

The positive side to Tuoti's use of so much orthodox rhetoric to make his point is that already mystically-inclined church members may be given insight into the mystical origin of the Scriptures. It was spirit that created symbols, not the other way around. Tuoti's book may help some Church members see through the rhetoric and the symbolism of religion to discover the living truth the symbols attempt to embody. Tuoti sometimes makes deliberate use of Christian rhetoric to illustrate his (mostly) more universal points. But mysticism is the essence of all religions, not just Christianity. One could wish that not only Frank Tuoti, but other writers on the subject of mysticism could be more explicit about what these symbols mean.

Cyrus Lee. *Thomas Merton and Chinese Wisdom*. Erie, Pa.: Sino-American Institute, n.d. vi + 138 pages. Paper. \$14.95.

Beatrice Bruteau. *What We Can Learn from the East*. New York: Crossroad, 1995. 126 pages. Paper. \$11.95.

Reviewed by Roger Corless

These are two very personal books. The reader who wishes to meet the authors, empathize with their points of view, and then think for him- or herself will find much nourishment here. One who comes looking for new scholarly insights will be disappointed.

Cyrus Lee is a philosopher and psychologist who was born in "China" (the biographical information is no more specific than that, but it appears to mean the Republic of China, or Taiwan), has lived and taught in the West for many years, and is currently active in intercultural and transpersonal research.

Thomas Merton and Chinese Wisdom at first appears to be a collection of papers read at academic meetings, but soon reveals itself as actually a series of Ignatian style contemplations—exercises of the imaginative will in which one places oneself in the context of a past event or puts oneself in the presence of a dead personality and acts and converses (performs a colloquy) as if the person were alive or the event contemporary. Those with whom colloquies are performed include, first and foremost of course, Merton himself, and, almost as prominently, John C. H. Wu (who taught Chinese Philosophy at St. John's

University, Long Island, New York, and was Lee's teacher), then the standard list of Chinese worthies—Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Confucius, and, last but not least, Mo Tzu, whom most Chinese have forgotten because he taught (unrealistically, as it seemed to them) that one should love everyone as oneself, but whose work is, just because of this teaching, routinely praised by Christian missionaries as *praeparatio evangelica*.

Lee is quite open about never having met Merton, but he is unapologetic about recording colloquies with him because, he says, "I did meet him quite a few times after his death [although] only in my dreams." Lee claims that "Tom and I . . . have a lot of common interests and dreams" (2). In accord with this approach, the cover features a drawing by Lee of a very Sinitic Merton in a Confucian scholar's coat entitled, in Chinese, "A picture of the Honorable Teacher Merton," and the book closes with the exclamation, "Rapoche [sic: Rinpoche, perhaps?] Merton, Pray for us!" (135).

The question that most urgently presented itself to this reviewer was, "Why?" and the answer seemed to come in terms of Chinese Euhemerism. Many Chinese deities began their careers as humans, living lives that were sometimes humdrum but always focused and dedicated to an overall *Lebenswerk*. Their deaths were sometimes violent or occurred under mysterious circumstances. After death their presence was felt, like that of incipient Catholic *beati*, to continue in the human realm, and their forms were seen in visions and dreams. Then, it was often maintained, not only should such a spirit, whose power had shown itself, be worshiped, but (and here Chinese Euhemerism differs from Roman Catholic *processum*) the more the spirit was worshiped the more worshipful would the spirit become—because of, as it were, *liturgia deficia*, the spirit would mature into a deity, gaining, in the most famous cases, imperial recognition. Merton then, whose life and death accord with the accepted Chinese pattern, is becoming, in the mind of Cyrus Lee, a Chinese *shen*. This is a way of bringing Merton's insights into a fully Chinese cultural context, since a *shen* is more like a Catholic saint than a rival to the Christian God.

If Lee's book is the writing of a disciple, Beatrice Bruteau's book is the teaching of a magistra (we cannot say "master," since she is a woman, and the title "mistress" gives altogether the wrong impression). Bruteau put us all in her debt by her careful and illuminating study of the extraordinary comparisons between Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Sri Aurobindo Ghose (*Evolution toward Divinity* [Wheaton, Ill.: The

Theosophical Publishing House, 1974]). She is the founder and resident teacher of Schola Contemplationis (formerly Philosophers' Exchange), an unofficial secular institute, we might say, centered in the wooded subdivision near her home near Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and reaching out to others via its spirituality newsletter. Based in the Roman Catholic tradition but not limited to it she is developing, in dialogue with other religious traditions, her own powerful insights into a rejuvenated, lay-centered, mystical Christianity. Not all will agree with her teachings, but no one can be unaffected by them.

What We Can Learn from the East contains transcripts of five addresses to retreatants and reprints of two journal articles. The collection is best characterized by Bruteau's remarks that "our planetary world has become so accessible" (1) that interreligious dialogue is no longer like the meeting of strangers who are exotic to each other, but is more like neighbors "entering one another's kitchens, swapping recipes, and sharing confidences over a cup of coffee" (very much what was happening when this reviewer visited Schola Contemplationis some years ago). Bruteau's great strength is that she revives the medieval approach to the Bible, honoring the *sensus literalis* but seeing through it to the *sensus plenior*, and makes the exegesis credible to a twentieth-century, post-critical audience. She appeals straightforwardly to her audience's mythological sense, confident, as was Joseph Campbell, that they will intuitively recognize the truth both in her words and in their own deepest selves. But more subtly than Campbell, she regards myth as multi-layered, so that "as one progresses in understanding, the mythical events (including basically historical happenings that carry the meanings of the mysteries) show themselves as more and more universal and therefore paradigms of the essential experience of everyone" (111). She laments that "the modern one-dimensional mind, weaned on scientific fact and newspaper reporting . . . cares only for the putative historical happening, and either neglects or rejects the universal application of the mystery so presented" (111). *Ecce! Bernardus redevivus!*

Using this hermeneutics, Bruteau re-presents, for example, the Johannine pericope of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (John 4:1-30) as Christian yoga (the seven husbands are the seven chakras), two synoptic logia about prayer (Mark 6:31 and Matt 6:6) as enstatic meditation (the closet is the self), and the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the teaching not simply that Mary was miraculously preserved from original sin ("the limited and

particular sense taught by its official custodians," 112), but "that there is . . . the unimpaired unity, still present and available" (110) to all humans.

Bruteau's weakness seems to be her tendency, despite her clear recognition of planetary neighborliness, to use "the West" to mean "us," meaning Western Christians (Catholics and Protestants, but not Orthodox, and certainly not Jews, Muslims, or atheistic philosophers), and "the East" to mean "them," or Vedanta Hinduism. (There are some references to Zen Buddhism, largely in its sanitized Western-import form, but they are interpreted, as is routine in Vedanta exegesis, as a variant of Vedanta, and there are no references to any other eastern hemisphere systems.) The book should more accurately be titled *What Western Christians Can Learn from Vedanta*—although that might not be as catchy.

More seriously, what we end up with is a kind of Vedanticized Christianity, or perhaps a Christianized Vedanta. Whether this is a Christian heresy or an exciting new development in re-presenting the Gospel in non-Semitic and non-Hellenistic terms, only time will tell. In any case, Bruteau's voice is worth hearing.