

# Book Reviews

## *CHRISTIAN AND HINDU ETHICS.*

By *S. C. Thakur.*

(Allen and Unwin. 48s.).

Review by **J. C. COOPER.**

*Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 2. (Spring, 1970) © World Wisdom, Inc.

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As the title suggests, Dr. Thakur's work is primarily a study of the ethical and moral aspect of the two great traditions with which he is intimately acquainted, since he is a Hindu who has lived and taught in the West.

He maintains that it is now time "to start a dialogue between these two religions", and that "it must be ethics and morality... that should receive attention first", the chief reason for this choice being that it is in this field that lack of understanding and the presence of prejudice is most noticeable and that while it is possible to have a system of ethics divorced from religion, the converse would be untenable.

The author makes no attempt to establish the superiority of either religion over the other, his assessment being absolutely fair and objective. He asks fundamental questions related to philosophical ethics and then answers them in Hindu and Christian terms, comparing and contrasting the results.

Although there are frequent references to the Scriptures of both traditions, the main authorities quoted are the great scholars in Hindu and Christian thought, but the work is one of comparative philosophy rather than comparative theology. A basic knowledge of Hindu and Christian terminology is presupposed.

The creation myths of the two faiths are considered and contrasted. In the Christian account, based on Genesis, God created the manifest world out of nothing and, therefore, "is the sole and sufficient cause of the world": this implies man's absolute dependence on God. Hinduism, on the other hand, has several creation stories, in which God either manipulates existing elements, or all evolves from the primordial Prakriti, or, as in the Rig Veda myth, it emanates from the self-immolation of Primordial Man, Purusa. Creation *ex nihilo* does not occur, though in theistic Hinduism man and the world are completely dependent on God. The moral implication in both religions is thus that "we ought to behave as guests, borrowers, or even servants, rather than as owners who *have* a right to do what they like with their own". Taking Hinduism in the more popular form influenced by Ramanuja, in which God is the moral ideal, then both religions have it in common that man's duty is to imitate the divine attributes. In Hinduism this is to ascribe certain qualities to God and to follow them in the personal life, in Christianity it is the 'imitatio Christi'.

Examining the claim to any exclusive virtues, Dr. Thakur comes to the conclusion that there is no particular quality or property in either religion to which exclusiveness can be

attributed, there are certain eternal and universal virtues traditional to both, though where the two faiths part company morally is in the Christian doctrine of Original Sin and its more extreme form in Total Corruption. While the Christian idea of sin expresses a "personal sense of shame before God", Hinduism regards sin as an infringement of the transcendent 'rita', which the Gods protect, or as "the violation of the divinely ordained Law (Dharma)". In Christianity God's grace is necessary for redemption from sin, in Hinduism the soul's choice "between good and evil is entirely its own" and any inheritance of sin "does not come down from a remote ancestor, but from one's own previous life".

In conclusion the points of similarity are recapitulated and it is noted that the system of ethics in both traditions is "characterized by a remarkable catholicity and comprehensiveness... both are committed to a high notion of the potential greatness of man; both believe in a transcendental and spiritual destiny for man which... make ethics an indispensable step in the realization of this final destiny". However, similarities of approach do not mean that "the two systems are identical, and, therefore, interchangeable... In spite of similarities the two remain distinct and independent, and it would be vain and pretentious for either to claim to take the other's place".