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Christianity through non-Christian eyes

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Trinity (10 diverge) with the psalms appointed in series C in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*. However, from Proper 4 through the end of the church year there is only one common selection.

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Christianity Through Non-Christian Eyes

Paul J. Griffiths, editor
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990
286 pages

Paul J. Griffiths, who holds degrees in theology, classical Indian religion and Buddhist studies, provides an informative, challenging, exciting, at times disturbing volume. Claiming that within today's pluralistic society candid and open interreligious dialogue is not only essential in its own right; it is also necessary for growth in personal and religious self-understanding, for a sense of wholesomeness in missiology and for a spirit of inclusivity in its fullest sense within religious ministry.

"Most interreligious dialogue has until now been initiated by Christians. This may change; there are some signs that it already is changing. But there is little doubt that one of the things that Christians... need to understand better is the images of Christ, Christians and Christianity that non-Christians have and use. Christians have said a great deal about how they see Buddhists, Hindus, Jews and Muslims, and about what place they are prepared to allot the members of these communities in God's plan for human salvation; they have as yet not learned to listen very carefully to what members of these communities have said and are saying about them" (3).

This volume contains essays by scholarly representatives from Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. "Each of the authors chosen is concerned to interpret and apply his tradition, as he sees it, to one of two questions (or sometimes to both): the question of how to think about Christians and/or the question of how to think about other religions in general" (3). Different views, sometimes embracing conservative and sometimes liberal perspectives, are intentionally presented from each of the four religions.

The editor provides a general introductory essay as well as a brief introduction and bibliography for each of the four sections. In the introduction he notes that this book "is intended as an educational tool for Christians and as an instrument to further discussion of one of the most pressing and difficult theological questions now facing all Christian communities. Christians must learn, if they are to reappropriate and give new voice to their gospel in such a way that it can be heard by faithful members of

non-Christian religious communities, to think about these faithful in ways that are not corrupted by ethnocentricity and which are sensitive to the complex realities of interreligious communication" (4). Each essay within each of the four sections has a descriptive introductory feature which gives biographical data on the respective author and which identifies the central emphasis or emphases of the particular essay.

The contents of the book are provocative and challenging. In spite of the editor's introductions, there is an assumption that the reader is somewhat familiar with the basics of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Furthermore, the scholarly contents—some of which have been published in other texts, some of which are published here for the first time—are presented with a view to serve the educational and instrumental purposes of which the editor spoke in the introductory essay. There is an assumption that a reading of this text will be accompanied by disciplined interreligious dialogue.

On the jacket Wilfred Cantwell Smith states: "Christian readers will find parts of this anthology fascinating, parts infuriating, and all of it educative. As we grope for world community and stumble towards it (or should we fail, towards massive disaster) it is important that each group not only learn about other groups but learn also how its own is perceived by those others."

This text is enlightening. As the scholars from each of the four religions presented and reflected on respective interpretations of Christianity, I found myself enlightened as to particular features of Christianity and how they are perceived by others, but I also found myself enlightened in learning how varied are the interpretations from within any given tradition. Another insight for me was in the whole area of what constitutes open and frank dialogue at the interreligious level. To engage in such dialogue demands clarity in expression, suspension of judgment, openness to authentic listening, critical awareness and a growing knowledge of what it means for me to be a Christian in today's pluralistic society.

On the matter of generating interreligious dialogue, it would have been helpful if the editor had provided a series of discussion questions at the end of each of the four sections. It would also have been helpful had the editor written and included a closing chapter in which the reader would have been engaged with burning questions on the horizons of interreligious dialogue. As it is, the book ends with the final essay in the section on Hinduism.

This book will be of interest to anyone who is sensitive to the inter-religious realities within today's global village. Given the nature of its contents, this text will be of particular value to students in religious studies, to seminarians (who can no longer be regarded as adequately trained for pastoral ministry if they know only their own religion and tradition), to professors in religious studies and theology, to clergy and laity serving in today's pluralistic world. This book's instrumental and educative value will, of course, be realized most fully if its contents can be engaged within the contexts of interreligious dialogue.

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World Religions: Our Quest for Meaning

David A. Rausch and Carl Hermann Voss

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989

xv + 212 pages

Fourth in a series on world religions, the purpose of this volume is to survey faith traditions for students and laity. The authors presuppose that "No one can understand the human race without having encountered the faiths of humanity" (xii).

Rausch and Voss purport that they are writing out of a wealth of first-hand study, teaching and encounters in relation to adherents of the world religions. They profess to have studied their subject matter in a "value-free" manner; but, alas, the attentive reader discovers numerous examples of Caucasian, male, North American, middle-class influences.

According to the authors, all major religions share the common ground of: ritualistic and belief systems, ethical codes, rites of passage, a preferential language of origin, influence upon social, political, economic and legal institutions.

Rausch and Voss ponder the origins of shamanism; unravel the intricacies of the Hindu caste system; observe the misogynistic beliefs and practices in Jainism; clarify the differences between Theravada, Mahayana and Zen Buddhism; provide biographical tidbits of Confucius and Lao Tsu; discuss the emperor worship of Shinto; elaborate on the significance of *Eretz Yisrael* for Judaism. In addition they focus on the universal, inclusive nature of Jesus' teachings and practices; underscore that Muhammad, according to Muslim scholars, married a Jewish woman and a Coptic Christian for compassionate reasons. They do all of this and a great deal more; yet the volume has several lacunae.

The authors fail miserably in their chapter devoted to Christianity. They seem oblivious towards the significant contributions of contemporary