

## Book Reviews

**Women Resisting Violence : *Spirituality for Life* :** M. J. Mananzan, M. A. Oduyoye, E. Tamez, J. S. Clarkson, M. C. Grey, L. M. Russel (Eds), Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N. Y. 10545; 1996; pp. viii + 184; U. S. \$ 16.

The book under Review is a collection of 15 articles, papers read at a conference of 45 women - theologians at San Jose, Costa Rica, in December 1994 around the theme: *Spirituality for Life : Women Struggling against violence*. Divided into 4 sections, the first part which contains 3 articles deals with Cultural and Economic Violence. The second part with 4 articles treats of Domestic and Physical Violence. The third part contains 4 articles on Economic and Military Violence. The last section consists of 4 articles which speak about Women's Struggle for Life and "the need for new forms of spirituality : a spirituality for life" (151). There is an Epilogue at the end followed by the Final Statement of the 'Women Against Violence' Dialogue.

In this collection of rich, varied and thought-provoking inputs the reader is powerfully drawn to experience "the sincere and intense longing for sisterhood (with the women) in the face of a common suffering" (7) among women from various corners of the earth, and "the beginning of a new phase of global networking as women work together in creating liberating theologies" (7). All the different forms of violence and victimization perpetrated against women, all the stories of women being maimed and marginalized, all the different forms of exploitation and injustice heaped upon women lead the women and all readers of the book to a new vision of strength and empowerment "to the dynamic energy Shakti" (63) to explore all positive resources and possibilities for change and transformation of the existing shameful as well as sinful reality of which we all

are the perpetrators. Away from struggle, resistance and violence we are called to "transformative action, change, strength and courage to build up and nourish the power of the good" (151). The spirituality these theologians are clamouring for, inspite of the legitimate 'nekrophilic' reverberations which come out from some of them, is surely "biophilic" (30,155,175), life-giving and life-loving. The spirituality these authors promote far from sadistic, masochistic or hatred-based, is a "spirituality which is a holistic and continuous process of becoming" (163). It has been rightly claimed already in 1988 by the Women's Commission of EATWOT that their "Spirituality is always both passionate and compassionate" (163,171). This adage is beautifully and systematically delineated in the articles "Spirituality for Life" (147-160) by Ursula King and "Spirituality of Resistance and Reconstruction" (161-167) by M.A. Oduyoye. At the end of the reading of the book the words of the British television documentary cited by Ursula King that "The Future is Female" (155) is loudly ringing in the readers' ears challenging each one to engage herself/himself in a liberative praxis. The call for an unambiguous message to women as to their human value and dignity is the need of our times, both in the church and in society. This very informative, well-documented as well as provocative book needs to be read not only by women but by everyone of us - theologians, social activists and committed men - both Christians and people of other religions. A cheaper Indian edition may put the book at the reach of many in the third-world!

**R. J. Raja, S. J.**

**The Engendering God :** *Male and Female Faces of God* :  
By C. A. Raschke and S. D. Raschke; Westminster, John  
Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1995; Pp. x + 102.

Quite radical in its tone "The thesis (of the book) is that the Scriptures, together with certain key elements of

the subsequent Christian tradition, can be read forthrightly to support a conviction of the unconditional religious equality of men and women" (vii). Being a bold and unprecedented attempt, and being admittedly controversial and speculative, there may be readers "who are certain to differ decidedly with what the book propounds" (vii). But the book may serve as a launching pad for further enquiry into the nature of God and of the humans.

The authors are quite within bounds to claim that "the God of Israel is an 'engendering' Deity who is revealed in both male and female guises" (5). But they could have been less uncharitable by not calling idolatrous, blasphemous, abominable, unbiblical etc, those who remain fixated on a male God (5.18 29 etc.). These kinds of polemical and caustic remarks tend to blunt the forcefulness of the arguments propounded by them in the book.

The idea of 'divine feminine' which is the dominant motif of "Sophian theology" is, according to the authors, "an adaptation of the traditional Jewish idea of the "Shekinah", or divine presence, which was taken as a feminine in nature" (44). The Judeo-Christian scriptures as well as other ancient sources both non-Christian (Canaanites, Egyptian etc.) and christian (the Troubadors, Crusaders etc.) avow that God is neither exclusively male nor exclusively female but "The Two in One", the twin-faced (88). From anthropological, historical and biblical enquiry the authors try to prove cogently that the idolatrous (!) fixation on a male God is of a latter vintage which has manipulated, obscured and marred the belief in the dual nature of God. What one needs today in the understanding of God is that besides being powerful and authoritarian (masculine), He is also compassionate, loving and ever-faithful (feminine), which is actually the better half of God (23). Being an Indian reader, what is laboriously argued by the authors in this book comes easily to me through the concept of

"Arthanariswara" (Shiva and Shakti) tenaciously held by my Hindu brothers and sisters! We are indebted to the authors for giving us a direction to the theological discourse which should play a vital role as we are moving towards the third millennium of the enfleshment of the "Sophia" in the human "Shekinah".

**R. J. Raja, S. J.**

**Jesus the Greatest Life lived on Earth :** By O. M. Rao. ISPCK, P. B. 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, 110 006; Rs. 15.

"The life of Jesus is a mystery" says the author (1), and he tries to unravel this mystery of Jesus in this little book in seven chapters. The first chapter shows "That in Jesus there came into the realm of human experience a spiritual force of such beauty and power" (6) that he could be called the 'Son of God' by his followers. The next 2 chapters (chs. II and III) deal with the significance of Jesus' death from the point of view of human sin and divine grace respectively. The last 4 chapters (chs. IV to VII) treat of the relevance of Jesus' life to our lives from the point of view of Religion (ch. IV) the World (ch. V), Others (ch. VI) and Ourselves (ch. VII). Each of these chapters logically and systematically exposes the biblical side to prove the contention of the author and at the same time sifts, selects and separates what seems similar or contrary in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Scriptures and traditions. What was conceived as a mystery at the beginning becomes at the end according to the author "the way for the realisation of man's highest life" (55).

**R. J. Raja, S. J.**

**Splendour For Ever :** Birth and Earthly Life Reflect Truths of their Splendour For Ever. By A. C. Parshad, ISPCK, Delhi, 1996; Pp. xi + 123; C. C. Rs. 35; H. C. Rs. 45.

Written by an Evangelical christian for born-again christians the book attempts to portray the similarities that exist between the physical and spiritual life. The first 4 parts of the book (I-IV) deal with the splendour of human life from its conception up to the golden years of ripe old age and simultaneously, with the aid of biblical citations, compare it with the Life of the Splendour for ever to which the born-again christian is called. The last 2 parts (V-VI) portray the Essentials needed for life as well as new life, the "nuggets of life" which are connected to the main theme and the "earth" which makes the Splendour of Life reach its climax, Splendour For Ever. The truth "that eternal life is not only a possibility but a reality" (Intro.) is dinned into the mind of the reader through countless citations from the Bible (mostly from KJV). The importance given to the Holy Spirit (cf. School of the Holy Spirit 67. 69 71; university of the Holy Spirit : 69 etc) in the new-birthing and growing into the Splendour For Ever shines through every page of the book. Written from a personal experience of life in the Spirit, the book would appeal to all born-again christians. The reviewer would have liked a contextual explanation of many of the biblical texts rather than literal citations which are aplenty!

R. J. Raja, S.J.

**William Carey and the Indian Renaissance.** By Malay DEWANJI. Delhi : ISPCK, 1996. Pp. vii + 83.

This book has been written in connection with the William Carey Centenary Celebrations with the avowed purpose "that the Indian Church reiterates and rethinks the concept of mission" (vii). Written in a simple language the book portrays the colourful personality of Carey the missionary with a purpose. Carey has had many firsts to his credit. Having been "wedded to India" (78), it was but

natural that like Paul the great missionary, he became all things to all. A great scholar and a linguist, an agriculturist and an educationist, a doctor and a social reformer, an ecologist and a philanthropist, Carey "tried to teach Indians to love their own country and respect their glorious heritage" (78). In sum, in Carey one sees a harmonious combination of a scientific attitude with humanistic frame which has its origins in his faith-commitment to Jesus. This multifaceted genius of a man stands as a shining example to all missionaries. In fact what is thought of and presented as new in missionary endeavours today, has been already practised and lived nearly two centuries ago by this indefatigable missionary. May his tribes increase and multiply. I recommend this book for all christians, more so, for all the young missionaries who have in mind in their mission work the welfare and the promotion of the total human persons entrusted to their care.

**R. J. Raja, S. J.**

**Where is God when Bad things Happen?** *By Horace O. DUKE. Mumbai : St. Paul's, 1996. Pp. 190.*

From time immemorial poets and philosophers, scientists and theologians, chaplains and counsellors - in fact people of all hues - have struggled with the problem of evil, especially innocent suffering. From biblical times upto now there is no dearth for the likes of Job who cry out with arguments based on retributive Justice and demand an answer for the perennial question: Where is God when bad things happen to weak, innocent and powerless people? The author both a chaplain with a vast experience in the ministry of counselling others and a man who has had to pass through severe tragedies and sufferings in his own personal life; is the one best suited to write this

gem of a book. The book is the result of the long encounters he had with his Spiritual Values Therapy group of people whom he calls "theologians-in-residence-of-everyday - life" (185) and to whom he feels grateful since his encounter with them still "continues to be of value to him" (185), and I am sure, also to all the readers of this book. This is a book of "practical theology" through which the author, in the tradition of Rabbi H. Kushner and Philip Yancey, instructs the sufferers as well as the readers in the right understanding of God, world and oneself.

The merit of this book consists in the fact, that like a good counsellor, the author enters unobtrusively through the door of the counselee and comes out quite successfully and adroitly through his own door. The conviction of the author that right in the midst of unjust suffering God is "in" and "with" the sufferer shines through consciously or unconsciously in almost every page of the book (95, 96, 103, 104, 106, 111, 112, 113, 133, 156, etc). "God is with us in the mess we call life" (95) is the assurance we are left with when we go through this book to the end. In fact the author is at pains to delineate "a new image of God as forgiving our best and our worst, a new image of a God who is gracious to us, a new image of ourselves as graced and forgiven, invited-urged to leave the empty boxcars that are...never getting anywhere" (177). From the tragic and awesome reality of the "dark night of the soul" the author is slowly but steadily, cleverly yet logically leading the sufferer as well as the reader to a "bright sunrise of the soul" (160).

The author's facility in handling a variety of biblical passages and examples especially from the book of Job and the letters of Paul is disarming. It is also an added asset to the book that the author presents the God of the Christians as "an empathic God involved in human experiences, feeling as humans feel" (93) and hence he insists that we become aware of the connectedness we have with God (90)

and this through prayer, to be able to cope with sin, suffering, sickness etc. When we realize that "God struggles with the meaning and unknown of our living" (78) then the crucified Jesus becomes our "God's 'With-us-ness'" (86), "urging us to turn defeat into victory, disgrace into honour, fear into faith, evil into good, hate into love, and even death into life" (137). Thus the "practical theology" of the author brings about peace and serenity to the sufferer, and in this way tries successfully to answer the question "Where is God when Bad Things happen?" I strongly recommend this book to all counsellors, educators and formators.

R. J. Raja, S. J.

**Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity.** By Aloysius PIERIS, S. J. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996. Pp. xvi + 220.

It is a welcome sign that recent trends in theology are moving in the direction of multipolarity. What began as the "cry of the poor" in Latin America and spread all over the world gradually came to encompass the "prayer of the devotee" as well. The socio-political matrix of theological reflection was broadened to include the non-Christian religions and cultures. Aloysius Pieris has been a passionate advocate of this conversation between the many religions and the many oppressed. This basic theme of his two well-known books *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (1988) and *Love and Wisdom* (1989) is further deepened and broadened in *Fire and Water*. Particularly it is the feminist/womanist dimension of theological discourse, a "lacuna" in his earlier writings, admits P., that has been integrated here (p. 3).

The book under review contains 18 chapters grouped under three major headings. Part I: "Women and Religion:

Buddhist and Christian Appropriation of Feminist Criticism" reflects the central concern expressed in the title of the book. Part II has 8 chapters dealing with a variety of topics and so the general heading is also generic: "Theology, Religion, and Society". Part III addresses the issues of religious vows, the Ignatian Exercises and the spiritual dimension of change. The somewhat loose organization of the material contained in the book is perhaps due to the fact that it had appeared as articles in reviews over a period of eight years (1988-94). However, the dialogue of Christianity with non-Christian religions, particularly Buddhism, the Asian reality of poverty and an authentic feminism (more clearly visible in Part I) are interwoven in an admirable way.

Pieris has a predilection for symbolism. He narrates how the Toba tribe of Amerindians in Argentina associated fire with their hunting, a male occupation, and fire became their male gender symbol. Water as symbol was associated with the female gender. P. expands the meaning of this symbolism to comprehend the cosmic (water - earth: female) and the metacosmic (fire - air: male). For him "symbols are more powerful than reality which they participate in, and which they 're-present,' because it is as symbol that Reality or Truth invariably finds entry into the human heart" (p. 27). If liberation, the central concern of all religions, is "the cosmic expression of the metacosmic," then "feminism...is a permanent feature in the struggle for full humanity in that it maintains the cosmic dimension without which the experience of the metacosmic (i.e., absolute liberation) is impossible" (p. 62).

But P. is not an uncritical lover of feminism. Even as he acknowledges that religion has in many ways abused women, he does not fail to point out the "false starts" in feminist theories (pp. 50-52).

P. rejects the western categories of "exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism" that are used to define the relationship between Christianity and other religions (the issue of "christian uniqueness/absoluteness") as being out of steps with the concrete experience of interreligious dialogue in Asia. He prefers the categories of an Asian paradigm, "syncretism, synthesis, symbiosis". Syncretism is a haphazard of mixing of religions, something of a cocktail; synthesis leads to the destruction of each component religion; symbiosis should be the desired goal. Here each religion is challenged by the other religion's unique approach to the liberationist aspiration of the poor, and discovers and re-names itself in its specificity in response to the other approaches. According to P., this is what happens in Basic Human Communities (pp. 158-61).

While he is eloquent about religions as languages of liberation and lays down principles which eschew "communalism" (absolutizing one's race, culture, religion...) and argue for pluralism, P. seems to show feelings of cultural superiority when he deals with Buddhism vs. Hinduism, Sinhala vs. Tamil (pp. 108-112). The view of P. on the Sinhala-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka appears to be partial to the present reviewer, a Tamil from India. P. narrates the story of the perception of themselves of the Sinhala people as a "chosen but persecuted people" (p. 110) but glosses over the reverse discrimination practised by the Sinhala-Buddhist State on the minority Tamils, which is in fact the root cause of the present conflict in Sri Lanka. Similarly, while identifying the presence of caste in Hinduism and the Indian Church the author seems to completely ignore the caste mentality within the Buddhist Sangha (pp. 70 and 108).

But these are minor flaws in an otherwise excellent book. P. is to be congratulated on opening himself to the mystical insights and prophetic criticisms of his female colleagues and friends and integrating the feminist/womanist discourse in the quest for a contextual Asian theology.

**Paul Leon**

## **Books Received**

(from May to October 1997)

[all books received are listed here whether  
they are reviewed or not]

**Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N. Y. 10545, USA**

Aloysius Pieris, S. J., *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (1996, pp. xvi+220).

**William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA**

Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (1997, pp. xiv+548).

**St. Pauls, 23rd Road, T P. S. III, PB 9814, Bandra, Mumbai-400 050**

Joseph Mattam, and Sebastian Kim (Eds.), *Mission Trends Today: Historical and Theological Perspectives* (1997, pp. 216).

Stephen Fortosis, *Great Men and Women of the Bible* (1997, pp. 140).

George Kaitholil (Ed.), *Church the Sacrament of Christ: Patristic Vision and Modern Theology* (1997, pp. 144).

Augustine Kanjamala, S. V. D., *Paths of Mission in India Today* (1996, pp. 310).

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Gilbert Meilaender, *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* (V. Paul Leon), pp. 74-77.

Vigen Guroian, *Life's Living Toward Dying: A Theological and Medical-Ethical Study* (V. Paul Leon), pp. 77-81.

John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (V. Paul Leon), pp. 81-14.

Phil Bosmans, *Give Happiness a Chance* (V. Paul Leon), pp. 84-85.

Carroll Saussy, *The Gift of Anger: A Call to Faithful Action* (V. Paul Leon), pp. 153-155.

R. de Smet, and J. Neuner (Eds.), *Religious Hinduism* (V. Paul Leon), pp. 155-156.

Rudolph Schnackenburg, *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology* (J. Susaimanickam), pp. 156-158.

Roland E. Murphy, *Responses to 101 Questions on Psalms and Other Writings* (J. Susaimanickam), p. 159.

Allen Verhey, *Religion and Medical Ethics: Looking Back, Looking Forward* (J. Xavier Ilango), pp. 161-162.

Carl Braaten, and Robert W. Jenson, *The Catholicity of the Reformation* (A. Arulanandam, S.J.), pp. 216-217.

Kenneth S. Ferdinand, *Reflection on Outlines of Bible Faith Doctrines* (R. J. Raja, S.J.), p. 218.

Doug Webster, *Dear Dad* (R. J. Raja, S.J.), pp. 219-220.

John Wilkins (Ed.), *How I Pray* (R. J. Raja, S.J.), 220-221.

- J. F. Kavanaugh, S. J., *The Word Encountered : Meditations on the Sunday Scriptures* (R. J. Raja, S.J.), pp. 221-222.
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