

## Book Reviews

**The Encyclopedia of Christianity**, vol. I A - D. Edited by Erwin Fahlbush, Jan Lochman, John Mbiti, Jerroslav Pelikan & Lukas Vischer (Trans. & English Lang. ed.: George Bromiley; Stat. ed.: David Barret) Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans / Leiden : Brill, 1999 pp xxxviii + 893, \$100 / £50.00.

The dawn of the new millennium is certainly a right moment when every human institution has to take stock of the situation before readying to launch ahead. This applies to religions as well and particularly to Christianity with its essential characteristic of eschatological hope of the full realization of the kingdom of God as the promised future of humanity. It has to glean together all its past gains, summarize all the knowledge it has acquired, consolidate its victories and analyse its failures so that it has a firm platform to envision a new future and enterprise ahead to realize it. **The Encyclopedia of Christianity** (EC) is undoubtedly a monumental effort and achievement of this kind.

EC is based on the third revised edition of the much acclaimed German reference work, *Evangelisches Kirchenlexicon* (1986 - 1997), known for the wide range of topics it included, comprehensive treatment of them and up to date scholarship. The articles in EC are the revised and expanded version of those in the German edition, with the addition of some new ones on topics of particular interest to the English readers. The work herein reviewed is the first of the projected set of five volumes. It contains 465 articles starting with 'Abbot, Abbess' and ending with 'Dying, Aid for the'.

EC is truly international in its authorship and in the choice of the themes treated. Though most of the contributors are from Europe and America, there are also many from the Asian and African countries who bring in their own diverse and rich cultural perspectives. EC is also international in so far as there are separate articles on every continent and country. These articles provide us not only with a wealth of general information about the demographic, social, political and economic status of the continent or country dealt with but also a clear picture of the religious situation with particular focus on Christianity with its history, present day problems and future prospects.

Another impressive feature of EC is its genuine ecumenical outreach. For though it is firmly rooted in the tradition of the

Reformed Churches it is also very Catholic in the best and broadest meaning of the term. Not only topics of special concern for the various Christian denominations are included but also wherever needed separate sections present the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant traditions and points of view. Ecumenical perspectives are also provided (e.g. Baptism, Birth Control, Catechism). Being basically a Christian encyclopedia most of the topics it deals with are related to Christianity. However, topics from other religions which are of contemporary concern and significance are also included. And this applies to Hinduism as well (e.g. Ananda Marga, Bhagavad Gita, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, Bhakti). However, EC might be faulted for employing Western and Christian scholars to write about topics that are specifically Hindu, Buddhist or Islamic. Is it not better that such topics are best left for scholars from the particular religion concerned?

One more feature of EC that deserves particular mention and appreciation is its multi-disciplinarity. Not only topics from Philosophy, Psychology, Cultural Anthropology and Sociology that have a special relation to theology or Christian pastoral practice are carefully chosen (e.g. Anxiety, Alcoholism) for summary treatment, but also religious themes are dealt with from Theological as well as Psychological, Anthropological, Sociological and Philosophical perspectives (e.g. Celibacy, Charisma).

While finding an article on Asian Theology is a matter of much satisfaction on an Indian reader, its length ( a little more than 3 columns) and lack of mention of Indian authors and trends of theology would leave him/her dissatisfied. We suppose that there will be in the next volume an article on Indian theology to make up for it. One is also left wondering why significant topics such as Ashram and Dalit Theology do not figure in EC. Even from the perspective of Western religious thought, it seems strange that some important topics such as Aesthetics, Aesthetic Theology and Deconstruction are left out in EC while Alchemy is given almost a full page long treatment.

Such very few and minor limitations which can almost never be avoided in works of this kind despite the best of editorial competence and care, do not in any way reduce the worth and value of EC. Its breadth of vision, wealth of information, depth of analysis and the best of current scholarship it offers make it an invaluable treasure house of knowledge.

It is certainly a vital source book that must find a place not only in the reference section of any library worth its name, but also in the bookshelf of every scholar in religion and particularly Christianity. The price also seems reasonable by Western standards and taking into account the size of the volume and the richness of its content.

However, since it might seem too steep for individual scholars and specifically those from the third world countries, could the publishers consider bringing out a less expensive edition or an Asian reprint!

Dr. D. Alphonse

**Religion, Beliefs, and International Human Rights.** Natan Lerner. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000. pp. XII + 183. 25\$.

There is no gainsaying that religious intolerance and persecutions are behind many recent bloody conflicts and clashes around the globe involving ethnicity, racism, minority rights etc. Religious intolerance has fanned up tragic campaigns of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Religious beliefs of the dominant sect in one form or the other, directly or indirectly has taken the central stage in international politics, curbing the rights of the other groups.

Natan Lerner (NL), a distinguished Jewish jurist, provides in this volume an authoritative distillation and analysis of modern international norms on religious rights and freedoms with a close focus on modern controversies over religious and racial discrimination.

The first chapter analyses the protection of religious human rights under the United Nations. A graphic picture of the evolution of the United Nations Declarations of Human Rights providing a concrete list of freedoms of thought, religion and beliefs, and a lucid description of the emergence of the status of religious and other minorities in four major stages (33-35) are well presented against proper historical background. Chapter two speaks about this protection extended to rights related to religion by the main regional systems of human rights. In this respect major European human rights documents draw their inspiration from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenants. The monitoring of human rights by the Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union has produced significant case laws with regard to religious rights. Through these cases (*Kokkinakis, Larissis, Arrowsmith v. UK, Otto Preminger Institute v. Austria, Darby v. Sweden*) the author explains in summary form the European system that was instrumental in clarifying the scope of rights and liberties of believers and non-believers. An exposition of the regional American, African, and Islamic systems for the protection of human rights in matters of religion is not lacking. But what is conspicuous in absence is the Asian system for protection of human rights with regard to religious beliefs. However due place for the Concordats between the Holy See and many countries deserves special mention.

In the third chapter NL dwells at length on the provision which offers religious groups protection from persecution and incitement. For the sake of clarity and better understanding NL divides this chapter into three parts: (a) relevance of the Convention on Racial Discrimination (article 4); (b) group defamation; and (c) international criminal law with greater emphasis on outlawing genocide and ethnic cleansing.

In the first part the author deals elaborately with the 'key article' which was also considered 'controversial article' (Article 4 of the Convention) because of the nuances of certain terms, for example, 'hatred', and their implications. The threadbare discussion on this article and the process it passed through are very well highlighted. Human right violations through evils such as dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to social discrimination are clearly brought to the fore. These features draw the special attention of the readers interested in the international laws on human rights (54-57).

The second part of the third chapter deals with legal protection against group libel or group defamation. NL explains picturesquely how despicable it is to categorize a particular sect or group of people, e.g., "blacks are rapists" or "Jews are traitors" or "Muslims are terrorists". While describing how such a categorization does unspeakable damage not only to the individuals but chiefly to the entire community, he also puts forth the legal measures employed in the West as well as in the East to avert such social harm (p. 64-67).

The third and final part of chapter three looks at the international criminal law which answers the most costly conflict of history in terms of human lives. Presenting the tragic events during and after World War II as the context of the evolution of the International Convention on Prevention and Punishment, NL highlights the important elements as found in Articles II - XI of the Convention. The way he defines and distinguishes with telling examples from recent history the terms "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" (p. 72) and the clarity with which he explains the characteristics of the acts that constitute genocide (p.69) arouse the interest of the reader.

The final chapter, as it were the soul of the book, addresses issues of proselytism and change of religion. The five subdivisions in it make this long chapter an easy reading.

The first section while affirming that everyone is free to propagate his/her religious ideas whether or not they are shared by the majority, equally stresses the right of a person to privacy (83), and thereby presents the problem of proselytism as a clash between rights.

Clarification of the key terms such as convert, proselyte, apostasy, evangelization, mission which concern changes of religion fills the second section of the chapter. While the third part treats proselytism and conversion in the United Nations era, the fourth examines the provisions on the issue of proselytism incorporated into the regional (e.g., European Convention, Cairo Declaration on Human Rights etc.) human rights instruments. The final section forms a more practical part of the book in which interesting cases of proselytism and verdicts by the international tribunals find their due place.

In addition to the specialities pointed out above, two more important features draw our attention. The Krishnaswami Study which formed an important stage in the United Nations' work on religious rights adorns the present volume. The Indian jurist Krishnaswami's objective observations make beyond doubt a substantial contribution to any study on religious human rights. To mention another special feature, the place of appendix in NL's book can never be minimized since it contains the 'Selected International Human Rights Instruments on Religious Human Rights' in its official form which will be of great reference value to any student for his scientific works in this area.

In a multi-religious country like India where every genuine act of charity by a member of a religion to his fellow Indian is watched with suspicious eyes and every free conversion distorted as a coercive act infringing the freedom of the person, a book of this sort will go a long way to enlighten the people of all religions in general and the religious and political leaders in particular and to help them value the dignity of the human person and the several humanitarian services rendered by many missionary institutions crossing the borders of belief and birth.

Dr. T. Victor

**Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Moral Thought.** John Webster. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998. pp. ix + 223. \$30.

Karl Barth was known for his exposition of the divine transcendence and grace. Assessing his writings especially his early writings very negatively some of his contemporaries ( J. Cullberg, H.U. von Balthasar, R.E. Willis and Richard Roberts ) highlight the denial of everything human, and the minimization of the significance of the human freedom in them. Their assessment drove them to the conclusion that his early writings "eliminated the problem of ethics;" that "every ethics is put to death;" and that "there can be no talk at all

of responsible action in the real sense" (12). Thus they ruled out ethics from his domain.

In this book John Webster makes an important study of Barth's theology of human action and comes out with an answer to their negative assessment. She attempts to prove with great success that Karl Barth was every inch a moral theologian. In the first few chapters she examines the views of Barth's opponents, situates their positions in the proper historical perspective and refutes their negative stand and proves to them her position convincingly. To strengthen her argument further she scrutinizes some early texts of Barth, analyses the issues of human actions in them and brings to light the ethical themes hidden therein.

JW continues to trace out the sovereignty of moral subjectivity by treating the three themes, namely calling, justification and conscience. She analyses these three themes in the essays that constitute Barth's *The Ethics* and points out that neither his theology of revelation nor his eschatology nor even his soteriology ever led him to discount the sphere of human action.

In chapter five the author points out the defects in the methodology of Barth's critics (Daveney and Macken) who charge Barth that there is no satisfactory account of how the divine power and agency relate to the acts of human beings. JW sets out to take Christian hope and unravels the link between hope and human agency. She then brings out the relation of divine act to human act through expression of three themes enshrined in Barth's Church Dogmatics: (i) the enhypostatic existence of humanity in Jesus Christ; (ii) covenant as the innermost substance of God's history with humanity; (iii) 'correspondence' (*Entsprechung*) as a term central to the illumination of the various types of interaction between divine action and human agency (88). Making use of these three themes JW exposes Barth's emphasis on the significance of human action which lays the basis for any moral act.

Chapter six on 'Freedom in Limitation' is pivotal to the whole book. As mentioned above JW's objective is to show that from the writings of Karl Barth emanate elements of moral theology no less than those of systematic theology. There is no morality without human acts and there is no human act without freedom and there is no freedom when it is completely infringed by divine grace i.e., when human beings are not self-determining agents. And therefore JW looks at Barth's writings on the theology of human political action to specify the ethical ramifications of Barth's account of human and divine freedom and to highlight human freedom as an ethical concept. According to Barth what is specific to human freedom is that it "is not

a principle of independence which transcends or precedes all concrete direction of the self through our acts, but rather a way of describing certain acts as acts in which we are truly ourselves as we correspond to what we have been made in Christ".

The last three chapters point to different directions. In the essay "Eloquent and Radiant" LW explicates the prophetic mission of Christ morally and existentially i.e., in the way in which Christ is realized in the present. In the next essay on "The Grammar of Doing" she explores some aspects of the moral ontology of Luther and Barth. She examines the similarities and differences between Luther and Barth on human agency. Making a close study of Luther's *Treatise on God* and Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, and *The Christian Life*, especially in relation to prayer and ethics, she suggests that Barth is more concerned to emphasize human actions as an answer to the saving act and presence of God.

The last essay is as it were the culmination of all the articles of this volume. For it traces the influences of Luther and of Barth in particular in the anthropology of a modern theologian Eberhard Jüngel. Barth's insistence that Lutheran and Reformed debate must focus on ethics has been deeply influential on the anthropology of Jüngel. Although Jüngel is neither a moral theologian nor a theological ethicist, he has written widely about topics in theological anthropology giving special emphasis to human agency. Jüngel's *Auseinandersetzung* with the moral and political tradition of modernity presses him to develop an account of human action as a critical theological task. Jüngel's comparative study of Luther and Barth serves LW as a springboard to achieve her purpose of this book that Barth's writings do include the moral aspects of human life. "The human is understood by definition to be constituted by action and self-determination. Barth's anthropology therefore permits the gospel to be transformed immediately into the form of the law which demands human action (202).

The science of theology is by its nature abstract. But Barth's theology is still more abstract. Nonetheless in the skilled hands of JW the abstract becomes concrete enabling the reader to open the book with ease and comfort. This success is due to the methodological techniques she employs. 1. She introduces theme oriented subdivisions which elaborate on the content of the chapter. 2. She presents the proper historical context of Barth's writings and explains them against that background. This book should be read by all moral as well as systematic theologians to get to know a complete picture of Karl Barth as a theologian.