

# Book Review

## **Carey's Obligation and India's Renaissance.**

*J. Thomas K. Dantel and Roger E. Hedlund.*

Serampore, West Bengal : Council of Serampore College, 1993.  
xvi + 363 pp. Rs. 150 (\$15.00 U.S. outside India).

One of the important features of India's bicentennial celebrations of William Carey's arrival in Bengal (in 1973) was the production of this large collection of essays. Edited by Dr. Thomas Daniel, Principal of Serampore College and Dr. Roger Hedlund, founder of the Church Growth Research Centre in Madras, the volume provides an unusually broad-ranging survey of the mission, education and scholarly activities of the first of three pioneer Baptist missionaries from England.

Most of the essays were first presented at symposia arranged by Hedlund (in Madras, October 1991) and Daniel (in Serampore, August 1992). Other essays were published as articles in Indian journals or were presented as annual "Carey Day" lectures at Serampore College during the last twenty years, the most recent (by Smith) being in August 1993.

One of the major achievements of this volume is to have brought together writings on William Carey (1761-1834)— a celebrated language professor at Fort William College, Calcutta — from the pens of some 23 Indian scholars who represent a broad array of academic and practical disciplines. Almost 75% of the essays in this publication are by Indian scholars, bearing testimony to the fact that much still needs to be heard from the subcontinent about the complex context and apparent achievements of William Carey, the founder of Serampore College.

The volume is divided into six major parts, focussing on "Carey the Man" (I) "Carey the Missionary" (II), "Carey the Linguist" (III), "Carey and [India's] Cultural and Educational Renaissance" (IV), "Carey and Science and Technology" (V), and "Carey and Social Reform" (VI). The Indian contributions are dominant and strongest in parts III-VI, while the missiological essays in parts I-II have mostly been produced by scholars from Britain, New Zealand and the U.S.A.

The essays that break most new ground, or that provide the most useful surveys, were written by scholars who have delved deeply into the primary sources that are available in Baptist archives in several cities around the world. These include Sunil K. Chatterjee's "William Carey and the Linguistic Renaissance in India," A. Christopher Smith's probing "Mythology and Missiology : Towards a Methodology for Understanding the Serampore Trio and Their Mission." Michael A. Laird's "William Carey and India's Education," A. R. Das' "Carey as Superintendent of the Botanical Garden," Vishal Mangalwadi's "Theological Assumptions of Carey's Reforms," and W. Michael Carey's genealogical piece on "William Carey's Descendants." These provide a

challenge for future research in preparation for bicentennial celebrations and reflection in the year 2000 on the beginning of the so-called "Serampore Trio"—William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward.

Many of the volume's Indian chapters unintentionally confirm the acuity of Lamin Sanneh's observation that missionaries in the developing world last century often contributed more to the linguistic and literary renaissance of the cultures in which they ministered than they ever intended or realized. R. K. Das Gupta reminds us that "Carey gave the Bengalis a grammar and a dictionary of their language and the heathens received the gift with gratitude without relinquishing their faith" (pp.187-188). This alerts Careyographers to guard against facile Careycentricity and missiological eisegesis. Thus we do well to heed Chittabrata Palit's warning to avoid treating Carey as "an icon" or an object of idolatrous veneration (p.289), and Vishal Mangalwadi's advice to understand Carey as "a model who inspires radical discipleship" rather than as mere "hero" (pp.309-310).

Evangeline Rajkumar provides much needed perspective on what has passed muster for far too long in Carey studies. In her insightful perusal of "William Carey's Mission of Compassion and Justice," she concludes ; "History itself can be oppressive if it fails to be open for correction. [The] straightening of history is of great significance for its own sake, for our mission[s] sake and for our theology[s] sake" (p.332). This call needs to be heard loud and clear in the Anglo-American world where many mission promoters still deal in re-cycled tradition and dated, second-hand renditions of the Carey story. The challenge is to recover the full contents of the primary sources, many of which are available on microfilm or are housed in Baptist archives. These have been strangely neglected for far too long. As A. C. Smith (pp.45-85) has pointed out in many journals since 1990, Carey and his team deserve much better from us, in the interests of the kingdom of God.

As it stands, this collected work provides timely alerts to all who would take the names of William Carey and his fine, dedicated colleagues on their lips. The implications of some of the essays' findings and insights will need to be digested and worked out. Far too many writers have failed to fathom the strange depths and the subtle dynamics in the thinking of the Serampore Trio which led them at times to invest their energies and resources in areas that had very little to do with applied missiology, evangelism or the contextualization of the Gospel. Thus we have a call here to engage in a new order of research, in a new quest for "the historical Carey" and his close associates *in situ*.

Quite possibly, one or more international research teams and several new volumes will be needed to do missiological justice to the triumvirate and their Indian partners. A new era of study on the pre-Victorian Serampore Mission has only just begun. The question is : who will do what it takes to rise to the challenge ?

Of course, it would be easy to assert that this volume will need considerable editing and literary embellishment before being reissued in any form. But it would be churlish to press the point, given the dedication of the part of the editors and the exemplary devotion of

the typist, Sheila Daniel, to get the work to and through the printer's hands in the space of just three months. Without their herculean labours, the volume would not have been ready for the celebrations of Carey's arrival on November 11, two centuries ago. So, welcome, to this important arrival from India !

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### **The Gospel of Indian Culture**

*Dr. K. P. Aleaz,*

Calcutta : Punthi Pustak (136/4B, Bidhan Sarani,  
Calcutta-700 004), 1994, pp.XII + 355

This book is a timely publication as the World Council of Churches is engaged in a serious study of the relationship between Gospel and Culture. The author has undertaken this research as a *Commissioned Study of the W.C.C.* on the above theme. The author makes an indepth analysis of the religion-culture relationship in India within the frame work of contemporary secular and theological discussions on culture. It gives an enlightened view of culture, examining its historical developments, offers a theological critique and points to new areas of theological research in understanding the Gospel of Christ.

The author works on the hypothesis that India's is a composite culture, a cultural symbiosis which has given birth to "grater vitality and larger acceptability," to religious ideas. The author's attempt is to discover new meanings of the Gospel emerging out of the Indian cultural context. He rejects all pre-fabricated ideas of the gospel either from the past or from the West. By allowing a free play of the Gospel in the Indian cultural context, the author perceives "a double gospel". One, the Gospel of inter-religious interaction and cultural harmony; second, the emergence of the Dalit-Tribal theologies and the Advaitic Christologies that develop out of the religio-cultural and socio-economic hermeneutical context of India (chapter VII). The author's claim is that to the extent these dimensions are neglected, the Gospel of Jesus Christ can only be poorly manifested. The "double gospel" is the "gospelation" of the context. He writes, "we cannot accept some timeless interpretation from somewhere and make it applicable to our context. Understanding and interpretation belong exclusively to us and to our context, and there is the possibility for the emergence of new meanings in the process of these. Inculturation, indigenisation or contextualisation of the gospel is an unreality, what really happens is the opposite, i.e., gospelation of the hermeneutical context or experiencing the emerging gospel from within a hermeneutical context." Dr. Aleaz shows courage to take responsibility for Gospel in India, "A Gospel that has come of age", a gospel that is no longer inhibited by the Barthian "nervousness". It is owning the Gospel of Christ in India. Gospel is no more an importation, it is not even "incarnating" because

there is nothing to "incarnate", rather it is "growing" "emerging" "blossoming" from the context. There is nothing "given" as such. Gospel is India's own. The author achieves this by exploring three areas of India's religion and culture. First, is India's own advaitic interpretations of Christ (Neo-Vedantic Christologies), secondly, Indian's own understanding of the suffering Christ as the 'Servant God' in the Dalit theology, thirdly, the Tribal rejection of the existing socio-economic, political and religious order and their insistence for an indigenous or *adi* people ideology of egalitarianism, and values of justice and politics which is a different form of consensus democracy in place of the existing "majority-versus- minority" form of decision making.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part, in four chapters, deals with the meaning of culture ; Western and Indian interpretations and understandings of culture and religion ; the symbiotic character of Indian culture with the Pre-Aryan, Aryan, Tribal, Dalit, Jaina, Bauddha, Muslim, Christian and Sikh cultural features. The second part which has got five chapters deals with Protestant and Catholic interpretations of the relation between Gospel and culture, such as adaptation, indigenization, contextualisation, inculturation, enreligionization and interculturalization ; Indian Christian interpretations of religion and culture by P. Chenchiah, M. M. Thomas, S. J. Samartha, Kaj Baago, Christopher Duraisingh, A. P. Nirmal and Paul Gregorios. The author finds some of their interpretations insufficient and feels the need to go beyond and he offers his own idea of 'gospelation' of the context, as a more adequate category. In the two final chapters he elucidates his theory of gospelation as an already happened reality in India through the detailed analysis of the thought of two advaitic theologians of India, Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya and K. Subba Rao. He narrates in detail the neo-Vedantic Christologies of eight Hindu thinkers like, Vivekananda, Abhedananda, Radhakrishnan etc. The author also develops his theology of religions in terms of Pluralistic Inclusivism, which he has already outlined in his earlier work, *Harmony of Religions : The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda* (1993).

While reading the book, one is fascinated by the clarity of arguments and their logical development. However, we would like to point out certain areas which need further elaboration and clarity. One is the question about the nature of Gospel itself. While rejecting the idea of Gospel as a principle of discrimination and self-critique as Western, is the author not in fact taking away the vital aspect of prophetic spirituality, which is not in any way a Western contribution, but rather biblical and necessarily a universal element. If he is willing to concede a role to prophetic spirituality from where does it originate ? Of course, one can see such an element in Buddhism. Then the task remains to reconcile Buddhist critique of Hinduism and advaitic criticism of Buddhism. Secondly though the author wants to do justice to the many-sided features of Indian culture, consciously or unconsciously, he is leaning heavily on the classical brahminic culture in its neo-vedantic form as he devotes two major chapters to the elucidation of the view points of Upadhyaya and Subba Rao, while no such treatment is given to other forms of culture. Hence the ultimate feeling one gets is that Gospel in India is more or less based on individual

spirituality, rather than the collective consciousness of suffering in the Dalit theology or egalitarianism and social justice concerns of the Tribal theology. How these theologies form one Gospel is not yet clear from the book. Also one notices the absence of Biblical material in understanding the Gospel or any discussion on the necessity of Scriptures in theological explorations. Perhaps, we can expect from this young prolific writer and thinker of Indian spirituality, further works to clear our reservations. There is no doubt that this work deepens our understanding of the relationship between Gospel and culture and certainly its thesis deserves close study and reflection from the theological community.

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### **Ethics of a World Community : Contributions of Dr. M. M. Thomas Based on Indian Reality**

*T. Jacob Thomas*

Calcutta : Punthi Pustak, 1993. pp. 250.

For those who are interested to know the theological ethics of an important contemporary Indian theologian, M. M. Thomas, in a brief, to-the-point manner, here is a doctoral thesis submitted to the Union Theological Seminary, New York, in 1986, now in a book form, published by a secular publisher. The famous Asian theologian Kosuke Koyama has written the foreword to the book. He praises M. M. Thomas as "one of the most illuminating Christian leaders of this century" enthusiastically recommends the book to all as it is authored by "a theologian whose vision is expanding towards the 21st century".

The book has eight chapters divided into three parts. The Part I is on 'a new awakening in modern India', having three chapters in it. The next two chapters are on the 'theological ethics of M. M. Thomas' and they constitute Part II. The last three chapters are in Part III and they deal with the theological ethical category, 'person-in-community'. Each chapter provides sufficient references and at the end of the book is available a select bibliography as well as an Index.

The thesis of the book is that M. M. Thomas has tried to develop a new concept of person-in-community within the frame-work of Christian faith which will be relevant to the new religious and theological consciousness developing in India (p.7). In his theological anthropology M. M. Thomas was influenced by several theologians and ethicists like Augustine, Martin Luther, Nicholas Berdyaev and Reinhold Niebuhr. He accepts Niebuhr's account of human beings as self-transcendent creatures, finite and at the same time unwilling to admit their finiteness. Humans represent the paradoxical situation of freedom and finiteness. They are anxious to overcome their finiteness and dependence on God and others and this fact serves as the internal

precondition of sin in human beings.-Human beings are standing at the juncture of both nature and spirit, in society and above society. Community is the foundation upon which the uniqueness of human person stands. There is the influence of socio-historical process upon the development of human personality (pp. 55-56, 129-30, 143). The claim of M. M. Thomas is, such an understanding of person-in-community, will give Indians a sense of history as well as dignity of human personality.

For M. M. Thomas history is where human beings work together with God and one another for the fulfillment of the divine purpose of Creation. We interpret the doctrines of Creation, Fall and Redemption in the light of his theological understanding of history. The Christian view of person-in-community is a working out of the implications of Creation, Fall and Redemption (pp. 61-74). In M. M. Thomas's theology the 'new anthropology' of the historical person of Jesus Christ is given as the principle of discrimination of Christ's presence in other religions and secular faiths (p.105). The vision of the cross judges and redeems all human ideologies. The cross of Jesus Christ breaks self-righteousness and places everyone standing in need of divine forgiveness. M. M. Thomas is for interpretation at cultural and religious levels, but with Jesus Christ as the principle of discrimination and coherence (pp. 105-115). He can even advocate a new form for the Christian church in India as a Christ-Centred Secular Fellowship (p. 184) with a spirituality for combat (pp. 188-91). The conclusion of T. Jacob Thomas on M. M. Thomas is : "Thomas's concept of person-in-community provides a viable Christian ethical philosophy in India. Because it takes into account the basic human predicament as well as the contemporary human situation, with a realistic view to transforming society in accordance with the New Humanity given in Christ" (p. 213).

There is no doubt that Dr. T. Jacob Thomas has succeeded in presenting clearly the thought of M. M. Thomas, relating it to the standpoint of many a Christian theologians. The book, hence, is going to help all the students of Indian Christian theology and ethics. But the doubt of the present reviewer is, how an extra Christian would receive the theological ethics of M. M. Thomas, if he/she is not able to receive the conception of person-in-community as conceived by Thomas, what would be the relevance of Thomas's thought ? The question in the context of religious-ideological pluralism is : Is there only one rigid way of understanding human person and his/her relation to God on the one hand and other humans on the other ? Secondly an equally important question in the context of Indian Christian hermeneutics is : Why cannot we understand the person and function of Jesus from within the Indian plural hermeneutical context rather than superimpose on Indians a foreign preformulated understanding of Christ ?

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**Mark ; A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross.  
Grand Repids : Wm B Eerdmans, 1993.**

*Robert H. Gundry*

Gundry's commentary on Mark could be treated as an epoch making book on Markan studies, for it reflects years of his painstaking scholarship. This book specially catches attention because of its thoroughness of treatment, including extensive interaction with other interpretations and detailed discussion on authorship, date etc. The book defends the Papiian tradition, rejects the view that Mark 13 reflects the Jewish War of 66—70 C.E. It also rejects the current popular ironic, polemic and other symbolic interpretations.

The central thesis of the book is that the Gospel of Mark constitutes a straight forward apology for the apparently shameful manner of Jesus' death. He argues that Mark is an evangelistic tract rather than an obliquely written handbook of christian discipleship and church life.

**Critical Evaluation**

The approach of the book at the very outset is that of knocking down the interpretations of others on Mark which tends the reader to assume that Gundry is taking a rather dogmatic and irrefutable stand in his understanding of the Gospel of Mark. Though his hypothesis that Mark "writes a straightforward apology for the cross, for the sameful way in which the object of christian faith and the subject of Christian proclamation died, and hence for Jesus as the crucified one", is acceptable without much serious refusal, his attempt of discarding other interpretations as "None of those" appears to make himself omniscient over others.

In his introduction he argues that the Gospel of Mark contains no ciphers, no hidden meaning, no sleight of hand, no messianic secret, no freezing of Jesuanic tradition, no christology of irony, no back-handed slap at Davidic messianism, no covert attack on divine-man christology, no pitting of the Son of Man against Son of God, Christ. The Gospel is not portraying any ecclesiastical enemies in the primitive church or any theological disputes over the demands and rewards of christian discipleship. It has no way symbolism for cross bearing, no bread symbolism for the Eucharist, no boat-symbolism for the church, no voyage symbolism for christian mission, no Galilee-symbolism for second coming or salvation, no Jerusalem symbolism for Judaistic christianity, no apocalyptic code cooling end expectation, no open end celebrating faith over verifiability, no over arching concentric structure providing a key to meaning at mid point. These negattons appear that Gundry is transcending all Markan scholarship towards a more perfect and undeniable conclusion which is an eternal truth for all times to come.

True to the New Literary critical methodological presupposition, Gundry sees the Markan meaning on the surface. At the same time he acknowledges that the readers of his book may get an impression

that "the thesis was imposed on Mark from the start"(p.2). But in actuality he says that the "thesis is evolved through multiple reading of Mark combined with reading of other primary literature and of secondary literature"(p.2). This is evident from the number of books in the bibliography that he cites at the very beginning of the commentary.

Gundry aptly identifies the Markan literary problem — the side by side presence of two disparate kinds of material : the first indicative of a theology of glory and the second a theology of suffering. The basic problem, according to him, is as to "how to fit together these apparently contradictory kinds of material in a way that makes sense of the book as a literary whole" (p.2). He disagrees with T. J. Weeden's hypothesis that there were two traditions in conflict and Mark was attempting to counter the *theologia gloria* with a *theologia crucis* (*Mark — Traditions of Conflict*, Philadelphia : Fortress, 1971.). According to Gundry such a theory does not contain historico-literary truth and he puts forward a series of evidences from the text towards this (p.3).

Gundry argues that Mark presents suffering not as a corrective to glory instead glory as a counter balance to suffering (p.3). Mark pits the success against the suffering and death. Even the passion predictions and passion narrative and the empty tomb as a cap of both cohere with the success-stories. The passion itself is a success story.

Methodologically Gundry achieves to find a unity of purpose within the Gospel. In other words he sees a literary wholeness of the Gospel of Mark. He finds that such a theological accomplishment of Mark agrees with the primitive christian kerygma in the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles. However the Markan problem of cognitive dissonance i.e. with in the christian audience whose christian experience in actual life situations seemed to contradict their cherished traditions about Jesus — a theory that Weeden and others uphold still holds ground even though we could accept Gundry's theory of Markan glory as a counter balance to suffering.

The identification of chs. 11, 12 as real confrontation stories is appropriate. With this, according to Gundry, Mark prepares the readers for the impending passion not as penalty deserved to Jesus, but the outcome of a backlash against his having defeated the opponents who were dangerous to society as well as to him. The miracles and exorcisms of Jesus in Mark are aptly used to substantiate his hypothesis. Jesus is adorned with magnetism, power, authority, clairvoyance, insight, foresight and predictive power. Here Gundry sees a parallel between Jesus (movement) with that of modern Pentecostals particularly their response to the scorn that they suffer from other establishments as sectarian, unsophisticated and insignificant. According to him, an understanding on the glory side of Jesus could spearhead a new positive attitude towards the modern Pentecostal charismatics who emphasize on crowds, miracles, exorcisms, clairvoyance, power over context of preaching, iconoclasm and predictive prophecy (p.24).

However his interpretation of Mark as the one glorifies passion and not passionizes the earlier glory must be viewed with utmost care. His



argument that a theology of glory pervades the Gospel of Mark and a theology of suffering does not pervade the Gospel (p.1024) is not true to the textual evidences in toto. Such an interpretative position indirectly supports the dangerous and unscriptural prosperity theology propagated by certain quarters. In fact Jesus' glory was in his *pathos* for it was a dynamic and liberative one.

The unity of the Gospel is not achieved solely by presenting the passion predictions and passion narratives as success stories (p.3), but rather by the technique of 'forwarding' and 'backwording' the power-*pathos* paradox. Here in this power-*pathos* paradox one could notice the narrative mode and theological claim of Mark. Just as the first half of the Gospel is not devoid of the *pathos* idea, so too the latter half of the Gospel is not devoid of the glory (power) idea. Through this power-*pathos* paradox and its 'backwording' and 'forwarding' literary technique Mark accomplishes a literary wholeness of the Gospel and his theological claim of power-*pathos* existential reality in christian life.

The massive bibliography used in this book and each note section after each passage and its exegesis make this book on an inevitable piece of literature for further Markan research.

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