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# Book Review: "East-West Dialogues: An Interreligious Encounter"

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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.)

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It is clear who is guru and who is disciple in this book and that is the problem. The conversation never succeeds in becoming a meeting of equals, entering into genuine disagreement and yet maintaining sensitivity and respect for each other. For a long time, Hinduism has suffered Christianity's colonial and neo-colonial arrogance. This book shows that arrogance, when transposed to the Hindu side, takes us no closer to authentic dialogue.

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