



January 1990

Book Review: "Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue"

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Recommended Citation

Amaladoss, M. (1990) "Book Review: "Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue"; *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 3, Article 9.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1032>

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all, as anyone who knows Father Bede would certainly anticipate, the direction of his journey is not so much that of the academic as it is of the *guru*, the spiritual guide. Told in another, though not unrelated, context, an amusing story nicely captures the design and the flavor of Father Bede's exposition. It seems that a learned scholar was giving a lecture on the *Gītā* in Sanskrit to an audience whose members were so bored that one by one they all departed, leaving a solitary old man sitting totally enraptured. The lecturer was consoled by the fact that at least one person was appreciative of his erudition, and expressed his gratitude at the end of the discourse. "Oh," said the old man, "I wasn't listening to your talk at all. I saw Krishna in front of you and I was worshipping the Lord." The *Gītā* is to be read in such a way as to enable the reader to experience the indwelling presence of God, and to awaken love for the Lord. To the extent that is possible for this to happen in and through a book, Father Bede has been successful in good measure and God-seekers in all faith traditions cannot but be grateful to him for helping this to happen in the *River of Compassion*.

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Spirituality in Interfaith Dialogue. Edited by Tosh Arai and Wesley Ariarajah. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990. (Also Geneva, WCC, 1989) xi + 103 p.

This is a collection of personal stories shared by Christians from various continents at a WCC seminar on the same theme, held in Kyoto, Japan, in December, 1987. The collection is preceded by a report on and the statement of the seminar.

The narratives make interesting reading. Each one tells us simply how he/she has come into contact with another faith and what this dialogue has done to him/her. Stories cannot be summarized. But one can note some common trends or special points. For everyone it has been a learning experience. All have been enriched by it, while rediscovering their own identity as Christians. At this level of spirituality one does not see the kind of argument that one might hear at an intellectual level of discussion. But one feels one's horizons broadened; one learns new ways of looking at and experiencing God and the world. In every case it has been an experience of growth, through inclusion and integration.

Predictably, most of the encounters have been with Hinduism and Buddhism and at the level of prayer and *sadhana*. Only one speaks about Islam and one about aboriginal religion. Some speak about the need for a common commitment to work for justice. But except for one example from Sri Lanka, where a workers' fellowship bringing together Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Marxists ventures even into common worship inspiring them to a common struggle, the others are not convincing.

One can at best see here a desire to push dialogue in a new direction of preparing for common action for socio-political/religious goals.

It is significant that most start with the experience that current forms of Christianity are inadequate to their needs. One also misses similar testimonies of people of other faiths.

As examples of dialogue in practice at the level of spirituality, narrated in the first person, these testimonies are inspiring and are well worth reading and reflecting upon. Some of the concrete experiments described here may encourage others to similar ventures.

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East-West Dialogues: An Interreligious Encounter. By Satyaraja Dasa Adhikari (Steven Rosen) and Rev. Alvin V. P. Hart. New York: Folk Books, 1989. 105p. \$4.95.

Readers of the Bulletin may be attracted, as I was, by the title of this book. Unfortunately it does not live up to its promise to offer an "interreligious" encounter between Hinduism, represented by a leader in the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, and Christianity represented by an Episcopal Priest. There is a conversation of sorts recorded between its covers; however, in my estimation, there is little reason to consider this exchange an interreligious dialogue.

Instead this book presents a condensed and introductory apologetic of ISKCON theology more reminiscent of the frontal assault on Western sensibilities characterizing the ISKCON of a decade ago. Since then this community has produced some sophisticated and articulate spokesmen, people like Steven J. Gelbertg and William H. Deadwyler, III. I suppose that is why I expected more from Steven Rosen, Minister of Interreligious Affairs for ISKCON's New York chapter and driving force behind this volume.

The major difficulty stems from Rosen's choice of a partner in dialogue. Although conversation with Rev. Alvin Hart clearly serves Rosen's purpose, that purpose is not authentic interreligious dialogue in my estimation. Before I am misunderstood, let me say that Hart's participation in this project is obviously sincere. He comes through these pages as a real gentleman as well as a "gentle man." Unfortunately, his sincerity and openness, manipulated by Rosen's editing (or so it appears from the liberal use of ellipses during Hart's contributions to the conversation), add up to such a flaccid representation of Christianity that it becomes somewhat embarrassing. By the end of the book Hart's contributions to the "dialogue" are reduced to short exclamations, like "This is fascinating," "Yes, please, I do so want to hear more," and "My head is swimming. Does it go deeper?" punctuating Rosen's lecture on the true nature of Jesus, for example. (According to Rosen, Jesus is comparable to Vasudeva Datta, an incarnation of the perfect devotee; certainly not an incarnation of the divine.)