

Book Review

The Secular Witness of E. V. Mathew: ed. by J. R. Chandran. C.I.S.R.S. & C.L.S., 1972. Pp. 267. Price Rs 10.

The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore must be commended for publishing *The Secular Witness of E. V. Mathew* even before the first anniversary of his death. The book has highlighted the theological thinking and service of a layman, and an advocate. It has shown how one christian layman, reflecting on his faith, discovered its meaning for him in his calling in the workaday world, and expressed it in a challenging manner; and so he has set an example to other laymen in other walks of life. This is not a task which can be accomplished by those in the ordained ministry of the church, or by lay theologians who make theologizing their vocation. E. V. Mathew has given expression to his convictions with the zeal of a revolutionary, because he felt that the world is the sphere of God's activity, and that therefore it is in the secular world that God has to be sought and found.

The book has two main parts, in conformity with the other volumes of the same type in the series 'Confessing the Faith in India'. The first part consists of a brief account of E. V.'s life by his son Varkey Mathew, and E. V.'s theology of secular witness by George Thomas. The former helps the reader to know that E. V. was devoted to Christ and his church, and that he was interested and involved in social action from his student days, and that C.I.S.R.S. found him and made him what he became, — a christian witness in secular life. The second, and larger, part (220 pages) consists of selections from his writings. It is divided into three sections: (1) The Christ Event: the transcendent in the secular, (2) Law and politics as instruments of social change, (3) Secularization of religion and society. The selections are from editorials of *The Guardian* of which he was executive editor from 1964, his address given at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at New Delhi in 1961, and his articles which appeared in *Religion & Society*.

E. V. was not a systematic theologian. As editor of a christian weekly he was called upon to give expression to his thinking on a variety of subjects which, he thought, should engage the attention of his readers in the here and now. The present reviewer had the privilege of knowing E.V. rather intimately and reading his editorials and essays as they came

out. Now that his writings have been collected and arranged according to subject matter, one comes to admire and appreciate his theological thinking and social concerns more than before. There are many insights in his thinking which will challenge and provoke the readers, christians ordained or lay, men of other faiths and of no faith. From the many passages which could be cited as examples of his thinking, two may be quoted. In the section on the Church's betrayal of its historical mission, he says, "The body of worshippers is called to live in Christ's ever present activity in current history and to manifest His love through the mission of bringing the abundant life to those who are denied it by the inhumanity of man. Man's salvation has to be proclaimed, promised and delivered within the bounds of history. It is to carry out this mission that worshippers are called" (p. 92).

In the section on "dialogue in the context of secular events", Mathew says, "A dialogue that does not take into account hard terrestrial realities of human situations but pursues it on the assumption of an independent metaphysical or ontological framework, in essence, denies that once for all mystery and finality of revelation are given to mankind in the central act of history in the birth of the Son of God as Son of Man. There is an all-sufficiency in the givenness of the revelation. Nothing more is to be known of the mystery of Godhead than Christ crucified and Christus Victor in the secular world of today" (p. 101).

E. V. saw the need of a revolution in Indian social life. He felt that the church in India could make a significant contribution to rapid social change if its members, recognized the importance Christ gave to release for the prisoners, liberty to the oppressed, and justice and peace to the poor. He was doubtful that the church in India would rise to her calling, and he therefore had some very hard things to say about that church. There may be many things in his writings with which readers will disagree; but there can be no doubt that his words will stimulate and challenge, and through this collection E. V. will continue to speak to many.

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