

hand of 'Benedict' (the same monk spoken of in *Dialogues II*) is strong upon the *Regula Benedicti*, but so are the hands of those before him and those around him. Were he to be writing today in a university setting, his preface would almost certainly have ended: '... and lastly, I owe an immeasurable debt to my fellow lecturers and students, who at every stage ...' etc.

Esther de Waal has wonderfully grasped the importance for Benedictines of reverence—reverence for material things (chap VII), for fellow people (chap VIII) and for people under one's authority or in a hierarchic relationship of cooperation (chap IX). In this flow of thought she brings in the 'non-vow' (for monks do not specifically take such a vow) of chastity—meaning consecrated celibacy, for we are all held by the law of God to chastity. Unwittingly she is invoking those words of St Paul that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, owned more by their Creator and redeemer (i.e. twice over) than by ourselves. From her own motherhood she has a marvellous insight to contribute: 'Yet how can I as a mother expect a teenage son or daughter to treat their bodies with reverence, suddenly at some point in their adolescence, unless they know this already as something experienced in their childhood world in relation to toys and food and animals?' Here one recalls the Rule's admonition that the tools of the monastery should be treated (i.e. respected) as the vessels of the altar. She goes on: 'If we have been handling their bodies with a tired and angry impatience, wrenching their clothes over their heads, dragging them in and out of the bath, trailing them with frustration around the shops, then right from the start we have been guilty of making a statement, however unconscious, about the dignity of the body'. (p. 123). That sense of reverence, begun in respect of the smallest tools, ends with paternal relationship in the common life, whose four principles she astutely gives as solidarity (what my brethren call 'keeping corpus'), plurality (which recognises the individual worth of each), authority (backing the man who has the burden) and subsidiarity (letting as many as possible share that burden).

Lastly, she has got Benedictine prayer right. I believe that book titles like *Seeking God* or *The search for God* radically miss the point. Most monks have found God: they live with him daily and love him in all things always—that is their prayer life, which permeates everything.

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A NEW FACE OF HINDUISM: THE SWAMINARAYAN RELIGION by Raymond Brady Williams, 1984 Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, Pp. 217, Proce £7.95 (paperback).

The followers of Swaminarayan constitute a dynamic force in Gujarat society as well as among Gujaratis who have settled abroad. Professor Raymond William's book on this important and fascinating topic is based on fieldwork and research in Gujarat between 1976–81. He has divided his study into 7 chapters to provide a comprehensive picture of the entire Swaminarayan movement, encompassing the primary sect founded by Sahajanand Swami and a number of schismatic organisations which have evolved out of it. At the outset, the author has treated the entire movement as one group. As he states on p. xii, 'The work is about one group, the history, beliefs, religious specialists and way of life that constitutes the Swaminarayan Tradition'. He repeats a similar statement on p. xiii when he says, 'The aim in this work is to present a full length portrait of a specific *sampradaya* and what goes on in its fellowship as an integral whole'. Presumably the author wanted to characterise the overall distinctiveness of this tradition. In fact, as the book itself shows, the movement consists of several schismatic organisations deriving from a sectarian nucleus described in the second chapter.

In his introduction, the author argues for the significance of 'A new face of Hinduism' in regard to the Swaminarayan movement. It is not entirely clear as to what set of specific dimensions does the word 'new' refer to—especially if the word 'new' is

taken to mean what it conveys, that is, something which had not existed before but has come into existence as a novel entity. This can hardly apply to basic precepts and philosophy of the Swaminarayan tradition, which is rooted in Hinduism. However, what was most likely to constitute 'new' and powerful element in the Gujarati society of early 19th century India was the penetration of British power and its far-reaching effect on local socio-economic conditions. Professor Williams dwells on this theme in his first chapter, opening his discussion with a focus on the meeting between the Governor of Bombay, Sir John Malcolm, and the founder of the movement, Sahajanand Swami, in 1830. Though the followers of Swaminarayan have made this meeting immortal in beautiful Gujarati murals (for instance, at the Swaminarayan Temple in Gadhda), it is difficult to accept Professor Williams's assertion that "the two men shared a common interest in social order and harmony" (p. 1). It is obvious by introducing private property in land and by linking Gujarat to international division of labour, the British were going to stimulate migration from the area to outposts of the empire. There is no doubt that this overseas movement and settlement had a significant material effect on the fortunes of Swaminarayan sects—a point which remains obscure in this book. However, the author does refer to transition from 'medieval to modern' (p. 5) and the great social change this entailed.

The remaining part of the chapter focuses on the biography of Sahajanand Swami and his rise as the founder leader of his primary Swaminarayan organisation. The stages of his life, from miraculous childhood to his spiritual retreat and journeys, to his renunciation and his subsequent rise as a religious figure of some stature and dominance and the rapid spread and consolidation of his following in Gujarat provide a familiar picture of phases in the genesis and formation of a Hindu movement. Once the followers of Sahajanand Swami, the supreme Swaminarayan, constituted an organised body, a sect or more precisely a *sampradaya* in which a tradition is handed down through a succession of leaders, difficulties were bound to arise, as all the main constituents of the organisation attempted to maintain their control over material and non-material resources of the sect. In his life time, Sahajanand Swami appointed sons of his two brothers as the householder heads or *acharya*s to regulate and manage the northern and southern administration of the sect at Ahmedabad and Vadtal. Apart from difficulties internal to families of respective *acharyas*, it was the bilateral conflict between the *acharya* and renouncers (*sadhus*), usually dividing the lay members, that generated a basis for segmentation and formation of secondary sects from the primary organisation. Although the author provides interesting historical and legal material to outline this process, there is a serious imbalance in his exposition. He has almost totally ignored the division that occurred at Ahmedabad and led to the formation of Shri Swaminarayan Siddhanta Sajivan Mandal—a sect of the Swaminarayan movement which has flourished among the Leva Kanbi Patels of Kutch in Gujarat as well as abroad. The relationship between the primary administration at Ahmedabad and this particular offshoot established in Maninager, not far from the location of the Ahmedabad seat of *acharya*, is a source of rich historical material on schism, in addition to providing an important insight into dynamic and complex interconnection between sect and caste. In contrast Professor Williams gives an adequate account of segmentation that occurred at Vadtal and gave rise to Shri Akshar Pursottam Sanstha. It is obvious that the author had spent considerable time and energy to do a more detailed study of this particular organisation, which therefore receives a much greater prominence in the book than other sects. However, Shri Akshar Purshottam Sanstha has given rise to further divisions, of which the author notes Yogi Divine Society and Guru Maharaj of North Gujarat but not Gunatit Samaj and its associated bodies Anoopam Mission for men and Gunatit Jyot for women. We need to know a lot more about the initial link between Yogi Divine Society and Gunatit Samaj and the recent split between the two resulting in competitive rivalry. The book provides us with no information on these developments and therefore remains less than complete as a

comprehensive account of the entire Swaminarayan movement.

In Chapter 4, titled 'The human face of god', the author provides clear and relevant material on the way Sahajanand Swami becomes a divine being, to emerge as the supreme Swaminarayan. In this connection, a sharper distinction between primary and secondary sects would have been helpful; that is, in Ahmedabad and Vadtal seats Swaminarayan does not dwell in the body of a living leader such as the *acharya*. In Shri Akshar Purshottam Sanstha and Shri Swaminarayan Siddhanta Sajivan Mandal the renouncer head of a sect is the divine embodiment of supreme Swaminarayan. In his analysis of the belief in divine incarnation in Shri Akshar Purshottam Sanstha, the author provides an admirable, clear and readable exposition on the twin titles of Akshar and Purshottam and the notion of personal Akshar as it has been developed in this sect. Unfortunately he does not explore the question of salvation (*moksha*) and its relationship to the divine incarnated in the person of the sect leader, and the implications this has for devotional surrender and the kind of specific salvation an individual becomes entitled to. In other words, the relationship between the belief and social organisation and social control receives insufficient emphasis in this study.

It is best to assess together chapter 4, 'The Sacred World', and chapter 5, 'The Sacred Thread: Transmission of tradition', as they hang together. In Chapter 4, the author uses the notion of sacredness descriptively and applies it to person, space and time. Sacred people are non-ascetic and ascetic leaders of the sect as well as male and female renouncers. Sacred space simply refers to monuments and temples and sacred time is little more than a list of events from an annual ritual calendar. The intellectual exercise necessary to give this material conceptual boosting is seriously lacking here. Chapter 6 presents a similar problem. Using the notion of communication to explain persistence of sects over time, the employment of Jack Goody's notion of communication by physical surroundings and communication by standardised ways of acting with scattered references to ritual does not explain sufficiently well the way sect leaders exercise power and authority to ensure continuity beyond a given generation. The section on communication by language is merely a list of main texts of the movement followed by a descriptive account of celebrations held in 1981 to mark the bicentenary of the birth of Sahajanand Swami.

In Chapter 5, the author deals with 'Dharma: the disciplined life' to provide an account of the vows the ascetics and householders are expected to observe. As some of the material has been already discussed before, the exposition seems repetitive and inadequately analytical. The author concludes this chapter with comments on the position of women and the question of caste in the movement. In keeping with the wider Hindu ideology, the Swaminarayan belief is marked by opposition between purity and impurity and the prime importance of purity for a salvation state, *moksha*. The association of women with impure and inferior states and the way female sexuality is believed to pose a threat to male purity is a significant point for an understanding of position of women in various Swaminarayan sects. The author's account would have been more effective if some such ideas were explored to analyse both the subordinate position of women and the dominance of men and justification of this dominance in terms of purity. Readers with background in Indian social anthropology will find the section on caste rather disappointing, as the author has hardly analysed the complex relationship between caste and sect and the consequences of differential affiliation to each of these entities. His assertion that the theological exclusiveness of Swaminarayan religion tends to reduce the importance of caste in the eyes of its members needs more discussion and some empirical evidence.

The final chapter describes the settlement of followers of Swaminarayan in East Africa, Britain and the U.S.A. The historical information on the formation of Swaminarayan sects in the African milieu is a useful addition to our knowledge. As for the settlement of sect members in Britain and the USA, the author focuses on the familiar 'between two cultures' theme and the conflict that characterises the norms of

cultural preservation on the one hand and assimilation on the other. Assimilation is not a unilinear process, and the revival of ethnicity in the USA in the 1960s and 1970s and in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s indicates an emergence of more complex patterns and choices.

Professor William's book is an informative addition to our knowledge of an important Gujarati Hindu religious movement. However, it is far from being a fully comprehensive account of *all* the Swaminarayan sects. Theoretical and conceptual weakness is a striking feature of this study and it is in this realm where its contribution is modest if not limited.

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THE POWER OF THE POOR IN HISTORY by Gustavo Gutierrez SCM London. 1983.

One of the advantages of being summoned to Rome to defend your theological views is that your book sales may soar. The recent criticism of Liberation Theology (LT) by Rome will no doubt increase the desire to know exactly what the liberation theologians are saying. This book by Gustavo Gutierrez will answer some of these enquiries. Gutierrez is probably the best known of the liberation theologians and his first book 'A Theology of Liberation' published just over ten years ago has become the classic of the movement. This new book is a collection of his talks and essays written since then and serve as a useful record of how one of the leading exponents of LT has reacted to mounting criticism. It is not always an easy book to read, certainly not at one sitting. This is partly because the style is very uneven and there is a good deal of repetition. The first chapter is a talk given to a lay summer-school in Lima. It probably was good as a talk but does not read so well. It would be what Gutierrez would call a militant reading of the Bible, but there is too little argument and too much rhetoric dotted with phrases like 'The Kingdom signifies globalisation'. The chapter entitled 'Liberation Praxis and Christian Faith' is a more academic essay written for *Concilium* and offers a good summary of why LT arose. Then there are two chapters which are commentaries of the documents of Puebla. The last part of the book is entitled 'From the Underside of History' and these chapters may help us to understand why the difficulty in grasping his argument may go deeper than rhetoric and repetitiveness. He is writing out of an experience which is different from that of say most of the readers of this journal. He defines TL as 'an attempt to understand the faith from within the concrete historical, liberating, and subversive practice of the poor of this world—the exploited classes, despised ethnic groups and marginalised cultures (p. 37). You need a good deal of imaginative sympathy to understand what he is saying, and that will not be enough. One of G's basic points is that LT is only a second step, the first step is solidarity with the poor. Theology only follows once you have made that step and are ready to reflect on your experience. This is the difference between what he calls progressivist theology and LT. This is not a totally new distinction and he draws on an illustration from the C16th to make this point. There were two great Dominicans in Salamanca who reacted to the exploitation of the Indians by the Spanish. On the one hand Las Casas actually worked among the Indians and had discovered Christ among them in their terrible suffering. de Vittoria on the other hand, while agreeing with Las Casas to some extent 'works with abstract hypotheses, as is typical of a theologian not in direct contact with the facts. Anyone familiar with the situation of the Indies knew the hypotheses were false' (196). Here are two kinds of theologies and you can draw the parallels for today. In a way he is telling some of his critics that they are in no place to criticise him especially as he says in another essay 'the history of Christianity has been written with a white, Western, bourgeois hand' (202). He offers an example nearer home. In his final chapter he shows how Bonhoeffer only began to see history differently, 'from below' when he was waiting execution in his prison cell.