



January 2003

Book Review: "Pilgrim Without Boundaries"

Anand Amaladass

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/jhcs>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Amaladass, Anand (2003) "Book Review: "Pilgrim Without Boundaries";" *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 16, Article 18.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1307>

The *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* is a publication of the [Society for Hindu-Christian Studies](#). The digital version is made available by Digital Commons @ Butler University. For questions about the Journal or the Society, please contact cbauman@butler.edu. For more information about Digital Commons @ Butler University, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

It is important to review a book such as this, because with the flaws I have mentioned, it is nonetheless an important book in evangelical literature. I expect it to find much acclaim in evangelical circles, but I would suggest that any such future manuscripts heading for publication should first pass the test of an anonymous Hindu reviewer so that authentic Hindu teaching might be more accurately and fairly presented.

Bradley Malkovsky
University of Notre Dame

Pilgrim Without Boundaries. Ravi Ravindra. Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2002, x+78 pp.

AT A TIME when every community tries to define and guard its boundaries in search of security and as a result when the people seem to live in a war horizon, there are also stray voices heard to cross the boundaries. Ravi Ravindra with his cross-cultural outlook has authored several books. A physicist by training, born and brought up as a Hindu and married into Christianity and Western culture Ravi seems to move with ease crossing the borders. His earlier works bear witness to this aspect of cross-cultural orientation: *Science and the Sacred: Eternal Wisdom in a Changing World* (1991), and *The Yoga of the Christ: A Hindu Reflection on the Gospel of John* (1990).

In fact this publication under review is the result of the De Nobili Endowment lectures he delivered in Satya Nilayam, Chennai, which he re-worked later as a monograph to be published in the Satya Nilayam Endowment Lectures Series. In brief, this work with three chapters sums up his basic attitude to the other - to other traditions and religions.

The author does not wish to engage in interfaith dialogue, which may be at best a preliminary stage of human dialogue and which could even be an impediment for deeper understanding; but he would like to

1. Bradley Malkovsky, "The Personhood of Sankara's *Para Brahman*," *The Journal of Religion* 77 (1997):541-562. Tennent also makes no mention of the work of Francis X. Clooney, another Christian, on Advaita.

engage in an "inter-pilgrim dialogue", which he explains as pilgrim being a student, a searcher with no fixed position, not quite satisfied with anything except the Infinite. (p.62)

On the one hand, he tries to see the common elements between the Asian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism and the Judeo-Christian traditions. On the other hand, he highlights the divergence expressed in the type of vocabulary these religions use. The key words in the Judeo-Christian corpus of redemptive literature, according to him, are sin, faith, prayer, revelation, grace, and salvation. All these words sound rather odd, he says, in the Hindu-Buddhist context, the hub of which is indicated by other words and ideas: *avidya-maya* (ignorance-illusion), *jnana* (knowledge), *sadhana-yoga* (practice-integration), *samadhi* (meditation-synthesis), *bodhi* (illumination) and *moksa* (liberation), (p. 50). In the Hindu-Buddhist tradition there are gurus, *buddhas*, spiritual teachers, but there are no saviours, since in this worldview each one has to work out his own salvation. Of course he admits that one can find parallels in all traditions. But what he wants to highlight is the striking emphasis in these worldviews.

70 Book Reviews/Briefly Noted

Another observation of his is worth considering:

That we are Hindus or Muslims or Christians largely depends on where we happened to have been born. It is extremely difficult to believe that truth suddenly changes across a border defined by a river or a mountain range corresponding to political boundaries of past or present empires."(p.67).

He appropriately quotes the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: "a time will come that you will worship neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in truth and spirit".

The author might sound provocative for some, but he is certainly persuasive without becoming polemic. What is fascinating is his candid and personal approach to the question of being cross-cultural, since he is by birth and training exposed to different traditions and cultures and he lives it himself feeling at home in this position without being threatened.

All the same the readers might also be puzzled by this pilgrim approach to life not having any fixed position. There are instances of sages, whom Ravi himself refers to, who were searchers after the Infinite. Such saints lived outside the structured traditions and inspired numerous visitors who became their disciples. One does not enter into "dialogue" with such masters, since they have reached another level, a higher level. One can only become their disciple. But these disciples created traditions around them based on their master, and normally we have to deal with such people in dialogue.

Being cross-cultural or crossing the borders does not mean that the boundaries are removed or the boundaries will disappear at any time. It is only one's ability to cross the boundaries, to be able to see things across the border with openness, not being threatened by the other, that is

called for. It is also significant to observe that people who have crossed the borders, who have a universal outlook, have developed a spiritual vision, which includes also a social security, inheriting a multicultural background, having access to diverse formations. Only such people could afford to engage in intercultural or interfaith dialogue. When more people have access to such a formation, the situation in the world should change. Does that mean training programmes in the centres of learning should include providing such possibilities? This has various socio-political implications which need not be discussed here.

But certainly Ravi's approach of inter-pilgrim dialogue challenges the well-meaning people of all traditions, and hence this publication merits the attention of the readers who are engaged in dialogue at various levels.

Anand Amaladass
Chennai

Briefly Noted

Imagining Karma: Ethical Transformation in Amerindian, Buddhist, and Greek Rebirth. Gananath Obeyesekere. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, xxix+448pp.

Written by a Theravada Buddhist Anthropologist, this book's thesis is that in spite of differences regarding rebirth in India, Greek and small societies there are underlying structural similarities based on a shared belief in reincarnation which has a common elementary structure and ethical implications. Written for Anthropologists and Historians of Religion, the book seeks to show that ethical ideas of rebirth are not exclusive to India. The aim is to demonstrate to modern Western thinkers, who find the Indic notions of *karma* and rebirth to be radically different, evidence that these notions, far from being totally