, stimulating though these often are, but because crucial questions in this field are now seen to

occupy the central position they deserve. Rather than attempt a brief resumé of each paper in the book, I wish to indicate two relevant problems that appear to me most worthy of serious attention. Professor Parrinder's contribution ('Is the Bhagavad-Gita the word of God?', ch. 7) throws the first into

sharp relief. It is this: What sort of approach and methodological presuppositions can best sustain a hope that a unitive understanding can constructively bridge the great divide between world religions today (especially where the Semitic and non-Semitic faiths are concerned)? For dialogue to bear most fruit between a Hindu and a Christian, say, must each seek elements in the key concepts, doctrines, and practices of the other's religious tradition that are almost directly equivalent to those in one's own? Can a Christian dialogist, for example, penetrate his Hindu counterpart's grasp of the abiding presence of the God *Kṛṣṇa* in the human situation by unpacking his own doctrine of the Incarnation and seeking to square things up by a process of one-to-one correspondence? I think not—though this approach is useful and indeed necessary up to a point, the hazards incurred in applying it too rigidly are overwhelming: there is the risk of distorting the other's tradition to fit the moulds of your own; the danger of eschewing as valueless in his vision what cannot be seen to harmonise with your own cultural patterns; indeed the risk of simplifying and thus inauthenticating your tradition and beliefs. What one is really doing in this case (if one speaks from the Christian viewpoint) is dialoging with the other in so far as he is a 'crypto-Christian', and not a *Hindu*. Should not the emphasis be rather on remaining open as far as possible to alien though complementary, sometimes completely fresh glimpses of a common root insight? An admirable effort in this direction is made in Kenneth Cragg's paper on 'Islam and Incarnation' (pp. 126-39). Here the basic character of 'sentness' pervading the lives and missions of both Jesus and Muhammad is seen as the basis for unitive understanding in an area traditionally regarded as stony ground for dialogue purposes. This whole question embraces, of course, the more fundamental topics of the goals and nature of inter-religious dialogue and this is provided for us by Dr Sharpe (pp. 77-95) in a useful analysis-cum-summary.

The second problem I wish to indicate is the apparently intractable one of 'conflicting truth-claims' in religion (an expression I consider quite appropriate despite Professor Cantwell Smith's rather persistent objections to it, cf. pp. 156-62). It is very much part of our world-wide religious situation that certain central (and many peripheral) beliefs and doctrines accepted by the majority of the adherents of a particular

religion clash with those of another faith's. The examples of reincarnation and the theological uniqueness of Jesus are already well known and are being much discussed. Now it is here that expressions such as 'orthodox belief', 'Christianity holds that . . .', 'Hindus believe that . . .' require close scrutiny, because words like 'orthodox', 'Christianity' and 'Hinduism' are by no means clear and well-defined. Questions connected with this point are discussed by Trevor Ling in 'Communalism and the Social Structure of Religion' (pp. 59-76). Furthermore, what is the nature of 'truth' in the context of religious truth-claims? This matter is taken up from various points of view especially in the first three and the final two articles of this book.

The number of typographical errors in the text shows that a lack of dialogue with the printer is very much in evidence, and the index is so incomplete as to be almost useless. However, this ought not to detract from the intrinsic worth of the book, which I would recommend as a useful acquisition for the ideas discussed and the problems raised in the field of inter-faith dialogue.

If *Truth and Dialogue* is primarily theoretical in tone and geared to more academic tastes, Thomas Merton's posthumously published *Asian Journal* is a quite different kettle of fish. For here, as its name indicates, the emphasis lies on religious dialogue in its making and on inter-faith encounters in the experiencing of it. The *Asian Journal*, as its editors inform us, is a diary of Merton's to-date publishable thoughts and impressions of the spiritually orientated Eastern tour he made, including a fairly lengthy stay in various places in India and a shorter sojourn in Sri Lanka, that culminated in his untimely death at a conference in Bangkok on December 10, 1968. Merton's own words in this context are not only prophetic but also significant. They are prophetic because as he wrote at the beginning of his eastward flight, he experienced 'a great sense of destiny, of being at last on my true way after years of waiting and wondering and fooling around' (p. 4)—'I am going home, to the home where I have never been in this body' (p. 5). He was to meet his death on this pilgrimage. They are significant because the overriding purpose of this journey is one of crucial importance to the vitality and deepening of religious experience today. He writes: 'I am convinced that communication in depth, across the lines that have hitherto

divided religious and monastic traditions, is now not only possible and desirable, but most important for the destinies of Twentieth-Century Man' (p. 313).

Consequently, in my opinion this book delivers a body blow to the position of those critics who like to harp on so-called insuperable barriers—cultural, linguistic, theological—that are said to block the path of deep inter-religious understanding. For here in the jottings of a spiritually mature and open thinker one comes across numerous references to cultural barriers transcended, conceptual chasms bridged, and to a conviction of profound inter-religious encounter. Thus Merton writes in a November circular letter to friends: 'I can say that so far my contacts with Asian monks have been very fruitful and rewarding. We seem to understand one another very well indeed' (p. 324; cf. also, e.g., pp. 143, 148). Indeed, it is good to know that one of his most rewarding spiritual experiences occurred in the presence of Buddhist sculptures in Sri Lanka (cf. pp. 233-6). This testimony is all the more valuable because not for a moment does he give the impression of diluting or turning his back upon what is lasting and valid in the treasures of his own Christian tradition. Yet Merton's assurance that 'We are well on our way to a workable inter-religious lexicon of key words . . . which will permit intelligent discussion of all kinds of religious experience in all the religious traditions . . . a kind of lingua franca of religious experience' (p. 314) is perhaps too easily won, and remains a question that requires much more painstaking investigation.

The book is divided into two parts, with a number of important appendices. Part I contains an experiential record of the journey itself, either by way of impressionistic comments, or by quotations from various sources Merton had read or was reading. He was sensuously an extraordinarily alert person: eyes, ears, nose . . . all the senses co-operate to register the details of the encounter or scene, and before long combine to produce a coherently woven atmosphere of one continuous spiritual experience in spite of the overtly quite fragmentary nature of the book's literary form (and the editors deserve much credit for the work they have done in this regard). Personal encounters (e.g., with Chatral Rimpoche, p. 142f), natural scenery (e.g., Kanchenjunga, p. 155), and cameos of the human situation in a particular place (e.g., Calcutta, pp. 25-7)

are described with a vividness, sensitivity and attention to detail that are striking. However, there are also some cryptic passages, e.g., the 'Conversations' on p. 136, which my perhaps perversely uncryptographic mind found neither the time nor the inclination to unravel. Yet I did understand and appreciate the excerpt on p. 154 which if I am correct, is one of the most profound insights concerning the state of Buddhist nirvana and the path thereto I have come across.

It is clear, of course, that in keeping with his previous studies of Eastern thought, Merton's main interest was in Buddhist (especially Tibetan Buddhist) spirituality, and this is evident in his preoccupation with this tradition, its holy men and ideas, in the book.

Part I of the Journal focuses on the need for direct, personal encounter to make inter-religious dialogue really bear fruit—'a camera cannot reconcile one with anything' (p. 153)—nor, one is tempted to add, the rather sterile dissections of an exclusively theoretically sustained study of diverse religious scriptures and traditions.

At the end of each chapter in this part is to be found a detailed list of notes, providing on the whole fairly helpful information on names, places, and other items mentioned in the text: all this adds to a fuller understanding of Merton's journey. Part II of the book comprises a potpourri of 'Complementary Readings', texts elaborating many of the points that interested Merton, and much more technical in content. The Appendices are well worth reading, and are in a sense the meatiest portion of the book. They give a more complete glimpse into Merton's thought (not all of them are by him). Appendices IV and VII being specially recommended. A number of photographs, some of which have been taken by Merton himself, are scattered throughout the text, and add to the tangibility of the experiences related.

The book contains some inaccuracies and printing errors. I suspect the note on the Bengal Naxalite movement (p. 206) is misleading: the Naxalites were (and are) a more organised force than Richard Critchfield's comment suggests.

The extensive Glossary at the end of the book I found useful but at times unreliable: thus the Bengali expression equivalent to 'all right' is not *aachya* but *aachha* (p. 363); the 'Ahirbudhna Sambhita' (p. 363) is described as 'a post-Upanishadic scripture in the Hindu

Vaishnava school of thought', and immediately following it is said that 'The samhitas are one of the three principal categories of the Vedas'; a *post-Upanishadic* scripture cannot be a category of the Vedas at all; under 'Ananda' (p. 364) the phrase 'when applied to the god Krishna' is an unwarranted inclusion; under 'caritas' (p. 370) regarded as Christian love it is quite wrong to equate it with the Sanskrit 'kama' (as has been implied): the closest Sanskrit equivalent is 'bhakti'. The note on 'Hinduism' (p. 376) as a religion having 'a pantheon of many thousands of gods' is grossly misleading; indeed many scholars (both Indian and Western) would argue (and I would endorse their view) that from earliest times the predominant theme in the majority of Hindu religious sects, certainly by way of a systematised theology, is a staunch monotheism. The quotation under 'Mogul' (p. 388) seems to have been misquoted: there is no sense in the statement that Akbar's empire occupied 'the vast territory from

Afghanistan south of the Godavari river' (sic); p. 402, under 'Sikhs', the number given as making up the community is about half that of the true total (the same can be said for the Jain figure, p. 377). Nor will the Sikhs take kindly to the largely inaccurate statement that their tenth Guru, Govind Singh 'welded the Sikhs into a military community which adopted the caste practices and the polytheistic beliefs typical of Hinduism'.

To sum up: this book might offer profitable reading for a number of reasons: for the rehash of learned sources and quotations it presents (especially in part II); for indications of the possibility of true inter-religious dialogue between Christianity and Eastern religions at both the discursive and contemplative levels; but, so far as the evolving and coherent development of the final stages of a profoundly spiritual Christian thinker is concerned, beyond an intriguing yet uneasy and partial insight into the workings of a creative mind it does not go.

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PRAYER by Simon Tugwell OP. *Veritas Publications*, Dublin, 1974. 2 vols. 144 pp + 152 pp. 90p each.

DID YOU RECEIVE THE SPIRIT? by Simon Tugwell OP. Paperback Edition. *Darton, Longman & Todd*, London, 1975, 143 pp. £1.

Many readers of Fr Tugwell's new work will compare it with *Did You Receive the Spirit?*, some no doubt exaggerating the difference between them.

There is no doubt that the mood is different; whereas the earlier book conveyed a sense of excited rediscovery, *Prayer* evinces a more sober form of encouragement. *Did You Receive the Spirit?* struck an unfamiliar note and claimed it was deeply traditional; *Prayer* emphasises the unchanging; that taking God seriously always makes the same demands, poses the same problems, uncovers the same needs. Whereas the basic thrust of the former was 'We should pray to receive the Spirit, not simply as a pious duty, but with the eager expectation that things will happen' (p. 93), the message being insistently rammed home in the latter is 'No God but God' (heading of Chapter 3 in Volume 1). Some of the distinctive emphases in *Prayer* were already present, however, in the earlier book, particularly in the later chapters (e.g., that on 'Icons and Idols').

Although *Prayer* occasionally betrays its oral origin (in the Introduction Fr Tugwell thanks those sisters whose

retreat provided the occasion to 'build up the material for this book', p. xii), it is much more systematic than *Did You Receive the Spirit?*, it is less repetitive and has less loose ends; in this way *Prayer* contains a body of spiritual teaching that may well prove to be more durable than its predecessor. Despite the changes in mood and thrust, there is a high degree of consistency between the earlier and later works; both manifest that sureness of touch and an instinct for God that grounds an inner authority. Again, the numerous references to past authors (particularly Desert Fathers and early Dominicans) convey that sense of being put in touch with the sources of perennial wisdom, and in the new book this style somewhat deceptively hides Fr Tugwell's own distinctive contribution: I see this to be his working through in practical detail the many consequences of the absolute dominion of God, with a relish for the paradoxes that must involve.

Some of the chapters in *Prayer* develop more thoroughly those comments made more casually in *Did You Receive the Spirit?* on taking human