

La Bible et le Veda comme parole de Dieu: Un essai en théologie comparée. By George CHEMPARATHY. Vienna: De Nobili Research Library, Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, 2010. Pp. xxviii-373. N.p. ISBN 978-3-200-02036-8.

This is a solid work of comparative theology, or theology of religions, by a very professional Indian scholar unfortunately little known in India, because he spent his academic life mostly as Professor of Indian Philosophy at the University of Utrecht, Holland. The book is a new version, in French, of a thesis for a Doctorate in theology presented in English at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve around the 1980s, (X) entitled *Veda and Bible as "Word of God."* *An Essay in Theological Comparison*, directed by Prof. Julien Ries. (To my knowledge the English

thesis is available only in cyclostyled form.) But there is an enormous difference between the thesis presented thirty years ago and the French work just published in a most elegant hard-cover form. The improvement is seen not only in the theological sections but also in the early sections giving more factual information. Some dated information is dropped and the footnotes and bibliography are updated, perhaps not so much as one may have wished. But I spotted at least one reference to a publication of 2000.

Prof. Champarathy is well known for his scholarly work on the Nyaya tradition. He has many books and articles on the various aspects of Indian logic. He does mention also the alternative view of the Purva Mimamsa, but generally presents it as a foil to the Nyaya view which to him makes more sense. The first part of the book in six chapters presents the view of the authority and paternity of the Vedas according to various Indian theological schools. The second part is much more elaborate, not only in respect to the first part, but also in comparison with the English thesis. Here in eleven chapters the author presents a theological comparison between the Veda and the Bible, rather focused on the Old Testament, for the New Testament so exclusively concerned with the person and message of Jesus Christ, seems to be too remote from the contents of the Veda to provide matter for easy comparison.

An introductory chapter to this first part (ch. 7) deals with the problems of a theological comparison between two religious traditions. The author recognizes the limits of studying only

the Vedas among many more or less normative sacred texts of the whole Hindu tradition. He is aware that his is a "hetero-interpretation," i.e., an interpretation by someone outside the tradition. He admits that the primary interpreters of a tradition are and must be the insiders of that tradition, but suggests that they are not the *only* legitimate interpreters. There is place for interpretations by 'outsiders', otherwise no 'dialogue' of religions is possible. A Hindu can likewise make an analysis of the Bible from the categories of the Hindu traditions, provided he is fair to what the Bible is and says. So must the Christian interpreter be. As for the charge of "katachronism" labelled by Panikkar against submitting an ancient text to modern logic, the author thinks that the Nyaya, with which he mostly deals, argues primarily at the philosophical level and as such can be studied from the perspective of the universally valid principles of logic.

After this introduction, Prof. Champarathy devotes three chapters (8-10) to an analysis of "inspiration" in the Bible and in the Vedas, with a presentation of recent theological discussions on the matter. The following three chapters (11-13) study the question of 'inerrancy', or rather the 'truth' in both scriptures, while the three following chapters (14-16) study the 'canonicity' of the scriptures. The final chapter (17), an "epilogue" poses the theological question, "Is the Veda the Word of God as the Bible is?" The concluding paragraph says this: "At the end of our comparative study of the Bible and the Veda as word of God we come to the following conclusion. The Bible for the Christians, and the Vedas for the Hindu thinkers of the Nyaya-

Vaisesika tradition, are both said to be 'words of God'. However, alongside striking similarities between the two sacred Scriptures, our study makes us see profound theological differences between the Christian and the Hindu understandings of their own Scriptures as word of God. A better acquaintance with the Veda as word of God will help us, we hope, come to a greater appreciation of the Veda as the sacred Scripture of the Hindus" (344). We note that the especially important root of the theological difference is fact that the Bible is seen not only as 'word of God' but as 'word of God in human words', which narrows the false door towards literalism and fundamentalism.

This is a very honest and profound scholarly study. It is comparative, analytical, based on original texts and done with humility and sensitivity to the many views found in both traditions, though perhaps the Mimamsa view does not figure as much as it should. The author is aware of the work done in India on the issues involved and the reflection on the inspiration of the Bible in Vatican Council II and later theology. The author wisely drops from this edition the appendix of the English thesis (pp. 226-231) about the universalistic views of Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) on the inspiration of the Veda, influenced by the philosophies of F. Schleiermacher, R. Otto and F. Max Müller.

The book is recommended to scholars and students of Indian theology and of Hinduism.

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