

Gerald Braun gives a very good idea of how development policy and the North-South Conflict are interrelated. The fact that he is sometimes not unbiased in his analysis stimulates a silent but lively discussion between author and reader. The book offers the opportunity of either getting the essential information quickly by reading the main text only or of going into more detail by studying the numerous and very interesting original texts inserted wherever necessary.

*Wolfgang Veit*

**John D'Arcy May:** *Meaning, Consensus and Dialogue in Buddhist-Christian Communication. A Study in the Construction of Meaning.* (Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums, Bd. 31). Bern: Peter Lang, 1984. XI, 348 p. SFr 59.-

There are books that must be read from the first page to the last as with the detective novel; others one must read like an encyclopaedia; a third category you have to read from the end (and here I am referring neither to Arabic books nor to the bad habit of first taking a look at the bibliography in order to evaluate a publication according to the works cited there). What I mean is that one gets the idea from the conclusion, so one can now read the book with a new understanding from the beginning. May's book seems to me to belong to this third category. One should first read the preliminary notes, then the table of contents and the introduction and afterwards part III. If you have then understood the problem you should read the book from the beginning to the end. A prospective reader is of course under no compulsion to read the book in the order I have suggested, but reading it is a must for anyone engaged in the problems of dialogue between 'world religions'.

I think the present study is the most exhaustive on this subject. The author remarks that "the dialogue between 'world religions' has had rather a bad press in European academic circles" (p. 245); and from the beginning "there have been tensions between those wishing to uphold the standards of 'objective' scholarship and the idealists enthusiastically working for pan-religious harmony" (*ibid.*).

The reason for treating the problem of dialogue is "because it's there" (p. IV). The author who is experienced in this field intended his publication for English-speaking Buddhists and Christians. Both Buddhism and Christianity are all-embracing world-views and "each of them constitutes an autonomous and self-sufficient 'world of meaning' within which people have succeeded in living their lives for generations" (p. 256) and "in terms of what each states about the nature of the world and human destiny they are as radically different as any two comprehen-

sive accounts of reality could be" (p. 3). Such systems "cannot simply be set off against one another in terms of truth" (p. 255). So the problem of comparative hermeneutics is left unanswered: is there some kind of neutral ground "from which the conflicting claims of religions and cultures in dialogue ... could conceivably be adjudicated?" (p. 255) and the answer has to be no.

The study does not practise dialogue but investigates "its practical conditions and theoretical presuppositions" (p. IV). The author who has written several studies on this subject presents an extensive study on the possibilities of dialogue; and if one asks whether he is adequate to the task, one must answer in the affirmative.

After the introduction "Of Talk and Texts", in which the author describes the linguistic method, he discusses the problem in three parts:

Part I: "Meaning" treats the construction of meaning in early Buddhist and Christian communities.

Part II: "Consensus" treats the construction of meaning as basis of life in society.

Part III: "Dialogue" treats the construction of meaning in Buddhist-Christian communication.

The confronting of individuals and whole societies and cultures "with questions touching the existence of the world and the purpose of life" (p. 2) generates meaning. The construction of meaning is therefore the answer they offer to these questions, and on this basis "life in society becomes both possible and plausible" (p. 2).

The investigation is based on several key texts both Buddhist and Christian, in order to show the 'origin' and the development of internal differentiation and historical interaction with other traditions. This builds "the immanent hermeneutic or the norms and methods of self-interpretation peculiar to each tradition" (p. 305) and guarantees the identity of the social group. So the problem of practising dialogue has its roots "in the primordial constitution of each tradition as an autonomous 'community of meaning', viable as a social entity and ... sufficient unto itself as an affirmation of ultimate truth" (p. 309). Neither is there a neutral ground from which systems in the above-mentioned sense could be criticized, as phenomenology for instance makes us believe, nor can the circle of doctrinal differences be broken through. So "the closed circle of self-affirmation and mutual repudiation can best be broken, initially at least, by the search for action-consensus or cooperation in practical affairs" (p. 309).

What I have here only roughly sketched in order to give an idea of the content and problems of this investigation, is in fact a profound and detailed study for which all interested in the subject will be most grateful.

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