

BOOK REVIEW

An Indian Jesus from Sankara's Thought

by K.P. Aleaz, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1996.

Christology is central to Christian theology. It is Christology, the study of the person and work of Christ, that makes theology Christian. Christ is one of the titles of Jesus, a title by which the Hellenistic Christianity appropriated the Jewish Christian vision of the Messiah, the Saviour. Indian Christians have every right to understand Jesus in their own way as the Jewish, Hellenistic or Western Christians have done. Understanding Jesus is understanding God. Reality is non-dual, advaita. Jesus represents both humans and God. Jesus belongs to the whole humanity. By understanding Jesus we understand both God and humans. Dr. Aleaz in this book attempts to understand the person and work of Christ from an advaitic stand point. He considers this work as the high point in his theological endeavours, "the thesis of my life", fulfilling the "purpose of my life". This is a completely Indian interpretation of Jesus in advaitic terms, original in every respect. It claims a place of its own among Indian Christian theological writings. It contributes to our ecumenical understanding of Christ, an originally Indian perspective, and enriches the content of it.

Even though the author provides an introduction to the development of Christology in the history of the Church that has not in any way made an impact on his own Jesulogy developed in this work. This introduction is intended only to show the legitimacy of developing an understanding of Jesus on the basis of one's own culture. If Jewish Christians can understand Jesus as Messiah/Christ, Hindu Christians can understand him as *Chit*, the consciousness of reality. It is unnatural and impossible for a Hindu to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah who came as the fulfillment of the Jewish prophecies. Knowledge cannot be externally produced and imported. Therefore attempts to adapt, indigenise, inculture or contextualise are epistemologically unsound. Jesus is relevant to a culture only when he is born in it, becomes a part of it. Christology becomes a *Chit-logy* for an advaitin. *Chitlogy* and Christology are only two possible understandings of the one Jesus who represents God and humans in his person. The author's attempt is to provide a Jesulogy through the "Jiva-Brahman relation of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta" which will serve as a framework within which any number of understandings of Jesus as Christ or Chit, Black or Dalit is possible. This Advaitic Jesulogy provides a larger framework than the Chalcedonian

formula which was much constrictive and divisive rather than open and unitive.

In ten chapters the author discusses the person of Jesus, the function of Jesus, and the implications of his Jesulogy. Without succumbing to the preposterous 'two-nature' doctrine on the divinity and humanity of Christ an Indian can very well rely on the advaitic categories such as upadhi (extrinsic denominator), *nāmarūpa* (name and form) and *kārya* (effect) to explain the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus. "The life of Jesus shows us that when name and form, existing latent in the Self (*ātmasthe anabivyakkte*), get manifested (*vyākriyete*) they manifest into all the states (*sarvavasthāsu*) by retaining their intrinsic nature as the Self (*ātmavarūpaparityāgenaiva*) and remaining indistinguishable from Brahman in time and space (*brahmanāpravibhaktadesākale*)" (Ch. II). "The constitution of the person of Jesus is the same as that of a human person. During his life with us in this world, his intellect, mind, senses and body functioned as extrinsic denominators (*upādhi*) to the Inner Self" (Ch. I). Jesus, the representative Jiva, is the effect of Brahman. The relation between Jesus and Brahman is *fādātmya* relation (non-reciprocal dependence). If Brahman is the cosmic space Jesus is the pot space (*mahākasāh* and *ghaṭākāsāh*). Jesus reveals Brahman as Pure Consciousness as well as the Witness of all, the Self of all. The function of Jesus is to reveal the pervasive illuminative and unifying power of the Supreme Self. It is this illumination, realization of God as one's own self, that brings real liberation to human beings. "The gospel of Jesus from India for the whole humanity is that liberation is an ever attained fact (*nityasiddhasvabhāvam*)." By liberation the author means not social liberation but individual's transcendence over all limitations.

True to his advaitic convictions Aleaz maintains that the gospel of Jesus is a renunciation of the lower self. Christianity has distorted the "religion of renunciation and realisation of potential divinity of Jesus into a secular dogmatic religion of the innate vileness of human nature and atoning sacrifice of Christ..." Dr. Aleaz is not sympathetic with people like Swami Akhilananda who consider Jesus as an *avafāra*, the descent of God, born without *karmas* and above *māyā*. The reason is that *avafāra* has no significance in Sankara's Advaita Vedānta. All humans are *avatars*, being reflections of Brahman. What makes Jesus distinctive is his "total sacrifice" for others and not claiming any uniqueness for himself. Aleaz is also not in favour of identifying Jesus with *Īśvara*. Sankara does not make any distinction between Brahman and *Īśvara*; Para Brahman and Paramesvara are interchangeable terms for him. To project *Īśvara* as a link between God and the world is based on a dualistic notion of reality. Aleaz also rejects the emphasis given to the

historicity of Jesus, what matters is the “eternal meaning behind the important historical fact”.

The author explicitly claims his “Jesology is an attempt to raise the question of the foundation of Christian thought outside the Western categories of ‘person’, ‘creation’, ‘world’, ‘action’ etc.” That alone is reason enough to take seriously this seminal work from a prodigious thinker of our time.

Dr. T. Jacob Thomas,
Bishop’s College, Calcutta.

Sharing God and A Sharing World

by Geevarghese mar Osthathiose, Delhi/Tiruvalla;
ISPCK/CSS, 1995, 156 pages.

This is a companion volume to the author’s earlier work entitled *Theology of a Classless Society*. The thesis of the book is that the Trinitarian God is a sharing God who inspires us to be a sharing community. A genuinely classless society can emerge only through such sharing inspired by the Blessed Trinity. The author expounds the Holy Trinity as the supreme paradigm of sharing and in that trinitarian sharing alone can we find the inspiration and the strength to grow into a community of sharing. The book attempts to point towards the ontological reality of love that eternally unites the plurality of theisms of all religions in the Tri-Unity of God. It claims to impart a new Missiology leading all religions from exclusive claims of Monotheism, Tritheism and Monism to an all-inclusive Trinity. The author has tried to present the paradigm of Trinity as the all-sufficient ultimate model of sharing love which the churches, religions and the world are invited to appropriate.

The book is a welcome change from the rigid orthodoxy we often notice in orthodox theologians who claim to be the custodians of Truth. Trinity is interpreted here in a novel way relating the doctrine to concrete human life in the world. That is the merit of the book and the good Metropolitan needs to be congratulated. If the patristic thought was interested only in affirming that the Father is both *agenetos* (unoriginate) and *agennetos* (unbegotten); the son is *agenetos* and *gennetos* (begotten); and the Holy Spirit is *agenetos*, but proceeds or comes forth (*ekporeuetai*) from the Father, here is an Orthodox theologian who affirms unequivocally that theology cannot be limited to just the two doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation, but it has to deal with the concrete problem of human sharing in the world. The doctrine of Trinity becomes meaningful only to the extent it gives an impetus for the redistribution of the resources of Creation.

Perhaps the doctrine of Trinity itself can get enriched further by receiving insights from the religious experiences of people of other faiths. This is an area where the standpoint of the book may have to be broadened. Perhaps the Metropolitan leaves this aspect of thought to his pupil to develop. Will they be able to do that?

Dr. K.P. Aleaz,
Bishop's College, Calcutta.

The Traditional Tribal World View and Modernity

by A. Wati Longchar, Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, 1995, pp. x+189.

In this work the author highlights differences between the traditional tribal worldview and modernity and shows that for the tribals of the North East India creation is the central point of reference for understanding all reality.

The book is presented in two parts. The first part begins by giving a brief introduction to the tribal people in the North East India and their religious faith. Then it gives a collection of myths under the title 'the Myth of Origin'. The myths presented here give us interesting insights of the ancient tribal people in this part of the world. From the literary point of view these myths presented here are 'aeteological saga' informing us as to why is the head of the owl flat, or why is the bird *Impang* so tiny or why do monkeys have fur and not human beings, etc. Through these myths the author shows how the animals have played their part in unfolding the mysteries of creation.

Under the myth of the creation of human, the myth speaks of theology and the evolution of human from vegetation (watermelon) or from a hole of the earth. The tribals have very strong faith in the presence of God in nature, 'the supreme being appears in everything tree, rock, flowers...(pp.27,39) (monism?) and that there is nothing on earth that has not been touched by Spirit/spirits. The Spirit/spirits inhabit every creation...(p.24) (Panpneumatism?). It is due to this faith the earth and other objects of the earth are honoured and respected as one would respect God. They have many totems and taboos which are ancient tribals ethics for the protection of animal and plant lives on earth. Through these religious beliefs the author has pointed out that the tribal world view is thoroughly eco-friendly. On the understanding of history the book shows that the tribal understanding of history is cyclic, which one may consider as expression of belief in determinism and predestination.

The second part of the book deals with merits and demerits of modern science and technology and the influence of British rule and christian

missionary on the tribal people in the North East India. The information presented here is well supported by illustrations and statistics. The book acknowledges that Christianity brought the sense of unity and identity to the tribals through the introduction of modern education to them. In conclusion the book claims that the creation centered world view of tribals will help all people in preserving ecological balance with honour and dignity.

The book is useful for the students of religion and people concerned with ecology.

Dr. T. Hembrom
Bishop's College, Calcutta.