

Book Reviews

Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin: By Ursula King, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1986, Pp. x-245, \$25.

This is an interesting and informative biography of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a traveller and an explorer, a scientist and a theologian, a mystic and a prophet, a priest and a poet, all in one. In fact he may be called the forerunner of many theologians and others who are committed today to creation Spirituality and Eco-theology. Ursula King a great admirer of Teilhard, a prolific writer on the spirituality of Teilhard: (cf. *Towards a New Mysticism: Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions* - 1980; *The Spirit of one earth: Reflections on Teilhard de Chardin and global spirituality* - 1989; *Christ in all things; Exploring spirituality with Teilhard de Chardin* - 1996) and the founder of the Teilhard Centre at London, narrates, interprets and tries to relive Teilhard's life from cradle to grave, from his birth in the Auvergne in 1881 to his death in New York in 1955. The story is filled with colourful anecdotes of his family at the Auvergne interspersed with pathos at the loss of each member of it whom he loved so much (21-23. 30-34. 68. 73-74 etc), a deep sense of God's presence - *milieu Divin* - in the world of matter (19-20. 102. 125. 133. 176. 216. 223 etc), a profound love of Christ leading him along to the heights of pan-Christic mysticism (32. 64. 84. 96-97. 184 etc), an authentic love for Society of Jesus and of the Church in spite of the harsh treatment meted out to him by both (104-109. 173. 196-197. 207. 210 etc), a persistent but prudent love for some remarkable and dedicated women who were close to him in thick and thin (49-50. 72-82. 144-154. 160-162. 182-184. 193-195. 205-209 etc), an unquenchable fire of love for harmonizing science and faith etc, are all interwoven into the story of the man, "the greatest prophet of this age" (ix).

The life-story of Teilhard -warts and all - as narrated by King is disarmingly breathtaking. It is both a biography (shall I say, a novel?) lovingly written by a disciple "in romance" with a master who is easily one of the great intellectual and spiritual giants of our time.

The get up of the book is quite attractive. Each of the page or double page is lavishly decorated with a picture associated with the life of Teilhard at various stages of his life. Appropriate quotes from his books and extracts from his innumerable letters add beauty to the organization and presentation of the contents of the book.

King has done full justice to the man "who deserves to be better known, his writings more appreciated and critically studied, his example more followed" (viii). This masterpiece of a biography "adoringly" portrayed by King must surely be a "*Vade mecum*" for all who want to read Teilhard "the smiling scientist"(133) as well as a "disappointed prophet"!

R.J. Raja, S.J.

The Cross and the Rain Forest: A Critique of Radical Green Spirituality: By R. Whelan, J. Kirwan & P. Haffner, W.B.Eerdmans Publ. Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, Pp. xi-163.

For the past 20 or 30 years ecology has been the in-thing. It has now taken the field with a vengeance to make up for the past injustice(!) it has suffered. This is amply testified by the numerous publications it has to its credit in the last few years. But when anything is taken to the extremes it has its consequent pitfalls. This book by 3 Christian ecologists, while it recognizes that "care for the environment is a worthwhile pursuit..., seeks to warn christinas about the pit-falls of an unqualified embrace of environmentalism" (Back cover). While radical environmentalists have subverted christian orthodoxy and "baptized secular environmentalism and proclaimed it as the newest *good news*" (ix), the authors of this book, who do not believe that care for the environment is trivial or worthless (5. 78) "offer an alternative christian ecology that views man as created in the image of God, that takes sin seriously and that looks to Christ and the redemption available through him as the key to the true meaning of creation" (B.C.). Thus this book aims at "a fundamental reordering of priorities which is essentially hostile to the Christian tradition" (B.C.) in the so-called Green Movement, which "represents an amalgam of vegetarians, animal rights activists, animal life and heritage lobbyists, organic food faddists, anti-nuclear campaigners, advocates of holistic medicine and 'alternative lifesyles' and other interest groups" (57).

The very arrangement of the book in four chapters: "Greens and God" (ch. 1), "Greens and People" (ch. 2), "Greens and Animals" (ch. 3), "A Christian Ecology" (ch. 4) testifies to this christian reordering of priorities. An Introduction "The Healing Power of Cardboard" and an Appendix: "Science Facts", encase the 4 chapters.

In the Introductory chapter R. Whelan warns that "embracing the Green agenda... is essentially hostile to the values of the Judeo-Christian tradion, and which may even be closer to paganism" (3) and pleads for a Green christianity based on the values of the tradition as portrayed in the Bible. In the next ch. on "Greens and God" he discusses the fundamental similarity between Nazism and the Green movement (8), points out how pressure-group politics is at the root of the theories of the environmental prophets of doom, explains how Greenery has now become a religion for the Green-followers (11-16), shows how the Green movement falsely attributes "the environmental crisis... as the result of the christian arrogance towards nature, which is derived from man's uniquely exalted status in the natural order" (28), gives reasons to show that the "Green spirituality is essentially New age spirituality" (29) and concludes that steeped in deism, pantheism, and animism, how the Greens have substituted nature for the God of the Christians (22-30). In answer to these challenges the author invites christian ecologists to view the environmental crisis from a moral point of view and avert eco-catastrophes through a balanced love for creatures and by turning to the Lord in repentance and humility (35-50) rather than be lured by the eco-prophets of doom.

In the next ch. the author refutes the statements by the Greens who promote population control and abortion, since according to them, humans are "a cancer on the rest of the biophere", "the affliction of the World", "its demonic presence", "a chemical scum floating on the surface of the earth" (60-66) as ther Nazis had contended before (72-75). He explodes the myth of over-population by appealing to scientific data and the Biblical doctrine about human beings. The "Greening of the Church" calls for a special ministry in the church in favour of the environmental movement, "by injecting into it the values and priorities of the Bible... by stating clearly and unequivocally, that the environment was made for man, not man for the environment" (94).

The ch. on "Greens and Animals" by J. Kirwan points out how by making selective use of the Bible (115) the Animal Rights activists "reduce man to the status of an animal" (121) and portray "a World in which man is deracinated and nature deified" (122). Though humans have duties towards the animals (118-120) and that we may not abuse anything, animate or inanimate, yet the fact that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, (and not so the animals), must receive priority in any consideration on animal Rights.

The last ch.: "A Christian Ecology" by P. Haffner considers ecological crisis as a moral problem (126) and proffers the solution from "the Christian Vision of the Cosmos" (126) based on the texts of the Bible (Genesis) and from tradition (Benedict, Francis, Philip Neri etc.). It is ultimately Christ who becomes the key to the true meaning of creation (129-132).

The Appendix "Science and Facts" touches on 4 problems: "Global Warming" (134-138), "The Hole in the Ozone Layer" (138-143), "Species Extinction" (143-145) and "Deforestation" (145-148) and allays the alarming fear aroused by them by showing that these are unsubstantiated theories "more to do with fundraising than science" (148). All in all, the book will give a good grounding for all those who "see the mission to save the earth as the most important ministry of the Church" (B.C.).

R.J. Raja, S.J.

MISSION IN BOLD HUMILITY - David Bosch's work considered.
Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger (Eds.) Orbis Books. Maryknoll, NY, 10545, 1996, Pp. vii+184.

The man: David Bosch is a South African theologian - missiologist to be specific - and the "Mission in Bold Humility" is a collection of thirteen essays by an international group of scholars about his missiology from a variety of theological perspectives and mission contexts. The book also assesses the significance of Bosch's many scholarly and humanitarian contributions: as a missiologist, as a man of the church, and as one who laboured courageously on behalf of peace and justice in his native South Africa.

"A sharp, logical mind that saw the heart of the issue at stake; a consistent and disarming honesty; a deep empathy with people who suffer; a refusal to impose suffering on others; and a "catholic" commitment to defuse tension and facilitate reconciliation between different Christian groups" are some of the fundamental features of Bosch's life and theology.

The Message: the characteristic for a missionary according to Bosch, is development of empathy in humility and modesty, not pity - also to their religion. "Mission is a two way process in which people build each other's spirituality". "Being a missionary is like a beggar who tells another beggar where to find bread" and that the missionary should get rid of the idea that "we" can do something good for "them". Bosch could very well say that because he, a white man belonging to the ruling class, was a missionary among the Xhosa in Transkei for almost a decade. Being a member of the Dutch Reformist Church with its strong support for the white supremacist rule in South Africa, Bosch's missionary theology is indeed a "Mission in Bold Humility".

"Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission" (which is extensively referred to in this book) is his "opus magnum" which enables us to enquire deeper about the Christian vocation to mission in the contemporary world with a plethora of religions and philosophical traditions. The differences are real. What we require is the humility to face the mystery which is greater than available theological categories. A major innovation is the attention paid to mission as contextualization, as liberation, and as inculturation".

The message of Christ is meaningful and relevant only if it touches the joys and sorrows, hopes and anxieties of the people of the time. Mission today is God's involvement in today's world. Mission then becomes contextual. In Christ we see how God is concerned about the whole of humankind and every dimension of human existence. With the spiritualization of salvation, mission in the past however, was heavily eschatological. For Christianity, God-experience has to flow in to the experience of the neighbour. Service to the poor is as important as worshipping God (Mt 22: 36ff). In fact the very criterion for the eschaton is this service to the neighbour (Mt 25:35ff).

The approach of David Bosch can enlighten the India Church which finds itself in a multicultural and multireligious milieu in this vast sub-continent. The Church in India depended on the Western "mother" churches for its theology, spirituality, personnel and funds. It is time that the church tries to proclaim what it has experienced in Jesus Christ without denying the authentic religious experience of their neighbours. "True witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others... that God is the creator of the whole universe and that he has not left himself without a witness at any time or any place. The Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding... Witness does not preclude dialogue but invites it, and that dialogue does not preclude witness but extends and deepens it."

Christianity should not be seen as something depreciating other religions and meant to swallow other religions. All Christian practice must be an expression of this experience of God as the intimate "abba" of all. The major contribution that Christianity can and must make is to manifest the experience of this twofold relationship: of God as the intimate "abba" and others as brothers and sisters. And this is to be expressed in service to the vast majority of the Indian masses who are denied the fruit of their labour and participation in determining their future. The mission of the Church in India today is to be with those who are condemned to a dehumanized existence but going through an awakening today.

The Book is a fitting tribute to a great missiologist of our times and needs to be read "in bold humility" by all who are living in a pluriform as well as multireligious and multicultural context.

A. Philomine Raj

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