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Book Review: "The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission"

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books and hundreds of articles. Now the living matrix of his thought has been reconstructed with care, skill, and insight by Shirley Du Boulay in *Beyond the Darkness*. This book is already an indispensable

resource for knowing Bede Griffiths.

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The Common Task: A Theology of Christian Mission. Thomas Thangaraj. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999, 167 pp.

THIS BOOK UNDERTAKES an ambitious project with remarkable success: rethinking Christian mission "from the ground up" in the light of religious diversity. Thangaraj begins by taking up the new postcolonial, postmodern, and interreligious context for missiology. He then offers a radical proposal: Christian deliberation about mission must be genuinely public reflection which includes persons from other religions. Such inclusiveness is possible, Thangaraj argues, only if the conversation about mission does not begin with narrowly intra-Christian assumptions regarding the nature of God or the authority of Biblical texts. Instead, he proposes that all persons enter into a conversation about "*missio humanitatis*". Mission, he maintains, must first be understood as "the common task" of all humanity.

Drawing on Gordon Kaufman's understanding of humans as "self-conscious biohistorical beings", Thangaraj maintains that human beings are called to a shared mission of "responsibility, solidarity and mutuality" (58). He derives this conception of mission without appealing to any specifically Christian presuppositions in order to formulate a "heuristic device" which can function as a framework for interreligious dialogue on mission. Thangaraj's understanding of mutuality is particularly noteworthy. Mutuality, for Thangaraj, means that, "[T]here are no longer 'missioners' and the 'missioned.' All are missionaries in a relationship of mutuality" (57).

The *missio ecclesiae*, on the contrary, is shaped by a particular theological understanding of the mission of God as disclosed in the mission of Jesus. The mission of the

Church is "cruciform responsibility, liberative solidarity, and eschatological mutuality" (64). Thangaraj goes on to stress that eschatological mutuality looks beyond the mission of Jesus and is rooted in a confidence in the Holy Spirit's presence in other religious communities. "Our being-sent-ness involves listening to other religious viewpoints, learning from other religious and secular traditions, and mutually enriching one another toward the eschaton" (75).

For Thangaraj, this emphasis on mutuality does not rule out the need for evangelism. Furthermore, he acknowledges that evangelism may lead persons to new religious loyalties. However, Christian witness can also lead to other kinds of transformation. Ram Mohan Roy, Gandhi, and others are presented as examples of persons deeply influenced by Christianity without undergoing conversion. Most importantly, Thangaraj contends that if witness is to be a genuine expression of eschatological mutuality, then Christians must also be open to the possibility of being transformed by the witness of other religious traditions.

Thangaraj's radical openness clearly distinguishes his theology from most previous reflection on Christian mission. He maintains a commitment to evangelism and conversion without falling prey either to triumphalism or "post-Christian guilt" which sees mission as an incorrigibly colonial enterprise. It is precisely this balance that makes Thangaraj's work an inviting resource for anyone interested in thinking mission through in the context of recent conversion-related violence in India.

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What remains unclear are Thangaraj's expectations regarding the character of Christian mission *after* it has been transformed through interreligious exchange. Will not eschatological mutuality require Christians to rethink matters of fundamental theology? If Christian thinking about God will be transformed through dialogue, can

that theological shift lead to further, more exhaustive reconfigurations of Christian mission? Thangaraj leaves us eager to hear more about the implications of his creative and ground-breaking theological work.

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Meeting Rivers: A Report on Transnational and National Cultural Processes. Lennart Svensson (Ed.). Lund: Lund University Press, 1997, 149 pp.

THIS EDITED VOLUME is the fifth in the *Lund Studies in Education* Series. The interest of the authors of the eight chapters in this volume is in cultural flows on two levels: the transnational flows between northern Europe and India, and flows between regions or cultures within India. While this is the purported theme of the volume, they address elements of culture from their own expertise and interests. In doing so the authors recognize that cultural flows do not move in one direction only, but that there is a mutuality of influence with elements of different cultures influencing each other. Thus the title of the study, *Meeting Rivers*, a metaphor meant to capture the ideas of flow and mutual influence.

The authors recognize that culture is a complex phenomenon, defying easy definition. The emphasis in the chapters is, therefore, not on the flow of culture as a whole, but on specific cultural elements, in this case, language, education, and religion. In his contribution on "Global and Intercultural Relations", D. P. Pattanayak uses the interaction between English and Indian languages to argue for a healthy or fruitful transnationalism. He sees the key to unity as the recognition of different entities, not homogenization, as some would have it.

Giving recognition to different identities, respecting the differing is the only way to ensure national cohesion in a multilingual pluricultural country. It is neither uniformization nor homogenization, but structural incorporation of elements which leads to harmonious

relation among them" (28).

Jennifer Bayer supports Pattanayak's view in her article on "Language and Culture in India". Her emphasis is on complementarity between the use of English and regional languages. She argues that the interaction is enriching for those who specialize in both their own regional languages and English, but not enriching for those who specialize in English alone.

Birgit Rodhe in her contribution on "Indian Policies on Education" attempts both an overview of educational policies since independence as well as a brief commentary on the current situation in India. The basis for her treatment is the directive principle of the Constitution, which holds out the elusive goal of education for all children till the age of fourteen. The author points out that this goal has proved to be an elusive one and asks why. She argues that it is not so much poverty or lack of resources, but belief systems that continue to support discrimination against the poor or lower classes in education. She suggests that the goal of universal education for children can only be met through a creative mix of traditional and modern pedagogy, and more varied schools which would include aspects of the modern, private, and indigenous systems.

Two chapters deal with religion, Birgit and Sten Rodhe's treatment of "The Lingayats of Karnataka" and Sten Rodhe's chapter on "The Encounter of Christianity and Hinduism". The treatment of the Lingayats is presented as an example of