

REVIEWS

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Christ the Guru: A Vedantic Key to the Gospels

Muni Narayana Prasad

D K Printworld, Veda Sri, F 395, Sudarshan Park, New Delhi 110015.
Website: www.dkprintworld.com.
2014. xi + 456 pp. ₹ 1200. HB. ISBN
9788124607503.

The Rig Veda says: 'One exists, sages call it by many names', and Hinduism celebrates this spirit of abundance of spiritual roads to attain liberation. Muni Narayana Prasad is a sage who tries to understand the Jesus-event through Vedantic hermeneutics. The book under consideration is a work of genius but will not be accepted by orthodox Christians. In a long discussion regarding interreligious dialogue vis-a-vis the Hindu position on tolerance and equality of the major religions of the world with me, the abbot of a Benedictine monastery in the US wrote: 'We believe that God incarnate has come into the world, not just as another incarnation as would be understood in Hinduism, but in a unique way. That person, Jesus, laid down some principles that were not simply one path among others, but really applicable to all men. So we see them as having a kind of absolute quality as being directly inspired by God, the very words of a Divine Person, who is also a perfect man. To say that all spiritual roads, all religions lead to the same destination seems interesting, but we would say that this is relativism, even syncretism. Of course, many things in life are only relative. Many ideas of Catholic theologians are just interesting opinions, it is true, but, nevertheless, we do not accept the idea the Christianity is just one possible road ad [*sic*] nothing more.'

Therein lies the problem of a book like *Christ the Guru*. It is one of the best books today on a synoptic study of the Gospels and Vedanta but it will not be acceptable as a work of true scholarship by the Christians. For that matter, any book that says

that all paths to Brahman qua God are equally valid and are scholarly will be rejected by Semitic theologians as being unorthodox and lacking in rigour. The logic is that if one were truly rigorous then one would know that Hinduism errs by being relativistic; both morally and spiritually! In that same email to me, the abbot further wrote: 'The Church is the royal road to Truth, despite the weakness of so many bad Christians. This belief, Christian Faith, seems to be a sort of madness when seen from the standpoint of one who does not have the Catholic Christian faith, but there is no contradiction in the affirmation of Catholic faith. We can show that it is not contradictory (and therefore false). We cannot prove by reason the truths of the Faith, however. This only comes with a special grace of God.'

Muni Narayana Prasad writes in his *Introduction*: 'When the great religions of the world are carefully studied, it becomes obvious that all seek to teach a living wisdom that brings supreme happiness. All religions then aim to help humanity attain happiness, rendering life in the here and now peaceful. As such, the differences existing between religions would then be understood to belong to what is inessential and not universal. ... the goal of all religions is one alone—the Happiness of Man. ... it becomes apparent that what Jesus revealed is none other than the same wisdom or supreme happiness of the Vedanta philosophy' (3).

Apparently Muni Narayana Prasad does not have any 'special grace of God' and errs by thinking all religions aim for and lead to human sanctification and happiness! Therefore this book needs to be reviewed solely from a Vedantic standpoint and should be read with deep faith for the Hindu tradition which allows such a work to be written by a stalwart of the Hindu faith community. Since if one were a Christian and wrote a book on the Hindu scriptures in the same spirit as Muni Narayana Prasad, then one would meet the fates of the likes of the Jesuits, Anthony de Mello and Jacques

Dupuis. The Rig Vedic dictum is what the Hindus believe in and it has little to do with faith; it has everything to do with tolerance and cosmopolitanism and Emmanuel Levinas's concept of hospitality. This book is about hospitality and cosmopolitanism. The *Chhandogya Upanishad's* declaration, 'Everything is Brahman', is the title of a section of this book. It is natural that Hindu sages will see the Godhead everywhere and not be stuck within the confines of bigotry. Before Muni Narayana Prasad, Fathers Johannes and Dandoy had done similar synoptical cultural work, but all those two Jesuits could show was that Vedanta leads to Jesus Christ. So their conclusion was that if one were a true Vedantist, she or he will become a Christian! Muni Narayana Prasad's book is a corrective to such views expressed in the influential *Why I am not a Hindu* by Kancha Ilaiah and the concept of the 'anonymous Christian' by admittedly the best twentieth century Catholic theologian Karl Rahner S.J.

The book under review is exhaustive in its deep reading of the Gospels. Part one is thematic and should be read by all including Christian seminarians for understanding the Beatitudes. It is truly a tour de force and I can testify of its being more lucid and to the point than many Christian commentaries on the Bible I have read. Then Muni Narayana Prasad's erudition shows forth—he analyses each of the *Gospels* minutely. It will suffice to discuss his interrogation of the *Gospel of Glory*, otherwise known as the *Gospel According to John*, he connects John 14:6 with the *Taittiriya Upanishad's* third chapter. He concludes that in John 14:6, Jesus speaks of the Vedantic truths. The *Gospel of Glory* is considered by biblical scholars to be one of the toughest biblical books to study, let alone write about. The author has not only studied the *Gospel of Glory* thoroughly but he performs the necessary Hindu theological work of connecting everything he reads in the Bible with that of the Hindu scriptures. This book proves that being caught up in dogma is a dangerous ideological position and reaffirms the tenets of the Sanatana Dharma. Indeed all religions lead to God.

This book should be compulsory reading not only in religious studies' syllabi globally but within the domains of professional philosophy. More importantly it should be available in Christian

seminaries as part of the compulsory books on biblical interpretation. It would be an injustice to call this beautifully typeset book with an essential glossary of Vedantic terms at the end, a work of Indology or Indian Studies. It is rather in the tradition of Christian Studies or Christology. Unless one studies this book in a seminary, one would have not studied Christology. It complements the historical Jesus Movement within Christianity and should be given the same importance as John P Meier's *A Marginal Jew* series. I have not recently come across a better work on Christology than the book under review.

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Make Me a Man: Message of Swami Vivekananda

T S Avinashilingam

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya,
SRKV Post, Periyanaickenpalayam,
Coimbatore 641 020. Website: www.srkv.org. 2014. xv + 212 pp. ₹ 100. PB.

The author of this book is a celebrated pioneer of giving tangible shape to the 'man-making' dynamic ideas of Swami Vivekananda. As Swami Abhiramananda, the secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Combatore says, Avinashilingam was 'an eminent educationist and an inspired freedom fighter [and] dedicated his entire life for the noble cause of providing education as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda' (vii). Moreover, this dynamic educationist was also blessed by Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

No wonder that 'Ayya' emerged as the architect of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore which is now one of the most active educational centres.

This book shows the enormous range of his ideas which he absorbed and gave a concrete shape. The most crucial were Swamiji and Gandhi. It consists of eighteen essays of varied hues but all centered on ethics and values for youth, as exemplified in the lives of pioneering achievers such as Edison, Swamiji, Acharya Shankara, and other stalwarts.

All the essays evoke the spirit of dynamic, man-making education as it gets manifested in