

Book Review

I could not go to Church on Good Friday. A Confession of Faith by S.J. Samartha, Bangalore : Asian Trading Corporation, 2000, pp47.

Early in the year 2000 S.J. Samartha was struck by cancer of the bones and he had to undergo much pain. But the disease could not defeat him. This book bears witness to that fact. It reflects upon the story of Job and the crucifixion of Jesus. The basic question raised in it and answered from experience is : how can religious people sustain faith in a living God who in spite of God's power and grace, seems to allow pain and suffering? The question is regarding the credibility of faith which is at stake here.

According to Samartha, in the story of Job the most significant point is that the God who was silent when Job and his friends were arguing with each other, and when Job repeatedly pleaded with God to intervene, now suddenly breaks silence. The bear event of the thunderous voice speaking from the whirlwind is a testimony not just to God's power but also to God's love and mercy. This is a God who *cares* for individual in their pain and suffering. There are no conditions except that Job should listen to God's voice. Job is reminded of his "creatureliness" and his small place in the vast cosmic scheme of things meticulously arranged by God. At the end, the answer comes to Job in the vision of God. There is no solution to the mystery of pain and suffering expect the assurance of the presence of God "who cares" Job learns not so much to seek answers as to live with questions in the presence of God who was revealed God's self as both powerful and gracious. The vision of God itself is an answer to unjust or undeserved suffering.

Coming to the crucifixion of Jesus Samartha notes that if in the case of job, God's voice is heard at last from within the whirlwind, in the case of Jesus, at the last moment, there was not even a small breeze. There was only the silence of God. In the case of Job, overwhelmed by God's thunder he is humiliates and surrenders to God. In contrast, the crucified Jesus, even though he did not receive even the hint of an answer from God, calmly commends his spirit to the hands of a gracious and loving God. From the beginning till the end, Jesus was theocentric, that is God-centred. Simultaneously, he was a Person for others. The crucified Jesus, suffering intense pain, even in his dying moments, does not think of his needs, but that of others : his enemies who pushed him to the cross; the second thief who was assured of being in God's presence with him, and the concern for his mother who was assured of loving care by the beloved disciples.

The conclusion of Samantha is, internalising the suffering of the crucified Lord not within individual consciousness but also within the collective consciousness of the community

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at worship, nourishes the roots of our faith, illumines our minds, purifies our heart and strengthens our will to live the Christian life in the midst of suffering. Should we not be thankful to the God of S.J. Samartha who enabled him to suffer and in that very suffering confesses Christian faith meaningfully?

Reviewed by K.P. Aleaz,
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Book Review

S.J. Samartha, *I could not go to Church on Good Friday: A Confession of Faith*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2000, pp.47.

The issue of suffering, especially that of the suffering of the innocent and the inner meaning of suffering have always bothered philosophers and theologians alike. Very often observations on suffering have emanated from abstract reflections and a detachment from a real, personal experience of pain and agony. This is where *I could not go to church on Good Friday* stands apart. (p. 1) In the midst of personal experience of “excruciating pain” and “sleepless nights”, in what became the last days of his earthly pilgrimage, the author reflects on the meaning of suffering in solidarity with those whose experience is but only continuous suffering. He asks, “.. how can religious people sustain faith in a living God who, in spite of God’s power and grace, seems to allow such pain and suffering?” The answer for him does not lie in “.. the problem’ of suffering but the credibility of faith in a living God, gracious and merciful...”(p.3).

Based on the suffering of Job and the cross of Christ and in the light of one’s own personal experience, an attempt is made to interpret the mystery of pain, suffering and death that are an essential part of human existence. The reflections are divided into six short sections. In the first, Job and his wife are presented as partners and protagonists in their journey of faith. It is this togetherness in the journey of faith that made it all the more difficult to understand the humiliation and suffering. A dignified death is suggested as an escape by Job’s wife, which Job though refused to heed. In the second, the dialogue is between Job and his three friends: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar who came to visit Job upon hearing of his troubles. Despite their sensitivity and concern for the suffering friend, their eagerness to uphold the righteousness of God leaves them with no alternative but the conviction that the sinfulness of Job is the cause of his misery. Job’s wife protests the lack of sympathy and compassion on the part of his friends and stands by him in his “innocence and integrity”. The hymn to Wisdom in chapter 28 is provided as an alternative to understand the mysteries of pain, suffering and death, in the third section. “Piety and obedience” in “awe and reverence” before the divine Mystery is suggested as the way to comprehend the secret of Wisdom.

In the fourth section, Elihu, the younger theologian, is presented as angry with Job as well as the “senior” theologians. With Job for his self-justification, and with his friends, for their failure to find an adequate answer to Job’s suffering. Elihu detects the significance of suffering in its purifying and disciplinary effects. He shifts the focus from the accusation of Job’s friends and his own self defense, to the goodness of God, his faithfulness and justice.

Elihu insists that the only appropriate way to face suffering is to submit to the mysterious divine working. God who seemed indifferent all the while as Job endured his pain and agony suddenly seems to intervene on behalf of Job. But it is not with the answers that he has been seeking for as indicated in the fifth section, but with an “avalanche of questions”. In fact God’s questions are his answers, if only one is willing to listen. Job not only had a vision of God that reminded him of his “creatureliness”, but also the caring presence of God even in the midst of pain and suffering, thus drawing one to evermore deeper faith in his Creator.

In the last section of the book, the author who could not attend the Good Friday worship service owing to his illness sent Job’s wife to the Church of which he and his family were active members. The specially prepared worship service with prayers, hymns, silence and meditation interspersed with brief reflections on the seven words of the cross. The reflections bring to light in a profound way the mystery of the suffering of Jesus on the cross. His solidarity with human suffering is evident in his caring concern for others even in the midst of his personal afflictions. It is by participation in the suffering of the crucified Christ that the Church is called to fulfil her vocation. Unlike to Job, God’s response to the suffering of Jesus was total silence. Yet contrary to Job, Jesus remained “a man for others” to the very end and calmly surrendered his spirit in the hands of the loving God. It is this internalisation of the suffering of Christ that enables one live the Christian life in the midst of suffering.

Despite being short, the book is rich in its reflection on the mystery of suffering as it emanates from one’s personal struggle to come to terms with the mystery of suffering. An unwavering commitment to Christian faith that is deeply rooted in the Scripture texts and one’s own cultural tradition makes it theologically grounded and contextually relevant. The book will remain as a parting gift, from one of the outstanding theologians of international repute that India has produced in recent times, in our struggle to come to grips with the mystery of suffering.

Reviewed by Dr. V. J. John
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Book Review

The Bible on Culture. Belonging or Dissenting? By Lucien Legrand, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001, pp. XVII + 190

The approach of the present study is to keep free from too narrow a focus on 'inculturation' and rather to take into account the various forms of interrelationship that can exist between the biblical message and the surrounding cultures. As much as possible Legrand has tried to allow the biblical history to speak for itself and tell us of the different ways in which the people of the Bible adjusted and reacted to their surroundings, in the light of their faith, in various ways, at different times and in diverse setting and circumstances. Ofcourse, from the entire Biblical field he can only propose sounding which are sufficiently representative. For the Old Testament, he examines the times of beginnings of Israel in Canaan, the royal period, and the important encounter with Hellensim in the last centuries B.C.E. For the New Testament the cultural world of Jesus is studied, which considers the Jewishness of Jesus and subcultures and counterculture of his time. Also, *Paul and Beyond* is another area taken up which reviews the world of Paul and his successors and the unique cross-cultural interactions evidenced in their writings. The book finds the biblical position between faith and culture as one of bipolar tension, between belongs and dissenting, between incarnated openness and prophetic challenge. The word 'inculturation' falls short of expressing this complexity.

Legrand shows that Canaan stands, on the one hand, for what Israel rejected, but, on the other hand, for the milieu that nurtured its growth. The Israelites shared with the Canaanites the basic realities of and Leagrاند. Canaan has no code of laws. The code of Israel show more distant Mesopotamian and Hittite influences. This reflects a sense of kinship with societies that were groping for a legal protection of human rights against the royal absolutism of the Canaanite or Egyptian type. But at the same time there was difference between the Mesopotamian laws and those of Israel; if in the former there was a preponderance of laws dealing wit property, the latter gave importance to laws dealing with persons.

It is the author's view that the most official layers of Yahwistic religion imbibed Canaanite influence. Hebrew calendar integrated agricultural elements. Temples were built according to the pattern of the Canaanite sacturies. Canaanite sacifies were not materially different from those which were offered to Yahweh. Under different dialectal differences "El is found all over the semetic world as the name of the supreme Father and Creator, eternal and merciful. By making use of this name, Israel shared in the fundamental religious experience of the Semetic world. Yahweh-Elohim was the expression of the synthesis between the liberative perception of God and the Semitic religious sensitivity. But at the same time Israel fought against the surrounding established culture of polytheism and idolatry.

The two opposite polar trends of rejection and integration are typified by the two Israelite institutions of kingship and prophetism. Kings in general represented the accommodation to the administrative necessities and to the set patterns of political life in Western Asia. This accommodation carried with it the temptation of assimilation. Therefore it was the task of the prophets to denounce the danger of losing the Yahwist, identity and to voice the protest against abusive royal despotism. On the whole the royal and prophetic figures confronting, each other in the history of Israel represent the opposite tendencies of political ascentation and countercultural protest. This is the view expressed in the book under review.

Wisdom literature is a privileged locus of cultural encounter. All the introduction to the Bible list a number of parallels to Hebrew wisdom found particularly in Egypt and Mesopotamia. According to Legrand similarities themselves can be accounted for in many ways. There can be historical interdependence, cultural interaction, and emergence from a common cultural milieu. Affinities can also simply derive from the universal bewilderment of humanity facing the basic enigmas of earthly existence. The obvious openness of Hebrew wisdom to the surrounding world arises from different attitudes such as deliberate *acculturation* (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon), by way of *osmosis* through symbiosis than of intended interaction (book of Qoheleth). When the interaction takes place unconsciously, it may come close to assimilation (eg. Proverbs). But when acculturation is an intentional process, the limits of the sharing are clearly defined and vigorously expressed.

Jesus was a Jew. His life, action, thought, language and teaching were totally rooted in Jewish culture. He belonged to it. This fundamental belonging goes far beyond the categories of inculturation or acculturation or contextualisation, as there was no artificial effort of insertion in the case of Jesus. But at the same time he stood often on the fringe of Israelite mainstreams. He was a Galilean rather than Judeo, a villager rather than a member of the elite of the religious (Jerusalem), administrative (Sepphoris), or economic (Tiberias, Tarichaea) when centers, an artisanfarmer rather than a priest, a scribe, or a political leader. If he identified at all with one of the social groups and its subculture, it was with the 'poor of the land'. He shared in their life, spoke their language, felt at home with their wisdom, and used their metaphors. In that sense, he is no 'marginal Jew' since the 'poor of the land' constituted the bulk of the population of Palestine. But the distinctiveness of Jesus manifested in his radical commitment to God and to the coming of God's rule. Like the Zealots or the Qumranites he cannot be pictured as representing an 'anticulture' or a 'counter culture'. Jesus did not identify with any of the opposition groups. Rather Legrand shows that his was an attitude of integral freedom.

The Paul was both a Jew and a Greek is demonstrated in the book in detail. The various elements of Paul's intercultural background interacted together. In the simplest case, one of the cultural components would predominate over the other. Sometimes they complemented or corrected each other. Other times they worked together in synergy to corroborate each other. In still other cases his thinking and language drifted from one cultural field to the other. His in a case of spontaneous cross-fertilization of cultures and of their spiritual values. True, his apocalyptic outlook led him to attitudes of confrontation, at least ideologically. However, in praxis, he belonged to the world he denounced. His language, rhetoric, and thought patterns borrowed abundantly from the surrounding Mediterranean culture. Launched by Paul, the process of cultural interrelation was to be further pursued in the apostolic and

Jumbulingham produced by the C.S.I. diocese of Tirunelveli. While looking positively at the video ministry of the diocese, the study also proposes certain strategies and policies for the diocese and the churches in other places. A number of models of Christian communication that are relevant to the practice of video ministry in India are proposed. The author points out that the two video films did not reflect and address the social issues that the people of other faiths face in their everyday reality. They did not use the cultural forms that the people of other faiths share among themselves. They only attempted to pass on the gospel as a single package of information. In order to bring about a change in the churches' perspective the author has also made an attempt to bring together J.W. Carey's ritual view, Paulo Freire's pedagogical principals and S. Kierkegaard's concept of indirect communication. They in line with Jesus uphold participatory or interactive mode of communication.

Jesus himself is a theological basis for an interactive approach to Christian communication. Theologically communication is understood as a process in which the communicator and the audience share, participate and interact. Theological basis of such a perspective sees God as a participant in the human communication process regardless of its limitations and demands. This book thus becomes an attempt to hold a dialogue between theology and communication. It is the vision of the author that such a dialogue has to continue vigorously in the training of theologians in India. Relevant strategies and policies for this may have to be adopted by the theological institutions in India. In this way theological training might contribute to the wider interaction between churches and the Indian audience and thus help to further the mission of the church. A useful book on Christian communication for all students of theology from a budding communication expert-cum-theologian.

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Book Review

Religions in Christian Theology by K.P. Aleaz, Lolkata : Punthi Pustak, 2001, pages 363.

The role of other religions in Asian/Indian Christian Theology is an issue that concerns not only Theologians but all Christians enormously today. Here is presented a collection of papers with the contention that Christians will have to evolve a more comprehensive role for other religions in Christian Theology than what has been envisaged in the past. To reduce the role of religions to liberational praxis is a reductionism. To reduce the interpretation of religions solely in terms of Folktales again would be a reductionism. Of course our focus should be the people, as has been emphasized by some of the Asian theologians; but people centered on a comprehensive religious life of the people of other faiths is related to the gospel of God in Jesus is the basic question to be answered in the third millennium. The book makes a preliminary attempt to raise this question, if not provide an answer, in terms of supplying some highlights on religions in Part I as well as discussing a possible relation between religions and Christian Theology in Part II. The view expressed is that all the religious resources of the world are the common property of the whole humanity, a relational convergence of religious experiences can grow by mutual giving and receiving.

The first part of the book has six chapters. The first chapter is on Advaita relation. As per Sankara's Advaita Vedanta the Atman as Pure Consciousness and Witness pervades, illumines and unifies the whole world, the whole of history and the entire human personality, giving significance to world and history as well as meaning and purpose to human life on earth. The second chapter discussed the theology of religions of the Hindu reformer Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1928). The Guru's 'One Religion' was centered on the Non-dual Supreme Reality, Brahman-Atman and he upheld Pluralism in theology of religions. The Third chapter indicates a few aspects of the religious renaissance in the 19th c. India. The focus is on the Brahmo Samaj and the Prathana Samaj which were open to other religious experiences as well as social reform. Chapter Four gives some highlights on select dynamic features of Religion. Sjadvada of Jainism is presented as an ancient Indian theory of Pluralism for harmony. Bhakti or total love and devotion to God is another important feature of religion studied. Manilal C. Parekh (1885-1967), the Lingayats, Carvaka philosophy and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter V takes up some religious concepts for interpretation such as Sakti, Atman, Image and it also discusses the human predicament. Methodological issues in the study of religions is the focus of the sixth chapter. Historical, Phenomological and Comparative approaches to the study of religion are taken up for analysis. Also discussed is an Indian perspective in the study of religions including Primal Religions.

The Second part of the book begins with a study on the role of Asian Religions in Asian Christian theology. It is the author's view that the out come of the study of religions in terms of an integral approach may have to be integrated in Christian Theology in terms of a perspective in theology of religions called Pluralistic Inclusionism in order to arrive at a more comprehensive role for other religions in Christian theology. Chapter VIII examines some Indian reflections on Gospel and culture. The Gospel is always available along with a particular cultural embodiment alone. The chapter demonstrates that the gospel of God in Jesus emerging from the Indian religious culture or rather the Indian hermeneutical context in reality goes beyond the scope of the previous Christian theological endeavours such as indigenisation or inculturation. The contributions of Advaita Vedanta to Indian Christian theology are examined in the IX th chapter. Theological who are positive in their approach to Advaita are studied under the reception model of Pluralistic Inclusionism. Another group is put under the Reinterpretation Model of Inclusionism. Yet another group is studied under the Rejection Model of Exclusionism. Some Indian theological and missiological insights are provided in chapter X. It supplies some highlights on Indian Christian theological developments in the 20th c. Indigenization which has a theological basis in the doctrines of creation and incarnation, is also studied. The last two sections of the chapter are on an Indian perspective on Mission and Missiology. There is a growth envisaged from Christian mission to the one mission of the one God. Chapter XI is an evaluation of the gospel as interpreted by Lesslie Newbigin. The gospel of God in Jesus, can evolve into something which is not the gospel through the hands of a conservation missionary theologian and the thought of Newbigin is a typical example of such an evolution. Globalisation and the gospel is the topic of discussion of the final chapter. It has been pointed out that if Globalisation along with economic growth achieves globalisation of poverty, the globalised gospel is a poverty-stricken gospel as it perverts the gospel of God in Jesus for the whole humanity into a sectarian expression of it. The book is a welcome addition to creative Christian theology in terms of extra-Christian religious resources.

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Book Review

What is the God-factor? Sermons and Writings of Frank Collison, comp. And ed. Frederick S. Downs & Eric J. Lott, Delhi: ISPCCK, 1999, pp.xii+97, Rs. 65.00

The book primarily is a representative selection of sermons preached by the late Rev. Dr. J. G. Frank collision at different occasions compiled and edited by Fredrick S. Downs and Eric J. Lott, his Colleagues on the faculty of the United Theological College, Bangalore. Along with eight of his sermons the book carries a reprint of his article on "Issues I the History of Biblical hermeneutics: A Protestant Perspective" Originally appeared in a special issue on "Biblical Hermeneutics" in *The Indian Journal of Theology*.

The sermons are a tribute to the great skill of Collision in the craft of biblical preaching. They also betray his great insights into the depth of the scriptural texts of which he himself was a student and a teacher. The challenging relevance of the ancient text comes alive in a refreshing way as Collision struggles with them from his contemporary context without ever loosing sight of the historical context from which the texts emerged. In his "Frank as Preacher", Eric J. Lott lists seven reasons for considering Frank's preaching as important. In fact, they should characterize any good preaching. Firstly, any authentic preaching is biblically grounded with a "fine textual analysis". Secondly, it is Christ-centered, focusing on what Jesus said and did. Thirdly, the relevance of the message should emerge from the faith involvement of the preacher in the actual life situations. In another words, there is a dialogue between the text and the context of the preacher that should lead to a pastoral, radical and lived engagement. Fourthly, there is a freshness of perspective. Fifthly, the clarity of language is important since sermons are "very clear expressions of faith". Sixthly, sermons should reflect honesty and frankness on the part of the preacher with a spiritual vision and ruthless integrity. Finally, selection of themes should reflect newness and relevance that should emphasize the need for a new way of relationships and engagement in life's struggles.

The first sermon entitled 'Rethinking Relationships' is a challenge to take a fresh look at our relationships in a given situation on the basis of our relationships in Christ. It is based on Paul's exhortation to Philemon to receive his slave, Onesimus no more as a slave, but 'as a dear brother.... Both as man and Christian'. He challenges us to rethink our relationships in the light of the brotherhood of all humankind arising out of the great fatherhood of God; the equal nakedness of all humanity before God; our claim to be servants of the Servant-God." (p.20) The second sermon, 'Go, and Make Disciples' is based on 'The Great Commission' in Matthew 28:19. Here the emphasis is placed on *make disciples of all nations*. Making disciples involves being a follower of Jesus, which in turn would entail doing what

Jesus, did. These include casting out demons, “the demon that controls our relationships, that dominate our life structures and are the cause of so much oppression and injustice in our community life, even in our global life” (p.24). Healing the sick, that is “of healing relationships that have broken, relationship that are sick, where there should be healthy vital relationships” and “working towards the provisions of adequate medical facilities for all sections of community, and at costs they can afford, in places accessible to them.” (pp.25,26). To proclaim the kingdom of God is to preach repentance in acknowledging that “life must be lived under the loving authority of God” and that “God relates to all humankind”. (p.26)

The third sermon has to do with ‘the God-factor’. Having asked a question regarding the content and form of God’s involvement in this world and therefore the extent, nature and form of our own involvement. He proceeds to answer it on the basis of three selected texts; the story of Peter and John in the ACTS of the Apostles, Jesus’ command to ‘Put your sword back in its place (Mat. 25:51), and from the parable of the sheep and the goats. The apostles witness to God was that he is the agent of liberation, while humans are only witnesses and participants (p. 29, 30). ‘Put your sword back into its place’ has to do with the ‘exercise of power’ wherein one seeks the good of others than that of one’s own (p. 33). The rewarding of people’s micro-actions in the parable of the sheep and the goats, stresses the need for initiating action at the micro-action at the micro-level following the model of incarnation. (p. 35). In our involvement in the world the God-factor is to be taken seriously. The stress in the fourth sermon is on ‘The Struggle against Evil’. We are called to struggle against the forces of evil that hold under its hostage our lives, our relationships and our societies. (p.38) The evil is made manifest in the oppressive socio-economic structures such as that of the caste system, dowry system that give birth to evil that originates from within. Therefore, “The fight against evil is a fight to transform a human situation”(p.41) made possible only through the divine power of the cross.

‘Can Life Be Changed?’ is the title of the fifth sermon. Certain things and experiences in life appear to be unchangeable such as the colour of the Ethiopian’s skin or the leopard’s spots. Yet transformations in life seem to be repeatedly stressed in the Scripture. In Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones, despite the devastation of death and destruction, the prophet sees a coming alive of the dead bones, of course as a result of the divine recreation. Similarly in the story of the resurrection of Lazarus, new life is brought about in a dead corpse. Faith thus affirms the possibility of new life here and now for humans, society and creation as a divine gift. That, however, does not excuse us of our responsibilities to work towards changes in personal, social and biological spheres. In fact, the experience of this new creation is to be encountered “within ourselves, within our humanness” through our hard struggle on the basis of faith. (p.47) The sixth sermon titled “Transfiguring Agony” is based on the text of the transfiguration of Jesus. The ministry of Jesus among the lower orders of society in Galilee has led to his rising popularity among them leading to upset the traditional ways of life and religious practices. (p.49). Yet, he travels to Judea and Jerusalem, the stronghold of orthodox Judaism, in order to fulfil the divine will. In the deep inner struggle that preceded his decision, Jesus went up the mountain for a moment of quietness. At this moment of agony regarding the suffering that he was soon to undergo that the glory was revealed. The moment of vision and the voice of assurance were confirmation to Jesus that he was indeed

on God's way. This however in no wise should lead one to sanctify all kinds of suffering, especially those resulting from injustice, oppression, exploitation and selfish human actions. Rather one should realize "The agony and doubt of anticipated suffering in doing God's will is yet a moment of self-assurance and transfiguration." (p. 53).

The last two messages were preached on Good Friday at two different occasions. The former asks the question "Why did Jesus Die?" and attempts an answer. The Roman authority condemned him as a political prisoner although the Gospels lack any evidence towards the accusation. Neither was there any religious crime on the part of Jesus that would make him worthy of death penalty. Rather it was his challenge to the existing religious, social or political traditions and structures in the light of the arrival of the new age. He called for "a re-ordering of their priorities in personal piety, in their religious institutions, in their pattern of life". (p. 59) This has ultimately led him to the cross. Thus challenging us with the question "Are we willing to risk the personal and societal upheaval that goes with listening to God?" (p. 60) The latter entitled "Cross Road" is a message based on Philippians 3:10. It appeared, cross was the end of the road for Jesus as well as his disciples. Perhaps, more than the pain and agony associated with crucifixion, 'the anguish and sense of desolation' arose from his inability to comprehend his fate. "The end of the road was in sight with all the possibilities, all the potentialities of his life still unexplored, his hopes still unrealized." (p. 62) The kind of life Jesus lived by his "risk-laden attitude to people" and "critical response to the structure of his time". (p.62) Ultimately did him in. To live as Jesus lived would be "To meet human need as it arises; to accord to all people the dignity due to them as human beings; to side with and be identified with the oppressed". (p. 66) And "to pattern our living on the death of Jesus, with my nature, myself, transformed to die as he died". (p. 67)

The book very fittingly closes with the author's article on Biblical hermeneutics that succinctly highlights the relevant issues in the history of Biblical Hermeneutics from a Protestant Perspective. It begins with the Jewish hermeneutics methods of Talmud and Midrash and follows it up with the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament in Christological terms, prophecy-fulfillment motif and Jesus as the end of the law. The Patristic period treated with its Christo-centric typological hermeneutics, the role of the tradition, and the multiplicity of the meaning of Scripture in the allegorical, historical and literal sense. The prominence of tradition, primacy of literary sense with a secondary allegorical sense and the supreme authority of Scriptures are the focus of the Middle Ages. The Period of Reformation saw the debate over the place of tradition in the interpretation of Scripture with the concept of *Sola Scriptura* gaining importance. Luther stressed an interpretation comparing Scripture with historical and Christological hermeneutical principles as well as a personal reading and experience of the Bible. The doctrine of Justification served as an important hermeneutical key. Calvin, who in large measure agreed with Luther, propounded a mechanistic theory of inspiration of Scripture and the importance of covenant as an important key. Many private interpretations of Scripture also followed.

The Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries saw the rise of Protestant scholasticism and Pietism as a reaction to the multiplicity of private interpretations. With the rise of rationalism interpretation of Scripture was attempted as a matter of reason. The authority of revelation and miracles were questioned leading to attempts to fuse together rationalism and

subjectivism of Romanticism in biblical interpretation. This in turn contributed towards the rise of the Higher Criticism with its emphasis on the historical investigation of Scripture with the study of language, grammar, sources, and contemporary religions. Historical investigations of the Gospels, theological approach to the Bible, and the existential approach were the results. The Modern Period with its stress on "The New Hermeneutic" laid emphasis on language and understanding and the role of structure. Many of the third world hermeneuts, however, were engaged in the role of ideology and pragmatic concerns in the hermeneutical task.

What is the God-factor? Serves as a model for sermon preparation and preaching on the hands of an outstanding New Testament scholar who was only committed to the serious study of the Scripture but also its meaning and relevance in ones living context. Anyone who is interested in preaching biblically will find the book a valuable resource. The book carries a tribute to the author by the late Rev. Dr. J. Russell Chandran and a foreword by Rev. Dr. Gnana Robinson, and is introduced by Frederick S. Downs. The Indian Christian community stands indebted to the compilers and editors for making available to the Church in India the Sermons and Writings of Frank Collision which otherwise would not have been accessible to us. Included also in the book is a portrait of the late Rev. Dr. J. G. Frank Collision.

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Book Review

Yisu Das: Witness of A convert. By Ravi Tiwari. Delhi: ISPCK (1654, Madarsa Road, Kashmere Gate, Delhi 110 006). 2000. Pp.xvi-280. Rs. 125, \$12, £9, ISBN: 81-7214-513-6.

This book provides us with a splendid record of Yisu Das Tiwari's life, thought, conversion and vision. The record consists of Tiwari's own writings: personal memories and tributes from friends, colleagues and students; and a biographical section, with final substantial contribution on his father's theology and witness, from his son Dr. Ravi Tiwari.

Almost forty years ago, CISRS held a conference of converts from Hinduism, at which Yisu Das Tiwari's paper, which forms Chapter 1 of this present book, was delivered. M.M. Thomas, about that time, urged Christian theologians to get a good grounding both in history of early Christian thought and, also; at the same time, in Indian metaphysics: he said that it was that background that would help the further development of a theology of spirituality. In this book we learn more about one particular participant in the conference, later to be known as the Reverend Yisu Das Tiwari, who had been brought up and nurtured in the scriptural and philosophical terminologies of Indian classical religious heritage, as well as having had an experience of conversion linked initially and closely with someone's quoting of words from the Gospel of John.

Ravi Tiwari's comments include some references to the relationship between classical terminologies just referred to and praxis-oriented theologies. The issue of old and new contexts for the interpretation of scriptures and for theology is clearly given recognition in the book. It is an issue which many of us would say emerges clearly now a days in relation to the Gospel of John just mentioned; since its chapters 5 to 8 give us words of challenge and a call to action, and its chapters 14 to 17 give us quieter and more contemplative words about personal mystical fellowship. Obviously Yisu Das' personal and philosophical mysticism leads us deeper especially into the latter, more contemplative aspect.

Well over fifty pages of this book deal directly with the Gospel of John, especially the Prologue, the Farewell Discourses and with detailed commentary on John 14:1-19. Ravi Tiwari's comments on the commentary help to unpack the meaning of some especially condensed sentences in the commentary.

There is space only to dwell on two points in any detail. One in Tiwari's distinctive material on *Shahda/Vachana*, the words used by him for 'Logos' in his biblical translation work. He defines the biblical concept of Word as 'revelatory word'. In comments, Jesus is given the title, *Shahdeshwara* of *Shabda-Brahman*. Since the concept of divine Word seems to find a prominent place in so many faiths (Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity), Tiwari's

focus on it may surely be of particular significance for the future. It is true that the early Christian Irenaeus said that we should not focus too selectively on the one title “Logos”. And, more recently, thinkers outside the Christian tradition or within it (such as John Arapura) have wanted to go behind or deeper down than Word to Symbol and contemplative Silence: Tiwari himself having material on symbolism. But such thinkers, not least Dr. Arapura, have also emphasized the central place of Word in Indian religious traditions and in the history of religions generally.

The second point, also Johannine, concerns Tiwari’s simple but profound comment on the much-discussed verse John 14:6 “None comes to the Father but by me”. He writes; ‘some people may see the communal narrowness of John in this phrase, “but me”. One may have to go back, for the answer, to the first fifteen verses of the introduction (to the Gospel) where Word-God (Shabdeshwara) is described: the “Word was God”, “all things were made by him”, “in him was life”. “Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”.’

But the book, as the subtitle shows, puts a big emphasis on Yisu Das Tiwari’s witness, his vision, conversion, way of life, religious experience, as well as on his thought and reflection. His own modest statement that he did not pretend to be a theologian is well discussed: it is a statement that Ravi Tiwari responds to with some good words of his own. ‘The term “theology” perhaps is a misnomer-term when applied in the context of a convert.’ He calls it ‘a theology of the Way’, that underlay his father’s life and thought.

This brings out clearly what Yisu Das saw to be some of the main perplexities and difficulties experienced in his own journey and life, as a convert, and in the lives of others of a similar background making a similar journey. He mentions John 14:1 as a biblical verse that proves difficult for many: the words of Jesus: ‘believe in God; believe also in me’. He writes that the objection is raised: “Why ‘also in me’? Is belief in God not sufficient?” And he follows with a ten-line response. Also touched on are the perplexities felt by those who have been accustomed to and waned to call Jesus *Guru*, but have hesitated to go on to call him *Prabhu*.

However, this is a book not only for those coming from Tiwari’s own background, *unbringing and nurture*, but also for the rest of us. It is a book that demands a willingness to cross frontiers of different language and cultures in the reading and in one’s mind; but it has impact, and points us towards a freshness of vision, faith, understanding and spiritual experience.

Reviewed by Cecil Hargreaves

Report of the 39th NITS Conference 2000

1. Opening Remark

We, the participants of the North India Theology Students conference of 2000, were very grateful to the Aizawl Theological College (ATC) for the hosting the 39th NITS Conference and for enabling us to meet again this year to discuss the very vital issue concerning the church and its mission in the context of the tribals in India, under the theme “Church Mission and Tribal Awakening”. We are grateful to God for enabling us to meet, to interact, and ponder on the prescribed issue, to establish the kingdom of God in the (the whole inhabited world)

2. Attendance

The Conference was scheduled from 25th 28th Oct 2000. Although ATC hosted the conference, for reasons of convenience the conference was held at the synod conference center in Aizawl itself. Invitation was sent to nineteen theological institutes but only seventeen participated in the conference. Each Institute was represented by a staff guide and three students. Most of the delegates from colleges arrived on the eve on 24th Oct and registration then followed.

3. The Programme

3.1 Tuesday, the 24th Oct 2000

There was a meeting held in the evening of this day exclusively for those members who represented the “39 NITS Conference held at the Gossner Theological College, Ranchi. Due to the absence of the elected President Mr. Timothy, Miss L Evangeline Odyuo of Serampore College (the runner up) was elected as the President of the 2000 NITS conference. Mr. John F. Lalhmingliana of ATC, the host college was the general secretary of the conference.

Later the meeting was concerned with all the delegates led by the President and assisted by the General Secretary. All the different committees were elected.

3.2. Wednesday, the 25th Oct. First day of the conference

The inaugural service was held at the conference hall, Aizawl Theological College. The meeting was presided over by the Vice-Principal, Rev. Dr. Roger Gakwad. He warmly welcomed all the delegates of the conference with a word ‘Chibai’ (welcome). He reflected on Abraham as a tribal and Jesus also a tribal. Rev. Dr. Vanlalava, the Principal of the college gave the keynote address. The President of the NITSC also welcomed all the NITS delegates. The General Secretary also gave the report of the 1999 NITSC, which was held at Gossner Theological College, Ranchi. Tea and snacks were served after the meeting. All the delegates were then taken back to the synod conference center which was about a 45 minutes ride.

The first session then started at 2:30 p.m. when the Oriens Theological College, Shillong presented “Role of Tribal Christians in Indian Nation”. The paper highlighted the present status of the tribals in India and focused on the historical events as models to the existing socio-cultural heritage of India. Life in praxis was also one of the thought-provoking statements that the paper stressed, which awakened Christians from their state of lethargy and complacency. The Serampore College and Clark Theological College responded to this paper.

3.3 Thursday, the 26th Oct. The second day:

The Gossner Theological College, Ranchi presented the “Chotanagpur Setting” highlighting the historical backgrounds socio-cultural, political and economical status of the people (tribals) and also of the present social evils that prevail in the area, such as suppression, exploitation of the tribals by the government, and also by the non-tribals. The paper brought out the awareness of the ongoing demands of the tribals for a separate state. The paper also posed a challenge to the church of what is the mission and role in such a context, Morning Star College of Barrackpur and Khriish Premalaya of M.P. responded to the paper.

The second session started at 2.30 p.m. and Eastern Theological College presented a paper on “North East Indian Setting” discussing about the socio - cultural, political and economic conditions of the North Eastern states, especially the threats of the invasion through the air waves and by the non-tribals, which affect and disintegrate the entire fabric of cultural and traditional values of the tribals.

The paper expressed concern for theological degradation, which further puts a challenge to the role of the church in such a context, and suggested that the church of NEI should play her prophetic role. Sacred Heart Theological College of Shilling and Leonard Theological College, Jabalpur responded to the paper.

3.4 Friday, the 27th Oct. The third day

At 8:45 a.m. Trinity Theological College presented an “Assessment of the Emerging Tribal Theology”. The paper focused on the social, economic, historical, cultural and political context of the tribals in India and also brought about some of the theology today. The paper was responded by the Khristo Mohavidyaloya, Orissa and Samaanvaya Theological College, Bhopal. The second session started at 2.30 p.m. with a paper presented as a case study of the Dangs district of Gujarat describing in detail the background and the incident of violence against the tribal Christians of Dec. 1998 and Jan 1999. Bishop’s College of Kolkota responded to the paper.

4. Group Discussion

At the end of very paper presentation five groups of both lecturers and students met together to reflect on question posed by the paper. Suggestions were then reported to the recording secretaries for necessary information and documentation.

5. Boarding and Lodging

Breakfast at 8:00 p.m., Lunch at 1:00 p.m., Tea at 3.45 p.m. and dinner at 7:00 P.M. were provided by a team of ATC hosts. We are very much thankful to them and we appreciate their hard work. On 27th Oct, the teaching staff of ATC attended the evening vesper and also joined the dinner with all the delegates of the conference. All the delegates were lodged at the Mission Presbyterian Synod Conference Center.

6. Devotions

Devotion were led by the difference participating colleges in the morning on 35 by Khrish premalaya, on 26 by Eastern Theological College, on 27 by Trinity Theological College, on 28 by Thomas Jones School of Mission and Evangelism and in the evening on 25 by Leonard Theological College, on 26 Bishop's College and on 27 by John Roberts Theological Seminary.

7. Photo-Session

Photo-session was delayed due to the absence of some delegates from expected college and was done on the 26th Oct at 2:00 p.m. on the arrival of all the delegates.

8. Cultural Programmes

We had two cultural programmes. One on the eve of 25th Oct right after dinner and the other on the following evening the 26th Oct. at 8:00. The Mission Vengthlang Cultural group presented their special items. In this cultural program various delegates and the participating colleges presented their different items.

9. Closing Remarks

The 39th NITSC has come to a successful end. The next conference will be held at Vidyajyoti College of Theology, Delhi. With the theme "The Indian Church in the crossfire of Communalism". Mr. Bantailang M. Pdah from John Roberts Theological Seminary from Shillong was elected as the President.

The NITSC body as a whole conveys a very sincere and hearty gratitude to the host college.

Last but not the least, we would not forget the Almighty God for His care and guidance throughout the conference making it a successful event and meaningful to each and every individual who had the privilege of attending this memorable 39th conference at Aizawl.

Serampore College
Serampore - 712 201
Date : 15.11.2000

Ms. Evangeline Odyuo
President,
NITS Conference, 2000.