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## Book Review: "Dialogue in Action: Essays in Honour of Johannes Aagaard"

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## Book Reviews

*Krishna and Christ.* Dr. Ishanana Vempeny, S.J. Gujarat Sahityaprakash, Anand, 1988, pp. 538, Rs.110/-.

It is a most gratifying sign of the times that scholars pledged to the propagation of their personal faith in the Catholic form of Christianity have felt impelled by a reverent interest in the scriptures that have inspired the Hindu mind through the ages. Gone are the days when the Hindu was a heathen to be rescued from hell fire. Gone indeed are the days when missionary enterprise in the field of education and health was motivated by the passion to recruit the lower classes at least of Hindu society into the fold. That political and economic motives mingled with nobler motives is doubtless a fact of history. But the stories of the great martyrs, the great apostles of the faith, the story of St. Thomas "gospelling India", of St. Xavier, Japan, and Britto falling a victim to brute force, tell another side of the great story of the propagation of the faith. They did what they did for God and Jesus and were ready to die in the process.

De Nobili was perhaps the first to realize that Christianity must conquer the mind of the educated upper class and he strove hard to achieve this. Dom Griffiths has sought through intense brooding on the scriptures of India to effect a greater understanding of the Hindu mind, especially of Vedanta. This is a new and altogether welcome trend. The scriptures of all the religions, even of the nearest and most animistic are a record of man's striving to come to terms with himself and with the universe around. *Kasmāi Devaya Havisha Videma*, the question posed thousands of years ago is not a Hindu question but man's question. And while many answers have emerged affording a measure of satisfaction to large sections of human beings, there seems to be little evidence of a final answer.

Dr. Ishanand has taken up the Bhagavadgita for what he calls a dialogal study, alongside of the New Testament. This in itself is a matter for thankfulness for it is an implicit, yet, even an explicit recognition that scriptures of all the religions of the world, of the most ancient and the most modern, are the scriptures of Man, imposing on man the duty, the ineffable responsibility of devout study of them. The New Testament with its Sermon on the Mount and its portrait of the compassionate Christ crucified on the Cross has evoked devotion almost comparable with that shown to the Gita by truly devout Hindus like Gandhiji, Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna Paramahansa

and others. If in any quarter there has been some reluctance to study the New Testament or some distaste for it, the blame must squarely rest on those committed to the propagation of its teaching, both native and foreign who combined with them necessary zeal a wholly improper technique of contemptuous relegation of ancient faiths and cultures. Religion needs not aggressive, salesmanship, or advertizing techniques but example of lives lived in danger, amid the loneliest and the lost of mankind, bringing to these latter something of the solaces of the spirit in their seemingly endless agony and misery.

Dr. Ishanand seems seized of the principal issues relating to the text of the Gita, of its relationship to the Mahabharata and so forth. The colophon of every chapter refers to it as an Upanisad, as a Yoga sastra, as Brahma Vidya adding that it is *Krishna Arjuna Samvada*. This last term really implies that it is a *Jiva-Iswara samvada*, a dialogue between Man and God. It is clear that it is the record of a profound meditation on the meaning of life. The historical occasion of the Mahabharata was on the *dharma kshetra*, *kurukshetra* is not as important to a true student of the scripture as the portrait it affords of a compassionate divine Acharya resolving the doubts of his sishya employing the well-known techniques of philosophic debate in India, of resolving the disciple's doubt by the use of rational argument. Death is not the thing to be feared. Dharma—in the sense of Asrama duties—may itself be surrendered and one could throw oneself absolutely on the mercy of God. Bodies are like clothes, getting worn out in time. The soul is immortal. The world around is but a phase in time. God will emerge, from time to time to establish dharma, righteousness.

Dr. Ishanand has a sound grasp of the argument of this great scripture. If a fault is to be found in his approach to this scripture, it is in his choice of the flute to symbolize Krishna. The fluting Krishna, the Muralidhara is the Hero of the Srimad Bhagavatam, where too the *gopis*, are symbols of the jivas seeking ecstatic communion with their Lord and God! The proper symbol would be the chariot; Krishna is Parthasarathi, the great charioteer of Partha, descended of the Prithus, and shrinking in imperfect comprehension of dharma from his duty to be discharged without thought of reward or benefit.

Dr. Ishanand's account of the New Testament is, naturally enough, fuller and more authoritative. To one reader at least the teaching of Christ can be regarded as

complete when he comes across the affirmation, the Kingdom of God is within you, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, consider the lilies of the field, they neither sow nor do they spin! This last is a firm rejection of material progress.

Both the Gita and the New Testament proclaim the call to the life lived in terms of the Spirit. Civilization itself is the triumph of the spirit in Man. Dr. Ishanand has striven hard and, on the whole, fruitfully to bring out the essential harmony of the teachings of the two great scriptures and the need to bring them into our dealings with the problems of the modern Kurukshetra—fast becoming an *adharna Kshetra*—that is this world.

The following minor points may be jotted down for purpose of correction in a future edition of this valuable book:

- 1) On p. 5, Max Muller, Ananda Coomarasamy and Radhakrishnan are referred to, among others, as indifferent contemptuous, or even hostile to religion and...unqualified to have access to the inner sanctuary of religion. What evidence does Dr. Ishanand have of these scholars' indifference, etc.?
- 2) Again, "male criteria" and "female criteria"—of human values. Do criteria also suffer from gender?
- 3) On p. 7, Dr. Ishanand draws attention to the source of Islamic nationalism. "My Islam is my mother!" This kind of commitment is the root of religious strife.
- 4) Dr. Ishanand could have emphasized more clearly the current fact that the real conflict is not between Religion A and Religion B but between true religion and bogus substitutes, including militant materialism.
- 5) Dr. Ishanand, it is satisfying to note, takes account of Sri. Sankara Statement that *Srutii* which contradicts experience is worthy of no regard.
- 6) Scriptures should emphasize experience and not fact. Fact bound religion, as Arnold pointed out, is doomed.
- 7) *Christ Value* is ineffably more important than Christ-fact.

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*Dialogue in Action: Essays in honour of Johannes Aagaard.* Ed. by Lars Thunberg, Moti Lal Pandit, Carl Vilh. Fogh.—Hansen. Prajna Publications, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 367.

*Dialogue in Action* is a felicitation volume in honour of Johannes Aagaard,

the well-known Danish missiologist. There are eighteen contributions in this volume by different scholars. First, three articles highlight Johannes Aagaard as a missiologist. Four articles deal with Indo-logical themes of classical Hinduism. There are two contributions taking us into the Islamic world-view. The rest of the book treats the missiological issues such as Church and World, St. Paul's mission to the Greeks, the role of the apologetic in Christian theology, inculturation and so on. The editors could have classified the articles better thereby indicating the different dimensions of the Dialogue in Action.

Lars Thunberg presents briefly Johannes Aagaard the missiologist surveying his contribution to the missiology of recent times. He underlines mainly Aagaard's understanding of the relationship between Church and mission giving a summary of JAA's Seven Thesis on Mission. Svend C. Boysen highlights the trademark of the work of JAA, which is made up of mission-dialogue in confrontation, personal commitment and practical application. Especially JAA wants to promote dialogue of reconciliation between those who lean towards an inclusivistic approach and those with an exclusivistic attitude "in order to fight the devastating sectarianism which constitutes a decisive threat to mission theology" (p. 39).

*Dialogue in Action* is by and large the underlying thread that brings together all the contributions in this volume. But the understanding of dialogue and the theological perspective vary. The use of the term dialogue found in all the articles does not warrant a commonly agreed perspective in the book. Lissi Rasmussen argues forcefully for diapraxis; otherwise dialogue would be an academic exercise. Some are apprehensive about entering into dialogue with various religious movements since dialogue will water down the orthodoxy of one's religious tradition. One can perceive this trend in Friedrich W. Haack's contribution on Apologetic. In a similar vein but in anthropological framework Stephen Fuchs points out the dangers and limitations of inculturation, since that will not help very much perhaps to preach the Christian faith in some cultures like that of India and China. Sometimes dialogue could take the form of inculturation depending on the underlying motive of those engaged in it.

The contribution on Indological themes has to be taken in a broader sense of dialogue in action. In an inquiry into the Upanisadic prayer Gispert-Sauch brings in his exegetical skill to highlight the

meaning and significance of this prayer: *asatoma sad gamaya*. With copious footnotes he tries to establish the original context in which this hymn was used and provides a fund of information on ritual tradition with a scholarly precision. Moti Lal Pandit analyses Patanjali's yoga text in the context of its goal—final freedom. For the beginners he provides a clear exposé of the yoga in its philosophical context with reference to its original sources. J.V. Perreira traces the factors leading to the religio-nationalist movements in India and calls for a dialogue and ecumenism among constructive forces in India.

This felicitation volume is a fitting tribute to a scholar like Johannes Aagaard and a publication of this type draws the attention of the public to the man on focus and also becomes an occasion for further creative contribution from different scholars. A select bibliography of Johannes Aagaard at the end of the book speaks volumes for his dedication and scholarship.

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*Mission Today—Reflection from an Ignatian Perspective*. Michael Amaladoss, S. J. Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, Rome, 1988, pp. 171.

Mission Today is a vital and a central concern to anyone who sees this universe as one community. It is not exclusive to those engaged in public service alone but to any ordinary human being who understands his surroundings and acts meaningfully.

In a society it is very difficult to adapt oneself to changing conditions. It requires a discerning spirit to reflect spiritually and theologially on the state of flux to maintain a smooth rhythm of life.

Dr. Michael Amaladoss, one of the Assistants and Counsellor to the Jesuit General, a noted theologian and Liturgist, describes this Mission constantly guided by the inspirations of St. Ignatius of Loyola. He employs a hermeneutical approach by rereading the texts of Ignatius like the spiritual Exercises, the Autobiography, the Diary and the Constitutions in the context of today.

The Book contains six chapters. The first describes the contemporary challenges and the next deals with the response to these challenges in the light of St. Ignatius. The rest of the chapters are divided each into two sections. The first describes the nature of the challenge and the second examines the Ignatian understanding relevant to that challenge. In other words, the author has followed a "Context-text"

methodology to bring meaning to both the Texts and the Context.

The book opens with the contemporary challenges in Mission, particularly of evangelization in a multifarious religious and cultural context. The Mission of the Church in such a context is to advance human and civic culture. In this process Culture or Religion does not become a means but a reality in which the seed of the Gospel fructifies. In it justice and dialogue works are never compartmental but mutually embracing dimensions of Mission.

The author explicitly mentions three types of challenges in the present World-Context, viz., the challenge to believe, the challenge to dialogue and the challenge to do justice. These, again, stem from a world of despair, conflicts and oppression.

First of all the Mission is to meet the challenge of secularizing, materialistic tendency promoted and safeguarded by Science and Technology, Industrialization and Urbanization. To free oneself from this clutch some prefer drugs and others go to the other extreme of becoming fundamentalists. But they do not prove an adequate response to the crisis. Here the Ignatian insight would be useful. He sees God in all things and in fact Science, etc. are God's gifts to humanity. One need not run away from or shun God's creation. The famous rule of "tantum-quantum" (so much—that much) inspires him to handle the situation.

Secondly the Mission is to meet the challenge of dialoguing with other faiths and ideologies. It is both a personal and an institutional encounter which reveals something new leading to newer forms of relationship. Authentic dialogue consists in a search in the context of the other. It should also preserve an autonomy of both which may be manifested in witnessing and proclaiming. In countries like India, where there are divergent religious forms, dialogue becomes more intriguing and complex. It requires a background knowledge of the religious and philosophical traditions of the other and an attitude of humble acceptance that one's own traditions and faith expressions are limited and conditioned in many ways.

While reflecting on the significance of dialogue Dr. Amaladoss points out that no religion can claim monopoly of God's action in this world. His argument is supported by the insights of Ignatius. The Ignatian use of mediators in and through whom God works is an important insight in the present context. God makes use of persons. His revelations are communicated to persons and are manifested in the forms of Scriptures, Sacraments, the