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ARCHIVES

BRIEF STUDIES

THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF INDIA ANALYZES EAST AND WEST

A Study on the basis of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *East and West* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1956).

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is respected as a scholar both in the East and in the West. He has had a long career at Oxford and Benares Hindu University. At the present time he is vice-president of India.

In his Beatty Lectures, delivered at McGill University, October, 1954, Radhakrishnan seeks to find *rapprochement* between East and West. The first lecture dealt with the spirit of Indian culture; the second treated Western culture and evaluated the contributions of Greece, Macedon, Rome, Egypt, Christianity, Islam, Crusades, Scholasticism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the rise of natural sciences, and modern philosophy; the third dealt with problems faced by the East and West.

According to a long view, Radhakrishnan held, there is not an Eastern view different from a Western view. He seeks to demonstrate this by tracing the history of man through a long evolutionary period and showing common denominators. Yet "culture is not the superstructure of the material means of production as the Marxists believe," but "the social institutions, economic arrangements, and scientific beliefs are all bound together by certain ideals, by which men overcome the dualism of their nature, the animal and the human, instinct and intellect, individual and society" (17). The ideals are sought in the religions and philosophies of the cultures.

The Vedic culture, of which only a few aspects can be given here, is described with special sympathy. In opposition to logical positivism it holds that the Real is infinite, ineffable, unreachable, unaffected by conditions of space and time. "Beliefs, opinions, dogmas belong to the contingent order and are variable and changing while truth is eternal and changeless" (25). All that exists or has existed is only a partial showing forth of the Real. "The essential religious experience is not a matter of belief in a set of propositions but is a movement of the whole self to the daily challenge of actual human relations" (24).

Other religions and philosophies of the East and West are discussed in the light of the above method of thought.

In his treatment of Christianity Radhakrishnan attempts to show influences of Persia and India on New Testament thought. He especially seeks to show similarities between Vedic thought and words of Jesus. Jesus had a consciousness of God which we should likewise develop.

In the last chapter the author points to limitations of the Marxist theory, the evil of "political parochialism," and holds that the cold war is a conflict for the soul of man. "With the spread of education and rise in people's demands, a process of liberalization, even in Communist countries, is inevitable. If it is impeded, like all totalitarian regimes, they will disappear through their own internal contradictions" (116). The spirit of man must govern technology. Hence there is need for religion not "of the dogmatic schools, not one of fanaticism that is afraid of the light but for a creative spiritual religion" (121).

In the conclusion Radhakrishnan states: "Especially in matters of religion we must understand the valuable work of the sages of other countries and ages. . . . The separation of East and West is over" (130 f.).

Dr. Radhakrishnan seeks to find a common denominator in the impasse between East and West. It is refreshing to note some of the problems faced by Western thinkers and stated against a background which includes the East as well as the West (e. g., "we suffer because of our emphasis on the achievements of mind and neglect of the values of spirit," 12). The author has a profound insight into Western philosophy as well as Eastern. Hence he strives to show similarities between the two and also indicate indebtedness. Dr. Radhakrishnan presents the culture and philosophy of the East with sympathetic loyalty in Western idiom. Certainly he has a deep grasp of the spiritual depths which went into the making of modern India and the Orient. He seeks to approach Christianity with a nobility derived from the most sublime basis which his orientation has to offer. This presages the time when the proclamation of convictions will no longer follow nationalistic lines but will be free for men everywhere. The Christian reader rejoices over some of the statements (e. g., "the attitude of the ordinary Hindu to the Christian religion is one of sympathetic understanding and appreciation. Christianity has been with us from the second century A.D. It has not merely the rights of a guest but the rights of a native," 35). With regard to Luther Dr. Radhakrishnan states: "Luther looked upon the whole Latin heritage as anathema. It spelled worldliness and corruption. For Luther

works were of no account. They are not the measure of salvation, though they may be the consequence" (92). This reviewer hopes that the author, although burdened by many duties and broad responsibilities, will have an opportunity to study Luther with the same profound approach that he has given Eastern and Western philosophical thought. On the basis of thoughts expressed in his lectures one would be inclined to think that he would delight in Luther's emphasis on the total personality in the Christian life, whereby the spiritual life of man, harmonized with God in Christ, must manifest itself in all the contexts of life and give quality to action.

The book abounds with statements of poetic insight and beauty: "Creative life is possible only for those who are capable of concentration and integrity, who have the courage to be lonely in their minds. It is in moments of solitariness that we glimpse visions of truth and beauty, bring them down to earth, clothe them with emotions, carve them into words, cast them in movements or frame them into philosophies" (21).

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