

Review: WHAT HAPPENED TO HOPE?

Reviewed Work(s): Hope Against Hope: Moltmann to Merton in One Theological Decade by
Walter Holden Capps

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derstanding of the Indian villages, "this unknown, unacknowledged India," the Indian past. He says that the past can be possessed only by inquiry and scholarship, or it will kill. True, the past is dead; but is it deadening? Can it be possessed *only* by inquiry and scholarship? Is it not possible and/or worthwhile to achieve a relationship to the past through an awareness of what it is and what its worth is for us today?

Besides the above main themes, we get several other instructive portraits and pictures in *India: A Wounded Civilization*: of Bombay and the Shiv Sena,

the *sarpanch* and the Patel of a Maharashtrian village, rural life in Bihar and Rajasthan, the intellectual tragedy of Naxalism, etc.

Finally, a word about Naipaul's 'passage' from *An Area of Darkness* to *India: A Wounded Civilization*. After thirteen years, he has travelled from an 'area of darkness' to a 'wounded civilization,' and the outcome is an accretion in his sense of the depth and distress of the Indian reality, more conscious and more reasoned. Let us not drown his sensitivity in our touchiness.

Srinivasa K. Sastry

WHAT HAPPENED TO HOPE?

Walter Holden Capps, *Hope Against Hope: Moltmann to Merton in One Theological Decade*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976. xxiii, 167 pp. \$4.75.

Walter Capps says that the "theology of Hope" was born in 1965 (a curiously exact date). It seems to have already run its course—or, more exactly, to have completed a significant cycle. This is the implication of Capps' subtitle: Moltmann represents the optimistic thrust of religious thought into the social-political order, its theology stressing the divine as immanent. Merton, whom Capps suggests will be the theologian of the coming decade, signals a return of religious attention to the inner person and to the transcendent divine.

Editor of *The Future of Hope* (1970) and author of *Time Invades the Cathedral* (1972), Capps has been immersed in hope as student and spokesman from its inception. (He mapped the "hope movement" for *Cross Currents* in 1968.) This present book represents his attempt to answer what has happened

within, and to, that once intense theological development.

Two factors, he sees, have worked jointly in the flourishing and decline of hope. First, the socio-economic-political situation in America passed from the heady ebullience of the sixties—when the great-society dream jostled and competed with intense actions of social reform and war protest—to the disappointments and retreats of the seventies—when inflation, recession, Watergate, and withdrawal into self-protection retuned American life. Hope rose with the rise of the one and sank back under the weight of the other. Hope promised a better world order. The movement envisioned the Kingdom of God in inner-worldly secularist terms: "the salvation of the individual depended upon the corporate fate of the human race." But the secular world showed little interest in sustaining the dream. This, in turn, set its theologians to further thinking. (One consequence has been the more radical "liberation" and "black" theologies which, still proclaiming corporate salvation, propose a

profound transformation of the secular world.)

The second factor lies in the inner rhythm of hope itself, observable in the course taken by the writings of Moltmann. His *Theology of Hope* (1965) which (for Capps) gave birth to the movement. Likewise his *The Crucified God* (1974) marked the completion of the cycle. Defending the unity of his work in *The Crucified God* Moltmann stated, "I was concerned then with the remembrance of Christ in the form of the hope of his future, and now I am concerned with hope in the form of the remembrance of his death." Spelled out, this comes to mean that the fulfillment of hope's promises will take place finally not through political planners and social builders, but by the transformation of human life wrought through suffering (*pathos*): the awakening of the power of human sympathy (*syn-pathos*). If hope appeared in the beginning as something greatly new, it now appears to have taken up into itself the old, and taken it as its foundation. Not engineering but metanoia is required.

The flow of hope into something like its opposite Capps sees as part of a larger shift in religious sensibilities. The shift has been from the world to the soul: from finding the divine in the concrete social order and aspiring to establish it more perfectly there to seeking and abiding in the transcendent God. For the latter Thomas Merton comes to be the theologian of the hour.

Capps does not find Moltmann and Merton altogether opposed, however. He quotes Merton: "I have been summoned to explore a desert area of man's heart in which explanations no longer suffice . . . an arid rocky dark land of the soul. . . . And in this area I have learned that one cannot truly know hope unless he has found out

how like despair hope is." In this context of shifting religious orientations Capps nominates Merton the theologian of the coming decade as Moltmann was of the last. Further, Merton's importance appears all the greater on account of his contact with "the full force of Asian religious experience."

Beneath the review of Moltmann and the spotlighting of Merton runs another theme: the oscillating character of religious sensitivities generally. The movement of hope from its worldly phase to its concentration on the crucifixion is an instance of this basic feature of all religious life. The ultimate answer to the puzzle of hope is that every moment in religion and ethics resolves into its opposite.

Capps illustrates this theme with chapters on Robert Jay Lifton's analysis of "protean man" and Norman O. Brown's affirmation of salvation through the Body. "Protean man" describes a person "incapable of maintaining allegiance to just one ideology," whose whole life is "a self-process endless in its experiments and explorations." For Brown, "the path to human salvation via *sublimation* and *repression* has . . . run its course." The only path available now is one based on "*narcissism* and *erotic exuberance*."

Lifton's new type of man and Brown's plea for a "resurrection of the body" have both emerged in a world dominated by their opposites—by the demands for stable character and for rationality. Capps also devotes a chapter to the widespread phenomena of "disengagement"—the turning away from activism in order to draw closer to the center of life (a place from which, among other things, life's priorities can be more clearly seen). This again is part of the rhythmic change.

In a less than satisfactory chapter Capps sets forth the structure of this

rhythmic process. (Its unsatisfactoriness results from clumsy language and padding. On one page almost the same question is asked in twenty different forms!) Historical religious life continually oscillates in attention and emphasis between the divine as transcendent and the divine as immanent, however more precisely these are fastened upon in the concrete. This is a judgment about religion worth noting and reflecting on. Capps has performed a service in enlarging it by examples, but he seems to have run afoul of the professor's Scylla and Charybdis: the jargon of academic analysis and the need to make enough words for a book.

Along the way Capps makes a noteworthy suggestion as to our relation to past thinkers. They retain their ability to teach (our ability to hear may be weak, however) because their in-

sights were formed "by the same dialectical pendulum swings within the same contexts of reference" as our own. Their great concerns, that is, "are identical to contemporary concerns" (body and spirit, change and permanence, freedom and authority). For a contemporary-minded person to propose that we really live in the same old (dialectically constituted) world is significant. The problem in our relationship with the past is not that it fails to offer us something—most of us strongly experience the fact that it does. The question is precisely what, and how. Here also more probing and less repetition would have been welcome. In spite of such annoying drawbacks Capps' book has good uses, especially in what it offers of the thought of others.

JOHN D. RYAN

SONTAG'S MOON

Frederick Sontag, *Sun Myung Moon and the Unification Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1977. \$8.95.

In the curious meeting of East and West since the era of World War II, a phenomenon has developed in America which often has drawn attention away from the Divine Light Mission, transcendental meditators, the chanting bands of Krishna Consciousness, and others. Almost as if to enhance the religious pluralism of the country rather than to unify its divisive tendencies, Sun Myung Moon and the adherents called by his name have stolen the headlines from many offbeat as well as mainline competitors. Perhaps this is the source of our understanding and misunderstanding the Holy Spirit

Association for the Unification of World Christianity. Frederick Sontag makes a point of the latter. Sun Myung Moon himself testifies to his gratefulness for such discovery and subsequent promotion by the media. A gentle Oriental who spoke only in kindly phrases would have generated a paucity of news. But America has quickly seen some negative aspects in the Moon movement and this evaluation has perpetuated the headlines. Today no citizen is unaware of the Moonies.

Why do young people in both eastern and western cultures—many no longer teen-agers—join the Unification Church? They seem to join for rather positive reasons: the search for authority, the hunger for the transcendent, the demand for truth to which one may