

Asians And The Old Testament Scriptures

How authoritative is the Old Testament? Can one claim for the Old Testament any more authority than the Scriptures of other religions? Many Christian thinkers in Asia seriously question the authority of the Old Testament for the church. They contrast the richness of the sacred writings of the eastern religions with the Old Testament. They see the Old Testament as a preparation of ancient Israel for Christ's coming and the New Testament, and all the other ancient sacred Scriptures, as a preparation of Asians for Christ and the Gospel.

Dr. Raimundo Panikkar, a Roman Catholic theologian and specialist in Hinduism and Indian philosophy, suggests that Christ came not to found a religion "and much less a new religion, but to fulfill all justice (Matt. 3:15) and to bring to its fullness, every religion of the world." He believes that "Christ is hidden and unknown, but really present in all the authentic religions of the world. The Christian is simply witnessing to a new dimension, hidden or unknown, of the same reality."

Stanley J. Samartha, associate secretary in the Department on Studies in Missions and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, with responsibility for the continuing study on "The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men," asserts that the word of the cross can be a stumbling-block and foolishness to people. But he believes that "theories of atonement based on outmoded ideas of sacrifice which make little sense today ... should be particularly avoided." The Burmese scholar Khin Maung Din makes a similar claim, when he writes that "Some of the traditional Biblical terms like 'atonement,' 'sacrifice,' 'blood offering' may have had supreme religious significance for the Old Testament Jews within their particular culture and history, but these same terms have no religious meaning, and at times even take on an irreligious or antireligious meaning for men of Oriental faiths. In such a religious context, if conventional Christology insists on using those relative Jewish concepts in an absolute way, then it will be imposing an unnecessary stumbling block to the Gentiles of the East and the fault will be more with the preacher than with the hearers of the Word."

Dr. Klaus Klostermaier, a German Roman Catholic theologian, visited one of the sacred places in India to have dialogue with Hindu scholars. After this experience, he wrote:

The more I learned of Hinduism, the more surprised I grew that our theology does not offer anything essentially new to the Hindu. When we transpose the knowledge of Christ into the depth of Brahavidya (Knowledge of the Supreme and Union with the Absolute) we begin to understand that, essentially, the stipulations set down by Indian theologians for the attainment of Brahavidya are a first step towards knowledge of Christ.

To equate the Old Testament with the sacred Scriptures of Eastern religions is to deny the unity of the Bible. Also, Christ is not the fulfillment of the hopes and aspirations of ancient Asian faiths. The person and authority of Jesus Christ must be understood

against the background of the Old Testament. He is the fulfillment of all prophecy (Luke 4:21).

After the resurrection, Christ opened the Scriptures to His disciples. "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures? Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:32, 45). "Paul - for three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, opening and alleging that it behooved the Christ to suffer, and to rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom, said he, I proclaim unto you, is the Christ" (Acts 17:2, 3). The Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35). They testify of Jesus (John 5:39).

In the sacred Scriptures of the non-Christian religions in Asia, history plays no part. Events are not important. In the Bible, historic events are important and have deep meaning. Israel's exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the desert and the possession of the promised land are, as Dr. Edmund Clowney writes, "Symbolic events of the redemptive history and have typical reference to the realization of redemption in Christ." When our Lord came into this world, he was not without a genealogy. He was born of a on a particular line - "Made of the seed of David" (Rom. 1:3).

The Old Testament saints looked forward to Christ's first coming; and, we, who are in Christ, have within us the blessed hope of His appearing. (c.f. Titus 2:13). The day will come when we shall sit down together with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God.

Both Testaments have one grand central theme - Jesus Christ. No Scripture of any religion can serve as a substitute for the Old Testament. The Scriptures are one. "For I delivered unto you," said the apostle Paul, "first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15:3, 4).

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