

## Book Review

**Hope for your Future, Theological Voices from the Pastorate.** William H. Lazaretu, Editor. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K. 2002 Pp xvii + 223.

This is a new kind of book on Christian eschatology, vastly differing from earlier manuals on the topic, which mostly dealt with "the last things" as objective realities, events and places awaiting those who are dead. This "physical style" of conceiving the last things in spatio-temporal terms separated the eschatological realities from the everyday life of the believers namely, the hope for future had little to do with their present life. Yet a historical fact is that the transforming presence of the vibrant Christian community in the Graeco-Roman, Semitic world was mainly due to its original eschatological drive.

Recognising this centrality of the eschatological message and hope of the kingdom of God in the life and teachings of Jesus and capitalizing on the general public's millennialist interest and concerns surrounding the year 2000, the Pastor-Theologian Program at the centre of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, New Jersey, USA, concentrated on realistic eschatology taking the

theme of "Theology, Science and the Future." The contributors have explored the interrelation of the natural and social sciences of today with various biblical, theological and ethical traditions. The book has two parts, each having 3 chapters with apt titles bringing out its central idea.

After dealing with the biblical traditions on hope in the first chapter the theological views on Christian hope are seen in the next. In spite of the possible danger that "all rational discourse . . . including theology as well as science... is prone to idolatry (p. 37) there is an expose of the views of Thomas Aquinas, "a rationalist albeit a Christian rationalist" (pg. 41) about the eternal life as the endless, but never boring life of knowing and loving God directly. Yet this hope, according to Luther, does not depend on any speculative proposition, but on faith.

This faith is never easy nor provable but involves, as Kierkegaard is convinced, "a leap of faith". The leap of faith in Christ crucified reveals the good news that the divine penetrates and rejuvenates human life at its worst . . . non being... to its own "new being" in Christ. Paul Tillich's "eschatological parentheism" speaks of the presence of the spirit

of God under all conditions of present existence and ultimate fulfillment of all things.

The much hyped "millennium bug" and apocalyptic movements of today with a literal understanding of the prophetic scenarios and apocalyptic timetables in the Book of Revelation, call for the recuperation by the mainline churches of the people's tremendous hunger for a sense of meaning and purpose grounded in God, and the profound authentic biblical vision of hope.

Science, once thought to be the enemy of faith in its role of eliminating mystery, now seems in a position to be something of a partner. We are beginning to understand anew how much we do not understand: Science does not threaten to exhaust transcendence but reaffirms it at every advance (150).

Innovative insights are spread throughout this book while dealing with themes like: the link of incarnation with eschatology, the crucifixion as end time in Mark 13 and beginning of the new age (14), cross as the centre of Christian eschatology (78), need of community sacramental worship in spite of internet communications, bodily relatedness, distinction of time in theological imagination and scientific imagination (15, 123, 174ff), memory in theology and

science, scientific technology as a gift of the spirit (135), human genome project in light of the three Christian concepts: creation, justice and hope (147) and postmodern theologies (155). Under the catchphrase of "the future belongs to Jesus" the eschatological significance of various gospel passages is also well brought about in one of the final chapters (184ff).

Yet, a few discordant messages and forceful statements may make a reader perplexed, perhaps drive him/her to greater confusion. In page 177 we read "by denying the world its natural "sacramentality" and radically opposing the natural to the supernatural, we make the world "grace-proof" and ultimately are led to secularism (a state of denying that we are essentially worshipping beings...)." A worshipping community will also need to celebrate the continuity of the eschaton with the created world by the God who promised to make all things new and not simply make new things. Contrary to this idea it is said in page 187 "The biblical story is not a story of world renewal but of new creation. Christian hope is hope that the limits of human existence and history will be totally destroyed."

Similarly in page 127 there is an emphatic statement which can be understood as though all,

without any exception, are saved: "Ironically, or perhaps miraculously, the final kenosis of God is not God's limitation but God's ultimate glorification. It increases rather than detracts from God's majesty. It means that hell is finally and forever vanquished."

One wonders how to understand the lines in page 125: "Christ's return therefore must be first and foremost incarnational. Is this to say that there will be yet another incarnation at that time, that God will change the world again and also be changed? I believe it does mean precisely that..." Are not the Christians expected to hold on to the mystery

**The Encyclopedia of Christianity**, Vol. 1 A-D. Edited by Erwin Fahlbush, Jan Lochman, John Mbiti, Jeroslav Pelikan & Lukas Vischer (Trans. & English Lang. ed.: George Bromiley; Stat. ed. David Barret), Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans / Leiden: Brill, 2003 Pp. 918. \$ 100 (£65).

This is the third of the monumental and much acclaimed reference work projected in five volumes based on the revised edition of the German Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon: International Theologische Enzyklopedie. This volume contains 342 articles that cover the

of the unicity and exclusivity of Jesus as the sole incarnation that took place 2000 years ago once and for all?

In conclusion, this book is a timely response of a dedicated band of pastorally oriented ecumenical theologians who felt "silence concerning the eschatological themes of scripture needs to be broken" (183). This book is bound to inspire intelligent Christians to integrate scientific advancement into their biblical faith and live meaningfully here and now in this world as persons of hope for their future.

**Fr. S. Jesudasan.**

alphabetical entries from J to O. Though based on the above-mentioned German work, it also carries many new features and additional articles.

Consistent with the first volume, reviewed in Vaiharai 5:2, this one also is marked by comprehensiveness in the choice of topics as well as in their treatment. The entries include not only themes related to the history, doctrines, theology and practice of Christianity but also of other religions, philosophies and socio-cultural contexts and developments that in some way or other impinge on contemporary Christianity.

What will gratify anyone who might refer the articles in these volumes is the depth of treatment. Written by leading scholars from all over the world, each a specialist in the concerned field, the amount of information invariably every article packs in, despite its brevity, and the profundity with which the subject matter is dealt with are certainly admirable. The entries on Liberation theology, Mariology are just two excellent examples.

Another feature of the articles is that they include the most recent research on the subject matter dealt with. Thus, each article also covers the latest discussion on the theme from the ecumenical; liberative and ecofeminist perspectives. The up-to-date bibliographical question list provided at the end of each article is of great help.

Readers from India, however, might feel a bit disappointed by the paucity of entries in the present volume on themes related to the Indian religio-cultural traditions that possibly have great significance for Christianity. The present volume contains only three articles, (ISKON, Jainisan, Karma) related to India, and they are all too brief. Jeevanmukta, Margas, Moksa and Nirvana and some of the themes that certainly deserve entries in an encyclopaedia such as the one under review which aims to be

comprehensive and does have a concern for inter-religious dialogue and relationship. The omission of entries on such themes of much significance in inter-religious encounter is all the more noticeable in the background of the fact that there is entry on International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKON) that is almost two pages long. Though it may have gained quite a following in the West, ISKON's overall impact pales into insignificance in comparison with the above-mentioned Indian ideals. However, editorial choice of entries to be included in any encyclopaedia is not an easy decision and is dictated by so many varied considerations and constraints.

Considering, the uniformly high standard of the articles in the present volume as well as the previous ones and the certitude that such excellence will be maintained in the forthcoming volumes as well, one can not but unreservedly recommend the entire set as a must-have reference work in any library worth its name as well as that of any individual scholar who can afford the price. Of course, an Asian or Indian edition of the whole set would make such a masterly reference work more affordable and thus available to greater number of individuals in India.

**Dr. D. Alphonse.**

### **The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar.**

Ed. Joseph Prabhu, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1996, Pp xi +307

Raimon Panikkar is a renowned and outstanding theologian of India who has made a remarkable contribution to the development of theology in the emergent context of religious pluralism. As John B. Cobb succinctly points out, "No one has wrestled more courageously with the issue of pluralism than Raimon Panikkar." The book, under review, is the compilation of articles written by thirteen eminent scholars on his profound and immense contribution to the philosophy of religion and interreligious dialogue. Even though the book was planned to be released in 1993 as a festschrift on the occasion of the seventy-fifth birth anniversary of Panikkar, it came out rather late, but providentially for the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood in 1996.

It is to be acknowledged that it is not so easy to capture the complexity and richness of the thought of Panikkar which covers not only the Western theological and philosophical traditions, but also the Eastern religious

traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. More importantly, no single volume, taking into account his multifarious contributions in so many different areas, would be sufficient to accommodate his diverse interests. However, it is gratifying to note that all the writers have done an excellent and commendable work of deeply penetrating into his theological and philosophical thought and have candidly and systematically presented his vision and views, which are original and challenging. For instance, Carney, Cobb and Larson grapple with pluralism, one of the most challenging questions extensively dealt with by Panikkar in his effort to build up a new society of love and harmony. Bettina Baumer and Harold Coward analyze the concept of myth which occupies an important place in the theology of Panikkar. For him myth alone can be the authentic language of faith. David Krieger highlights in an excellent way the methodological foundation for the inter-religious dialogue as envisaged by Panikkar. Carney, Sheridan, D'Sa and Lanzetta penetrate into his understanding and interpretation of the mystery of Trinity and Christ. The grouping of all the articles under three parts based on the three central areas of Panikkar's

thought, namely its metaphysical foundations, his Christian theology and their practical implications has given an organic unity and logical sequence to the entire work. Moreover, all the articles are closely linked together, despite the fact that each one deals with one particular dimension of Panikkar's theology

Another noteworthy feature of this book is that the theological views of Panikkar are not accepted uncritically by the authors, some of whom have openly pointed out how they are inadequate and how they fail to respond to the contemporary burning issues of human community. It is to be kept in mind that their intention is not to correct what is wrong but to complement what is incomplete. While discussing the radical pluralism as advocated by Panikkar, Paul Knitter observes that "his notion of radical pluralism might lead participants in dialogue to simply delight in diversity without ever really "judging" the differences." To clothe pluralism with a kind of ontological ultimacy, as Panikkar does, can easily create the temptation, in David Tracy's opinion, "to enjoy the pleasure of difference without ever committing oneself to any particular vision of resistance or hope" (p 183-184). Another

criticism leveled against Panikkar is that he has failed to deal with the thorny question of liberation and justice in the Third World countries, which are steeped, in misery and poverty. Pointing out such an inadequacy, Paul Knitter writes, "Panikkar is entirely correct in warning us against universal "theories" of religious pluralism or too facile methods for religious dialogue. And he does well to balance this warning with his proposal that unless there is a shared "cosmic trust" in the value of our differences and the prospects for learning from and cooperating with each other, our conversation will be impossible. Yet I suggest that, by itself, Panikkar's image of cosmic trust is still too general or too mystical. It can be, and needs to be, grounded on and inspired by a shared preferential option for the suffering and the victims of this world (191).

The last article by Panikkar is indeed precise and thought provoking in giving response to the various observations made by the authors. He has accepted with gratitude and humility both praise and criticism. He writes, "The former stimulates me to be worthy of it. The latter offers me the opportunity to pursue the dialogue entering into that difficult but fruitful activity of self-

criticism. By self-critical dialogue I mean activity of the whole person rethinking and re-examining one's own spiritual and intellectual life after having listened carefully to the reception of one's thought in the minds of others (228).

This book on Raimon Panikkar is valuable for its pertinent analysis, enlightened

perspectives and critical observations. It will be helpful not only to understand the importance of interreligious fellowship in the context of religious pluralism, but also to be more committed to the creation of new humanity in the face of fast growing religious fundamentalism and communalism.

**Dr. S. Devaraj**