

## Book-Review

*Jesudas Athyal, ed., Keeping Hope Alive: Theological Insights From the Past — For Today.*

Madras: The Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology and Church Administration, 1993.

This book contains six public lectures made by eminent theologians under the auspices of the Academy of Ecumenical Indian theology, founded in 1987. The subjects dealt with in this series of public lectures are varied like Christology, Ethics, Ecology, Inter-faith dialogue, and Peace with Justice. Contributors are V.C. Samuel, Ditrich Ritschl, Somen Das, Mathai Zachariah, Dayanandan Francis and Ofelia Ortega. This book has an introductory essay by Dr. Jesudas Athyal, the co-ordinator of the Academy and brief notes by Justice C.J.R. Paul, the Chancellor and Dr. K. Rajaratnam, the Pro-Chancellor of the Academy.

Various subjects are carefully selected and introduced with a view to create unity in the Church and deepen the sense of mission and broaden its scope. The unity envisioned include not only of Protestants and Catholics but also the Orthodox and the newly strengthening Pentecostal groups. The sense of mission these lectures want to promote has the goal of keeping the human hope alive in all the daily setbacks people experience, irrespective of their religion or culture (lectures by Chandran and Ortega). In the name of conversion the Church is not always doing good to the people or to the richness of larger human community. Mathai Zachariah in his lecture envisions a cosmic ecumenism, a spirituality that contains not only human beings or their home, earth, but the starry heavens, the cosmic environment. Two biographical theologies are attempted one explicitly by Dr. Somen Das on Toyohiko Kagawa, the Japanese Christian leader, whom Dr. Das considers to be the father of Asian Christian Theology and the other A.J. Appasamy by Dayanandan Francis. It is the life that is theology, and not simply the words written, is the message of Kagawa. Certainly Kagawa will always be a challenge to the moral (Cross) conscience of Christians in his living upto his words, as he has been the informer of "this moral conscience of a non-Christian nation probably more than any other of his countrymen in the twentieth century". Similarly Appasamy's life has a message so as his writings have. Appasamy has been the fore-runner of a dialogue theology which so far has not been taken seriously as such. His idea of dialogue was not aimed at conversion, not even a dispassionate knowledge sharing, but at a spiritual search, searching spiritual food in other religions. One may wonder how bold he has been in asking people to sit at the feet of Hindu guru

of spiritual power and learn; "they could teach us much". "Would it not be possible he asks, to arrange opportunities for common worship? In the atmosphere of reverent worship, many difficulties will disappear" (p. 123). What a challenge for Christians and Hindus and to all religionists not only with regard to be tolerant towards people of other faiths, not even of inviting them to "our" worship or participating in "their" worship but to come together in common worship. What a humble acknowledgment of the worth of the other spiritual traditions. Perhaps a world community, of which all are anxious to promote, will be realized only in such self-less reverence to others. This view of dialogue has "no desire to influence others to change their views, or to make them accept their own, for they know that the views of others are just as good as their own" (p. 127). And it is quite natural for this to say that "if Jesus blamed his contemporaries for not listening to the voice of Moses, with equal power and vehemence will he condemn us for not listening to Ramanuja, Manickavachakar, Tukaram, Kabir and Chaitanya who left behind them teachings of such undying value, pointing the way to Christ" (p. 125). His bhakti was not simply contemplation but a sort of advaitic action, as his ministry as Bishop was "full of activities relating to the social upliftment of the poor." Here is a Bishop to whom theologians should listen.

Now, the subtler points of difference between the Churches, that of the East and West, between the non-Chalcedonians and Chalcedonians are dealt by Rev. Dr. V.C. Samuel with an adept hand and his convictions are supported by Dr. Dietrich Ritschl. V.C. Samuel is an expert on Eastern Orthodox theology and history and he has clarified the theological convictions as well as misappropriation of view points which led to the controversies of the early centuries and the unfortunate division of the Church that followed. First thing that must be done in any reconciliation is repentance and seeking forgiveness for the omissions and commissions, both from God and other follow-beings. In the Church unity efforts that real confession has not yet been complete, and therefore forgiveness and reconciliation are still further away. Ecumenism is not possible by closing our eyes to differences, but only by acknowledging them and appreciating them. Samuel not only masterly handles the complex issues of the earlier controversies, but also inspires one that such researches on our past history will help the "Churches to reach understanding among them."

This book is a bold addition to our Indian Christian thinking.

Dr. T. Jacob Thomas  
Bishop's College, Calcutta (West Bengal)