

A Review Article

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The Vedic Experience—Mantramahājari: by Raymond Pannikar—
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This book is a major work of scholarship. It contains nearly a thousand pages and it took the author and his team of helpers ten years to produce. To summarise a book of such dimensions would be impossible in a review unless the reviewer were to write another book, and it would in this case be self-defeating for this book is essentially an anthology and anthologies cannot be summarised. Your reviewer has therefore based his comments on a series of quotations which seem to him to reflect the main points which the author wishes to convey. Such a process of selection is also in keeping with the spirit of the anthology itself. The review is divided into three parts: the purpose of the book as described by the author in the General Introduction; a selection of the contents; some issues which the work raises.

The General Introduction is an exposition of the work's subtitle which is 'An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration.' An anthology, says the author, is like a bunch of flowers. You pick the flowers for someone else, not for your own enjoyment. You make a representative selection from all the available colours and scents. You pick the flowers down near their roots so that they can live long in water or even be transplanted to another garden. As such a bouquet is a gift, so this anthology is a gift offered to the world at large. The book is limited to the Vedas:

It is an account of the Vedic Revelation, understood as an unveiling of depths that still resound in the heart of modern Man, so that he may become more conscious of his own human heritage and thus of the springs of his own being (p. 9).

And therefore:

This book aims, insofar as possible, at being free of all peculiar preconceptions and particular value judgements. The *śruti* must be rescued from the monopoly of a single group, whether it be a scholarly group of pundits and indologists or an active religiopolitical faction (p. 10).

This is a major emphasis throughout the anthology and we shall have to return to it later.

The author lives in no ivory tower and is fully aware of modern man's predicament. Precisely because modern man is more than

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merely modern the Vedas may be able to speak to him, and because he realises that provincial cultures are no longer enough to live in or live by he needs to assimilate the best that other cultures can give him. Accordingly the aim of this work is not so much to stimulate study, though it will certainly do that, as to make possible 'an existential re-enactment' of the essential Vedic experience:

Modern man is inclined to-day to accept the idea that he is not saved by reason alone or liberated by will-power alone. He seeks an active participation in the overwhelming dynamism of the universe, in which his involvement is possible only if it is actively passive. And this could be said to be the core of the experience of Vedic Man; that he is called upon to perform the sacrifice that makes the world and even the Gods subsist. . . . The Vedic Revelation may become a real discovery of new dimensions of life, if it is taken as a celebration of Man (pp. 27-28).

The intention of the author thus demands a certain quality of attention on the part of the reader. With that in mind we now turn to consider the contents of the book. The framework of the anthology can best be described by the author himself:

The criterion of selection obviously cannot be purely sectarian; it must be universally acceptable and it must spring from a simple human experience. The pattern adopted here seems to be the most basic pattern offered by nature, by Man, by life on earth, and by history. It is the pattern that seems to be built into the very core of being itself. It is as much a geological pattern as a historical and cultural one. Significantly enough, it seems to be also the same initiatory pattern that is found almost universally. There is a preparation before a given community comes into the fullness of life; there are growth and decay, and also a way of removal (*sic*) that will facilitate the continuation and survival of the particular group. . . . The seven parts of this anthology follow this pattern (pp. 6-7).

Each of these seven major parts contains a number of lettered sections which are further divided into numbered chapters. Each chapter contains a number of texts from the Veda with introductions by the author. Each major part and each section also has its own introduction. The aim of all that the author writes is to enable and to stimulate meditation on the texts themselves.

Part I is entitled *Dawn and Birth*. It has five sections: Prelude, The Word, The Elements, The Lord, and Emerging Life.

The five sections of Part I, though not systematically connected, are deeply related inasmuch as they all try to give expression to God-above-God, the Beginning-before-the-Beginning, the Lord-previous-to-any-Lordship, Life-before-Life, and the Unity underlying all Plurality (p. 47).

The Vedic seers make the staggering claim of entering into that enclosure where God is not yet God, where God is thus unknown

to himself, and, not being creator, is 'nothing'. Without this perspective we may fail to grasp the Vedic message regarding the absolute Prelude to everything (p. 50).

Some of the author's comments on *skambha*, the cosmic pillar which corresponds to the *axis mundi* of other cultures catch the flavour of this Part.

[The *skambha*] is seen in the Atharva Veda as the frame of creation, and even more, as that invisible and ever transcendent ground on which everything stands and towards which everything tends. The vision is circular and anthropological. Man and the cosmos are not two different creations, each governed by different laws. There is one point without dimensions, as we would be tempted to word it to-day, that is, without forming part of the things of which it is the point of reference, which is the support, the ground, of everything (p. 61).

In Part II Man has to 'come to terms with the Gods, with himself and with the world':

Man becomes conscious that he is that pole of the universe which recognises itself to be something other than the center. He is not the real center, for he discovers that reality evolves and moves around a center that is, by definition, God—whatever this God may be—and not himself; but he is the epistemological pole (which some consider to be the ontological one also), for it is he who recognises God to be the center of the universe. . . . In other words, Man discovers himself, not as a separate individual but as a creature that grows towards fulfilment by discovering itself to be that particular pole on which the true center is seen to rotate (p. 187).

This second Part is called *Germination and Growth*; its three sections are The First Blessings of the Lord, Awakening and Coming of Age, and The World of Man. We quote a prayer for happiness from the third section (RV 1, 89, 2; 5):

May the righteous Gods gladden our hearts
with the warmth of their love.

May the grace of the Gods encompass us;
their friendship we seek.

May the Gods grant us life that we may live!

We invoke him, the Lord of what moves and what moves not,
the inspirer of our thoughts. May he come to our aid!

May this our divine Protector and Guard,
the unfailing one, cause our wealth to increase, that we
may long flourish! (p. 302).

Like this one, all the hymns presented from the Veda are original translations and read easily and naturally. This is largely due to the literary skill of Mrs Mary Rogers, to whom the author pays tribute in the Preface.

The third Part of the anthology is called *Blossoming and Fullness*:

... Man discovers his own personal, divine, and, of course, human dignity.

Now, dignity involves responsibility and awareness. This is at the heart of Part III and it finds expression in the central section on sacrifice. Man discovers himself as man, or rather, as fully Man, as a center of the cosmos, fellow with the Gods, and partner of God himself. Between the two poles of reality Man discovers a link, an unbreakable relation, and the burden of this consciousness leads him to discover not only the laws of sacrifice, but also its nature. Man is going to lose his own life in the experiment, for the discovery that he too is God, that he may enter into the mystery of reality, not by an epistemic act of his mind, but by an existential and total involvement of his being, is going to consume him in the very fire of the sacrifice that he himself discovers and prepares. All he can do is to throw himself fully into this adventure and, heedless of all else, trust that the experiment will succeed (p. 311).

This Part has two sections: Radiance and Cosmic Refulgence, and Sacrifice. The latter is the pivot of the whole work for the author has already told us in his General Introduction that liturgical celebration is the essential hall-mark of Vedic Man. Moreover the *śruti* itself affirms that 'This sacrifice is the navel of the world' (RV 1, 164, 35: 128). We shall therefore consider it at some length.

The basic characteristic of *yajña* seems to be that of an action that reaches where it intends to reach, that really and truly offers something, that stretches out and extends itself (p. 347).

Sacrifice is

the primordial act . . . *the* act that makes beings to be and is thus responsible for their becoming, without the assumption of a prior Being from which they come. In the beginning 'was' Sacrifice . . .

At the origin of every being here is a sacrifice that has produced it. The texture of the universe is sacrifice which is the act *par excellence* which produces all that is (p. 348).

Vedic sacrifice is undergirded by the symbol of *ṛta* 'that non-ontological but nevertheless real principle of order and activity.'

Ṛta is, in point of fact, the actual functioning or rather the proper rhythm of the sacrifice, while sacrifice is that which causes things to be what they are. By sacrifice Gods and men collaborate, not only among themselves, but also for the maintenance and very existence of the universe. Reality subsists, thanks to sacrifice (p. 351).

The texts selected illustrate the various kinds of sacrifice to be found in the Vedas, 'the spirituality of Soma,' sacrifice as the way to immortality, the desire of Heaven, the interiorisation of sacrifice which is one of the main themes of the Upaniṣads, and the 'harmonious synthesis in which are blended action, knowledge and love' through which the

Gita transcends both 'the way of Vedic sacrifice and . . . the pure ontological knowledge of the Upaniṣads.'

There is now no longer need, as there was in the sacrifice of olden days, for large sums of money, the mediation of priests, or long and complicated ritual: nor is it any longer essential to retire into the forest or lead an ascetic life as taught in the Upaniṣads. This way is far less complicated and more compatible with human life, though it is by no means easy of achievement (p. 425).

This transition from the life affirming world of the Vedas, to the interiority of the Upaniṣads and thence to the synthesis of the Gita is a recurring theme of the whole anthology.

The last section of Part III introduces *saṁnyāsa* for 'Renunciation is the culmination of the sacrifice' and 'Sacrifice leads not only to the immolation of the victim, but also to the holocaust of the subject, even in his thinking capacity' (pp. 432-3).

With Part IV, *Fall and Decay*, the mood changes, for 'Man's personal experience of his own limitation in all spheres of reality' makes him yearn to 'break the boundaries of his humanness.'

The human individual is not infinite like God; he cannot even compare himself with the immortal Gods. He begins now to discover that he is not even Man, but just one member of the species and often at variance with his fellow Men. Even more, he discovers that within himself also there is a lack of harmony, or in the words of the Gita, that there is something obstructing his own will and compelling him to sin (p. 451).

The sections of this Part are: Sorrow and Suffering, and Sin and Mercy. The texts in the first section illustrate the themes of physical ailments, old age and *duḥkha*. The author warns us not to read into the word 'sin' assumptions drawn from other traditions. To help us in this he includes a comprehensive list of the Sanskrit terms often translated by sin and associated terms, together with their meanings.

Part V is about *Death and Dissolution*. Throughout the whole work, but here particularly, modern man is never very far from the author's mind:

. . . contemporary Man seems at a loss when he is confronted by one of the most ancient myths of mankind: the possibility of avoiding death. Because death is seen to be inevitable, modern society tends to wipe out from the memory of the living all dealings with the dying and the dead. The fundamental Vedic attitude is almost the opposite: it does not reckon with death's inevitability and it does not try to smuggle death away from everyday life.

According to this vision, which is common to other cultures as well, death is not inevitable; it is only accidental. You die if your life is snatched away before you reach maturity . . . On the other hand the old Man, 'the Man of long life,' as the Vedas call him, the one who has lived his life, does not die; he does not

experience a break and, thus, a trauma; he has simply consumed the torch and exhausted the fuel (pp. 534-5).

The two sections of this Part deal with The Great Departure and The Other World.

New Life and Freedom is the title of Part VI. This is the climax of the whole work. It demands much more of the reader, and more extensive treatment in the review than its predecessors. The effort is richly rewarding.

The Vedic experience is not one of death and resurrection as two dialectical moments of a process. The concepts of death and resurrection, if introduced at all, should not be understood as belonging on the same plane. The Vedic experience contains no idea of a temporal link connecting the two, as if resurrection were coming after death in a temporal sequence. In fact it is this great fallacy which the Upaniṣads are striving to overcome. What Upaniṣadic Man is interested in is not a return to the old familiar life, not a 'new' old life; not a resurrection, but a 'surrection', an ascent to the heights of real and everlasting life. A mere reversion to 'life' is precisely the danger and the dread. It is *samsāra*, that is to say, the clinging to the spatio-temporal world of intranscendent events, slavery to history, entanglement in the chain of *karman* which confines us to this world (p. 643).

The Upaniṣads do not teach a death experience, but an experience of life. Ultimately there is no experience of death and the death experiment is, in the last analysis, unreal because the 'subject' who died was not real. The supreme Upaniṣadic experience is discovered precisely by realising that the experience of death is only a psychological experience, made by the immortal *ātman* . . . Man has to break the circularity of time in order to reach the ontological fullness of his being (p. 644).

Those two quotations should be pondered and assimilated by anyone who wants to attempt to enter the spiritual world of the Upaniṣads, but they should be read in their context, for in the introduction to Part VI the author is also at pains to refute the allegation of other-worldliness which is frequently applied as a blanket accusation to the whole of the Hindu tradition. While this tendency is certainly to be found in some later philosophical schools, it does not represent the authentic vision of the Vedas themselves. The early Vedic hymns are emphatically life-affirming:

The Vedic Revelation is a constant reminder of the generosity of the world, of its self-offering to Man, like that of the young bride who presents her charms and the allurements of all her finery to her husband (p. 645).

Upaniṣadic Man discovers the 'experience of supraspatial and trans-temporal reality, the discovery of the mystery concealed in the cave of the heart.' But—and this is fundamental to the author's message—the second experience does not cancel out the first. Both are held together in a third which maintains them in proper perspective:

This basic attitude [is] rather a harmonising of polarities and an inclusion of both poles without eliminating either and without sublimating them in such a way that they become no longer recognisable (p. 647).

The first section of Part VI is The Ascending Way of which the first landmark is oneness, for

Nothing short of the One can ever be ultimate truth. No kind of dualism or plurality can be the lasting and final foundation of all (p. 653).

Here is *advaita* which is oneness of a very special kind. It does not necessarily imply monism. It makes room for pluralism, not as a competitor of the One, but as enhancement of effective oneness. Here is the coincidence of the divine with the cosmic and the human :

We witness three moments of one and the same ultimate process: the *divine* giving himself up so as to be able to produce the world out of himself; the *cosmos* coming and exploding into beings . . . *man* discovering the all-encompassing One and finding at the same time a place for himself in the *advitiya* of the oneness (p. 658).

The author describes this threefold but single process as 'holistic', 'cosmotheandric' or 'theanthropocosmic'. These three synonyms are the key words in the light of which the whole anthology can be interpreted and the author would claim that they are the key to the Vedic revelation itself for they mean precisely *advaita*. But this discovery can be made not intellectually, but only through realisation. This discovery has 'four acts, the four acts of the theanthropocosmic drama'. The four classical *mahāvākyas*, or 'great sentences' of the Upaniṣads represent these four acts.

The first of these sentences is *Prajnanam brahma*—Consciousness is Brahma:

How is the one itself so constituted that there is a place for pluralism without destroying the unity? The answer of the *mahāvākya* is clear: consciousness and consciousness alone is able to assume multiplicity without endangering oneness. In the world of human experience consciousness is the only power that embraces the manifold without losing its identity and unity. A multiplicity of thoughts as well as the many objects and contents of consciousness do not disrupt but rather reinforce the unity of consciousness (p. 669).

This consciousness is Brahma, but it can never be objectified for 'the quest for it is the quest for the origin of the questioner himself, for the "mind of his mind"'. Consciousness does not depend on man's state of waking but is ever present in him in whatever state he may be.

[The] discovery of consciousness may be an impersonal truth, the following *mahāvākyas* could be said to constitute the unfolding of the mystery of the person in all its dimensions (p. 697).

This brings us to the second great utterance which is *Ātman brahma*—*ātma* is Brahma. This is to be interpreted neither as 'a logical

monstrosity only possible in an unmitigated monism' nor as a 'barren tautology'. To look at it in either of these typically Western ways is to distort the very thing one is trying to grasp. For Western thought proceeds on the basis of non-contradiction. A is A and is therefore not B, but Indian thought proceeds on the basis of identity. In this way of thinking name and form, the outer marks of difference, are of no ultimate significance. For example, when the drop of water is absorbed in the ocean it is not destroyed but fulfilled, for its essence lies in the water which it shares with the ocean, and not in the surface tension which originally kept it separate from other drops. It is along these lines that *ātma Brahma* is to be understood and experienced.

This brings us to the second section of Part VI, The Internal Way, and to the third great sentence *aham Brahma*—I am Brahma. What does this signify?

The discovery of the *ātman* is in the last analysis the discovery of the third person. In spite of all provisos and cautions not to reify the insight of the preceding Great Utterance, the *ātman* appears always in front of us as substance, and as such it lacks the immediacy and the fluidity of the I; it is not yet the revelation of the first person. We can understand and even say that *ātman* is Brahman, and yet keep a certain distance and remain detached in the saying. The discovery of the *ātman* is the fruit of a predominantly objectified investigation, whereas the disclosure of the I is the result of a subjective introspection in which not only the object but also the subject as a substance evaporates (p. 725).

This entails the realisation that the *ātman* is not to be identified with the limited empirical ego. Only the realised man can say in truth 'I am Brahma'. All the rest is secondhand knowledge and superimposed wisdom, mere hearsay.

The fourth *mahāvākya* is *tata tvam asi*—That art thou:

Because Brahma is the I, there is place for the thou: that art thou, the thou of the I, the thou of Brahma. That is what you are, a thou, nothing more and nothing less; nothing more, so that without the I you are sheer negative nothingness and have no consistency or existence of your own and do not belong to yourself, to your ego; but also nothing less, so that you are Brahman, of Brahman, equal to Brahman, and have infinite value and are like Brahman, *sat*, *chit* and *ananda*, being, spirit and glory. That is what this Great Utterance affirms (p. 749).

This is so because

The Absolute Brahman or God (or any other term we may prefer) is not the thou (to whom we may pray or about whom we may think) but the I, and we are his thou. This personal aspect makes room for the total development of my being and my person (p. 750).

The author summarises all he has been attempting to set before us in Part VI in the following passage:

The whole of reality subsists in this relational and personal structure. Brahman, the nature of which is pure *consciousness*, is the unique and ultimate *I* which exists precisely because it has a *thou*, which responds to its own constitutive calling via the *he*, the *ātman*, without splitting the pure *oneness* of all. This stretching of the Non-duality, this tension and polarity within the One, making it really Nondual but without breaking its oneness, is precisely the mystery of life disclosed in the Upaniṣads, whose climax is found in the experience of *tat tvam asi* (pp. 752-3).

Part VII is entitled simply *Twilight* and its aim is to serve as an introduction to that life of prayer which has nurtured for millenia a considerable part of mankind in its quest for happiness and in its search for the ultimate meaning of life (p. 785).

The introduction to this Part is built round an exposition of the Sanskrit word *samdhya* for which 'twilight' is the English translation. The two sections each present a series of texts for use in prayer at respectively sunrise and sunset. The sections are further subdivided so that there are appropriate morning and evening prayers for each season of the year, spring, summer, rainy season, autumn, winter, and frosty season. For

the seasons and activity of the Gods are connected, time is not an abstract value or an empty concept. Liturgy is nothing other than Man's participation in the temporal unfolding of the universe (p. 787).

After that brief survey of the contents of the anthology we turn to consider a number of issues which it raises. Although as we have seen the primary aim of the work is to introduce the texts selected from the Vedas for the reader's meditation and appropriation into his own spiritual life, for this to be possible the author has to present a case and state an argument. He has to do more than this for he has already told us (p. 10), as we have seen, that the *śruti* must be 'rescued (our emphases) from the monopoly of a single group'. Now any act of rescue demands a struggle against those persons or elements who try to resist it. Dr Pannikar therefore has to fight a battle on two fronts. The first is against certain elements of the Hindu tradition itself. He points out that, though the Veda has always been treated with great reverence within that tradition, it has in practice been largely ignored:

It is a well-known fact, long recognised and now confirmed by recent studies, that Indian philosophical systems, not only the *nāstikas*, that is the so-called heterodox ones, have drawn very few of their reflections from the Vedas. Most of the philosophical systems were developed outside the world of Vedic speculation. Even the two Vedāntas make only selective and limited use of Vedic material (p. 14).

The book therefore is an attempt to travel back beyond later tradition to the source itself and thus to make available once more the authentic experience from which the source itself sprang.

Later tradition here means not only the development of the six systems, but the scholasticism of the traditional pundit, for it is characteristic of Hindu and all scholasticisms that while in a sense they preserve the best of the tradition, they do so at the cost of making remote from ordinary men the life-giving experience on which the tradition is based. Scholasticism, is, almost by definition, dry and lifeless. Your reviewer has spent many hours sitting at the feet of traditional pundits and he is much struck by the fact that this book breathes a wholly different atmosphere. To the pundits the ultimate experience of *mōksha* is so remote as to be far beyond the reach of ordinary people, 'The scriptures tell us that it is there, but it is only for the great souls: not for people like you and me.' The implicit claim of this book is that the ultimate experience is open to every man. This implies that the Veda belongs to humanity and not only to Hinduism.

Will this book gain recognition and acceptance by a sufficient number of educated and scholarly Hindus for it to achieve its aim? (If that is to be practically possible it will have to be readily available in a much cheaper Indian edition and plans are in hand for this.) Although Hinduism knows no system of 'imprimatur' there is an informal *consensus fidelium*. A work such as Father Kamil Bulke's *Ramkatha* has won widespread acceptance among Hindu scholars as a major contribution to the study of the epic. It has to be recognised, however, that previous works of Dr Pannikar have not gained a similar measure of acceptance by Hindus who often feel that he has read his own interpretation into their scriptures rather than expounded what is in fact in them. It is greatly to be hoped that the present work will be read and judged on its merits and not ignored or rejected simply because of the author's name. One Hindu scholar of considerable reputation has told the reviewer that he regards the book as making a most original and important contribution to the study of the Veda and their recovery for modern man. It will be several years before we shall know whether the book has really won its way in the world of Hindu scholars. If it can do so then it will represent a major step forward in making the source of the tradition accessible to the English speaking world.

Second, the argument is implicitly and sometimes explicitly directed against Western scholars who have misunderstood so much of Hinduism. Again and again the author insists that western categories of interpretation cannot do justice to the Vedic experience and indeed seriously distort it. We quote some examples:

No merely naturalistic explanation of the worship of the Gods as natural powers will do justice to the texts or to the sophistication of Vedic culture. No supernaturalistic hypothesis should undermine, on the other hand, the realistic and humanistic approach of the texts. The Gods are intrinsically connected with sacrifice and with the idea of cosmic order; they constitute different expressions of the sacrificial act that maintains universal order. Within the cosmic realm the split that is productive of many Gods is not an ultimate one, just as the parallel split in our consciousness among ourselves, the world, and God is not.

ultimate either; these three are certainly not one, but neither are they many (p. 137).

Many misunderstandings and accusations regarding pantheism and monism would disappear if the texts that speak of the all-pervasiveness of God and the unity of the universe were viewed in their proper context, that is, in the context of an ultimate spiritual experience that has already eliminated the individual as spectator or subject (p. 433).

The seasons in their totality, together with morning and evening, build time, the year, the whole universe, Prajapati, the Lord of all creatures. We may tend, of course, to transcend time, but we can do so only in and through time itself. All this has little to do with either 'nature-mysticism' or 'pantheistic' trends, which spring out of another quite different fundamental intuition. The word 'nature' cannot be used with reference to this attitude because in this context there is no background of the 'supernatural' nor is there any separation from the 'personal'. To superimpose the pair 'nature-supernature' or 'nature-person' may be interesting from a polemical point of view, but it will not help towards an understanding from within. The same applies to the word 'pantheism'. Pantheism is an alien conception that cannot be applied without distorting and doing violence to the world view of the Vedic experience (p. 788).

Here there is probably a veiled reference to the work of the late Professor R. C. Zaehner. We might add in mitigation that to use our own familiar categories is the only way in which we can initially grasp any alien reality in any field of learning. It is only in the light of more mature knowledge that we can discard our categories and see the reality in terms of its own. The Vedic experience, we can now see, is *sui generis*. We must discard the alien mould which has now served its necessary purpose.

Pannikar's criticism of both Hindu scholasticism and of Western misinterpretation is based on a single claim: the Vedic vision is founded on the 'theanthropocosmic', 'cosmotheandric' or 'holistic' unity of men, the world and the Gods which is Brahma, that oneness which yet contains plurality. This is at once the starting point of Pannikar's argument in intellectual terms, and the goal of that trans-intellectual meditation which the texts have been selected to enable and encourage. Here is the distinctiveness of the Vedic experience: it can lead to, as it springs from, an insight which contains differences within an all-embracing unity. It could enable modern man to overcome the dividedness and fragmentariness of his world and of himself.

What implications does this book have for the Christian Church? Here we will draw attention to two: it is an implicit challenge to us to go much deeper into the Hindu tradition than we have yet done or contemplated doing. That means beginning with the Veda. While very few will be called or will be able to go as far as the author has gone, all may and can share his attitude of open and expectant reverence. Moreover we have to recognise that the Hindu tradition is distorted

not only by false intellectual categories but by false psychological ones as well. Those of us who live and work mainly among Christians and in Christian institutions are unconsciously moulded in ways that very often prevent us from seeing Hinduism with open eyes. The Church must be prepared to release many more men and women than it has yet done from institutional and administrative responsibilities in order to devote themselves to the kind of listening to Hinduism which this book implicitly demands.

The second implication is ecumenical. The author disarmingly states that 'This book aims, in so far as possible, at being free of all peculiar preconceptions and particular value judgements' (p. 10). Yet he would be the first to admit that no book can be written without assuming something. The basic assumption of this book is Thomism (which is not necessarily to say that the author is a Thomist). If the author's total interpretation of the Vedic experience is valid, then it can be understood as a natural theology or *preparatio evangelicae*. The contrast with Christian thought and experience is neither so stark nor so complete as Hindu scholasticism and Western distortions have implied. In particular Pannikar's interpretation of advaita and of the Four Great Utterances does seem to bring the Vedic understanding of persons much nearer to the Christian one than the categories of pantheism or monism allowed. The general thrust of the work is in this way in harmony with much of the best of Catholic scholarship in India today. For instance, on a very much smaller scale, R. Antoine's monograph *Rama and the Bards* does for the Ramayana what Pannikar has done for the Vedas in the present work.

Evangelical scholarship begins with different assumptions and reaches very different conclusions. Its starting point is the prophetic interpretation of the activity of God in history found in the Old Testament and especially in the Prophets. From this perspective other religions are seen not so much as preparations for the Gospel as totally different from it. If the distinction is not too crude and over-simplified, Catholic thought has seen in other religions evidence of the creative activity of God, while Evangelical thought sees them as standing in need of redemption. In particular the biblical attitude to time has always been seen as wholly different from the Hindu one, and in spite of his massive reassessment of the Veda Pannikar does not appear to question that, for he writes:

The Vedic experience is one of liberation, of freedom from everything. It thus includes freedom or liberation from time. What both fascinates and haunts Upaniṣadic Man is not anything that comes after, but that which has no after. As long as we are entrained in the net of mere temporal existence, we are in the clutches of death, even if we postpone death by a sequence of successive existences. An afterlife is as inauthentic a life as a prelife (p. 644).

The Christian emphasis on history has all too often been presented to and understood by Hindus as if history were precisely 'the mere net of temporal existence'. Yet that is history lived without God 'a tale

told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.' St Paul called this 'life lived on the level of our lower nature.' History takes on meaning and purpose only when it is transformed and redeemed by God's saving grace. It is not discarded like an old coat but taken up and transformed into a reality greater than itself—to which the symbol of the resurrection of the body points. Because this interpretation of history is the starting point of their thinking Evangelical scholars have usually dismissed the idea of 'liberation from time' as at best hallucination or at worst an illegitimate attempt to break the boundaries of creaturely existence. The primacy of history has received new emphasis in recent years in the theologies of Pannenberg and Moltmann and indeed it is the Marxist writer Milan Machovec who insists in *A Marxist Looks at Jesus* that it was the Old Testament prophets who gave man the *future*. It is the rediscovery of this fact by Christians that Machovec sees as opening up the possibility of a real dialogue between Christians and Marxists.

It is just possible that Pannikar's interpretation of advaita could help to narrow the apparently unbridgeable gap between liberation from time and the gift of the future. Thus this book could assist Catholics and Evangelicals in our continuing discovery of one another, for this is inescapably bound up with our common discovery of other faiths.

This review must end on a note of praise for the publishers. The book is beautifully produced and is a pleasure to read. Misprints are few.

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