

MO: South Asia Books.

Laxmi G. Tewari  
Sonoma State University  
Rohnert Park, CA 94928

RAJ, P. SOLOMON. *A Christian Folk-Religion in India. A Study of the Small Church Movement in Andhra Pradesh, with a Special Reference to the Bible Mission of Devadas.* Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, Vol. 40. Frankfurt / M, Berne, New York: Peter Lang, 1986. Xii+375 pages. Illustrations, photographs, maps, bibliography, appendices. Paper SFr 75.—, ISBN 3-8204-8924-X.

The book under review deals with the problem of how far inculturation in the local culture is permissible to a Christian Church, in this case the Lutheran Church in Andhra Pradesh, India. The author is pastor in the Andhra Lutheran Church; his book is his thesis for a Ph.D. degree at the University of Birmingham. He took as his paradigm the "Bible Mission", a sect split off from the Lutheran Mission. The sect, founded in 1938 by Mungamuri Devadas, has at present about 25,000 followers. With the present trend for indigenisation (or contextualisation), more such local Churches may spring up in India among converts rooted in the local Hindu folk-religion, but only superficially instructed in the Christian faith which they have recently accepted. The question is: how much Christian faith-substance must they absorb to be called genuine Christians? Is there any danger that gradually they will drift back into their pristine religion because the evangelists had not sufficiently separated them from their folk-religion? On the other hand, because these "Group Churches," as the author also calls them, are intimately connected with the old folk-religion, they represent valuable links between the foreign and rather distant Mother Churches and the prospective converts among the local non-Christian population.

While in his first chapter the author thus states the scope of his study, he gives in chapter II a general picture of the land and people of Andhra Pradesh, to which he adds a short history of the Lutheran Mission. In chapter III, then, he gives the life-history of the founder of the Bible Mission, Mungamuri Devadas (1875?-1960). Working as a touring evangelist for the Lutheran Church for forty-six years, Devadas nevertheless in 1938 broke away from the Lutheran Church, after he had been asked to resign his job and had been refused communion by his pastor for his alleged aberration from the Lutheran faith. He took a substantial number of his disciples along into his new Church.

The author avers, however, that it was not so much aberration from the Lutheran faith which earned Devadas the stricture of his Church, but rather his willful and singular emphasis on certain points of belief which, though they were also held by the Lutheran Church, were considered of minor importance.

In chapters IV to XII the author explains with great sympathy and respect for Devadas the latter's basic theological views. Above all, his strong emphasis on the existence and importance of spirits and demons in the life of the people is significant. Devadas also claimed to have had visions of God and received personal revelations from God and the spirits. He was also convinced that he had the gift of healing diseases of mind and body and of driving out demons. The author points out that the Lutheran Church, too, believes in the existence of spirits and demons and their influence on

human beings. The Lutheran Church, however, plays down these beliefs, while Devadas preached them with special emphasis because they conformed so strongly to the beliefs of the local people.

Devadas, however, had not only intimate contact with the spirits, but especially with the Holy Spirit whom he conceived not so much in the Christian sense as the Third Person in the Trinity, but more in the sense of the Old Testament pneumatology as the universal substance of creative power. He taught that a Christian needs two baptisms, one with water and a second one with the Holy Spirit. To Devadas God's world was a good world. Sickness is the work of Satan and the outcome of sin. God is a God of healing and gives the gift of healing to anyone who asks for it, through the life-giving Spirit, the cosmic *shakti*, as the Hindus call it. Again we see that Devadas is in close conformity with the local mentality.

Devadas used the words Christ and God interchangeably. For him Christ was the revelation of God and in a sense the continuation of God in time and space. But the historic Jesus, God made man, was also important to Devadas. To him the birth of Christ was as important as his death and resurrection for our salvation. Devadas found 500 title names for Christ in the Bible.

The Lutheran doctrine of the Holy Trinity was for Devadas an unfathomable mystery, but he found it not difficult to believe in. He even tried to find reflections of the Trinity in nature all around, in the nature of man and in the teaching of the Bible. But Devadas rarely preached about the Trinity; he found it too profound a mystery. He believed in it because it was clearly taught in the Bible.

Devadas claimed that the Bible Mission was a more perfect Church than the Lutheran Church. His Church was not controlled by remote agencies transacting business in high-powered committees, but by pastors who lived in fellowship with the other members. It was a loving leadership, always evolved and seldom appointed. It was self-supporting, and had no need for funds from abroad. Its preachers and evangelists lived on the free offerings of the believers or did some jobs to support themselves.

Devadas was much concerned with eschatology. He firmly believed that the end of the world was near, but that before that all would happen as foretold in the Gospels and the Apocalypse: the period of great tribulations, the appearance of the Anti-Christ, the Thousand Years' Rule, the Last Judgment, and the Final Consummation.

In all these chapters the author tries to show that Devadas was orthodox in matters of faith, but might have gone too far in his endeavor to make the Christian Faith palatable to the people among whom he lived and to whom he preached and whom he understood so well. In chapter XIII the author shows in greater detail that even Devadas' emphasis on the importance of dreams, visions, and faith healing was well founded in the Bible and in the practice of the Church throughout the centuries.

Since Devadas' audience was mostly illiterate, all teaching had to be done orally. He preached and taught, using to full effect the imagery of the local people. To communicate his message he used also hymn-singing accompanied by music instruments in much the same manner as the ballad singers of the region. Devadas himself was a gifted poet and composed devotional songs which were sung in genuine Indian melody and metre, while the Lutheran had few such songs. Most of their church hymns were translations from western languages and had to be sung in the western style of music. The foreign character of the Lutheran Church became most conspicuous in the form of their singing and worship, while that of Devadas' followers was fully indigenous. He had also his own style of prayer, meditation, and Divine worship, which was better adapted to the mentality of the local people than the official Lutheran liturgical style.

In the concluding chapters XIV and XV the author gives a theoretical exposition of the concept and scope of "indigenisation" and then tries to answer the question how far this indigenisation may go in the Mother Churches established in India. His reply is short and rather disappointing: Since we cannot yet envisage what future shape the Church in India is going to take, it cannot be stated definitely to what extent the Church and can should be indigenised. He merely gives the advice that there should be more indigenisation than in the past. And he adds that surely the Mother Churches—in his case the Lutheran Church—could learn a lot from the local Group Churches such as the Bible Mission.

This book by Solomon Raj is important, because it shows that Devadas' Bible Mission is a folk-religion which in its earthy, practical, and simple framework, well attuned to a peasant mentality, could easily establish contact with the local people and open their hearts to the message of Christ. As such it is a valuable intermediary between the Lutheran missionary Church and the non-Christians. However, for uplifting, widening, deepening, and inspiring the human spirit into a higher and more sublime sphere, such folk-religions may be found inadequate. The author does not say it expressly, but seems to imply that Mother Churches alone could do so, with a higher developed theology and a more sublime and elevating liturgy.

Stephen Fuchs  
Institute for Indian Culture  
Bombay, India

#### PAPUA NEW GUINEA

LEROY, JOHN, ed. *Kewa Tales*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985. Xxv+251 pages. Photographs, appendices. Paper, US\$ 21.50, ISBN 0-7748-0218-9.

LEROY, JOHN. *Fabricated World. An Interpretation of Kewa Tales*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985. Xii+319 pages. Index, tables, map, figures, appendices, bibliography. Cloth US\$28.95, ISBN 0-7748-0217-0.

The narratives contained in *Kewa Tales* were collected by the author from the Kewa people of the Southern Highlands Province in Papua, New Guinea, over a period of fourteen months during the years 1971-1972, 1976-1977. They were tape-recorded; and, to quote the author, "I have striven for a balance between too free or too literal a translation, one which both reads easily in English and preserves the sense of the original" (xii).

The tales read well and one gets the strong impression that the translator has stayed close to the native texts. LeRoy says the Kewa distinguish two kinds of narratives, *lidi*, which he glosses as *tale*, and *ramani*, which he calls *legend*. *Lidi* are considered fictitious and the *ramani* are held to be true. Sometimes the narrators might disagree as to which is which, "but in my experience this happens infrequently (or perhaps only infrequently is it important to decide)" (xi).

For his interpretative purposes and for inclusion in *Kewa Tales*, LeRoy has chosen the *lidi*. While such tales are untrue in the literal sense, LeRoy points out that they can well convey truth in a figurative sense and are "pointers to deeper metaphorical or allegorical truths" (xii). This comment is also a pointer to LeRoy's interpretative preferences, which are structural and metaphorical. This approach is laid out very