

BOOK REVIEW

A BUDDHIST CRITIQUE OF THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF GOD

by Gunapala Dharmasiri. Second edition. Antioch, California: Golden Leaves Publishing Company, Forthcoming. Approximately xv + 325 pp. cloth: \$42.85; paper: \$19.00

Originally a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Lancaster, this work of comparative theology is now being published in a second, American edition. This edition includes a new forward and a additional chapter entitled "More Problems With The Concept of God That Require Our Serious and Urgent Attention". This new chapter deals with contemporary issues related to the belief in God. Editing plans for this edition are intended to increase the readability of the work. For example, the original gives as footnotes the Pali for quotations from the canon made in the text. These will be moved to the end of the text, making for a cleaner, fuller page of text.

The body of the work is composed of eight chapters which deal with different contemporary issues in theology, and a postscript outlining future problems. The eight chapters are entitled: "God and the Soul," "God as the Creator and Designer," "God as Benevolent, Omnipotent and Omniscient," "God as The Good," "God, Cosmos and Evolution," "God as Experience," "The Nature and Existence of God," and "Revelation and Reason." Under these rubrics the author considers both classical theological positions, such as Aquinas' Cosmological Argument, as well as more modern theologians, such as Teilhard de Chardin, Underhill and the "Death of God" theologians.

Work of this type—comparative work—is very difficult, since it requires equal sophistication in both terms of the comparison, in this case Christian theology and Buddhist philosophy. Dharmasiri has succeeded at this difficult task through careful preparation and thorough scholarship.

The issue which this reviewer found most interesting is treated in Part 2 of "God as Experience." This is the widely accepted notion "that there is a mystical truth common to all religions though it may be obscured by various denominational colourings (6.59)." The author rejects this view, developing the idea of Nirvana as total extinction, which he holds is different from any theological or mystical position which views God as a more real form of existence. Although it may have been useful in the development of Western respect for other religions, the idea that there is a single mystical truth common to all religions has become an unexamined assumption which now needs to be reexamined.

The republication of Dharmasiri's work comes at a particularly auspicious time, since there continues to be concern with the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. What is particularly important is that he is willing to confront the differences between the two traditions, rather than politely emphasizing similarities.

Richard K. Payne, Ph.D.
Institute of Buddhist Studies