Review

Reviewed Work(s): SUBVERTING GREED: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY by Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar

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substituting industrialisation. As a result these countries did not establish vested interests in their domestic economies which were in a position to hinder the competitiveness of their exports. The authors also stress that the key lies in introducing as many autonomous efficiency inducing forces into the system as possible. These observations should provide a useful base for policy-makers in the developing countries.

The book, on the whole, is an important contribution to the literature on comparative studies of countries, though one of the major limitations of the analysis undertaken is the time period covered which does not include the Asian crisis and the aftermath. However, the authors have made an attempt to examine, in general, the factors that might have led to the East Asian Crisis. The book would also have been more enriching for the readers if it had undertaken a detailed country-level analysis since the authors had very successfully built up the institutional contexts, policy-regimes and outcomes of selective policies countrywise. Even so, the book provides interesting and important insights into policy-making and therefore will be useful for the policy-makers and researchers in this field.

SUBVERTING GREED: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY
Edited by Paul F. Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar

NUR YALMAN

Every now and again a book appears which illuminates brilliantly the most pressing concerns of the contemporary era and has the potential to reach a large audience. The book under review is such a work. The editors have succeeded in bringing together a most insightful group of thinkers from entirely different traditions to encourage them to think about the problem of what “global capitalism” is doing to all of us. What is the reason for the vast resurgence of disaffection that has motivated millions around the world to protest against the policies of the Bush administration? In what direction is the “military industrial complex” in many countries taking us with their gargantuan budgets? Whom do those who run the World Economic Forum represent? Karl Marx spent years of his life in the reading room of the British Museum working to alert us that something unusual, a bourgeois revolution with an increasing concentration of capital, was taking place in the world, something to which we needed to pay urgent attention. It has taken a hundred years or so for some of the disastrous aspects of the “fetishism” of money, the global pursuit of capital, and runaway consumerism to become salient.
The writers in this slim but incisive volume have thrown a very powerful light on the critical issues regarding the negative aspects of globalisation as they appear from the vantage point of various religious perspectives. Any attempt to focus the attention of Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians and African traditionalists is likely to be a challenge. In this case it is a challenge which succeeds by focusing attention on the globalisation of the culture of greed.

The book is the result of the efforts of the Boston Research Centre for the Twenty-first Century. This is an organisation which represents the thoughts of a major Buddhist organisation in Japan, Soka Gakkai, which has chapters in many parts of the world. It also accurately reflects the thoughts, interests, and initiative of Dr Daisaku Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International, who has placed the substantial resources of his organisation in the service of “evolving a global ethic for a peaceful twenty-first century”. Given that at the time of writing we are further away from peace than we have been at any time since the fall of the Soviet Union, the book could not be more timely. The executive director of the Centre, Virginia Straus, states their noble intentions in the preface: “At a time when religion in its fanatical, dangerously closed form has enabled acts of terrible destruction, interfaith partnerships...for a better world are more important than ever.”

The editors Knitter and Muzaffar who have written the excellent introduction and far-ranging conclusions respectively, have chosen a brilliant group of thinkers. Each essay is an inviting point of entry to the serious and productive thought of great religions about the real world. Ifi Amadiume, an anthropologist with great insight, writes a most unusual account of West African thought about the world economy. Swami Agnivesh has an incisive analysis of activism from an Indian perspective, reminding us that varna, a key element in Hindu thought “is derived from the root... which means ‘to choose’... not of material avenues, but of a mission in life” (p.56). David Loy writes about the Buddhist attitude to wealth and property. Zhou Qin writes of the strengths of the Confucian tradition concerning the attitudes regarding service to others and to the community. Norman Solomon has an important piece on the Judaic tradition, so sharply dealt with by Marx. Sally McFague writes of the challenges of the Christian tradition to a world defined by economists who have the audacity to claim that they represent a science “independent of any particular ethical position” (p.125) when in fact their recommendations have had devastating effects on the lives of many. One of the most thought-provoking essays is by Ameer Ali on the Muslim perspective on “greed” and “globalisation”. It concludes with the unusual thought that, contrary to what most Westerners believe, Islam has
profound insights to offer, in ethical
terms, to a world ruled by the hegemony
of the “the market”.

All these writers share a common
view, well expressed by Knitter, that
“Whether we are conscious of it or not,
if the market is actually functioning as
a religion, then it needs to enter into a
dialogue with other religions” (p.10).
They are equally aware of the urgent
problems of poverty, eloquently
mentioned in every contribution.

There is a long way to go before the
members of the many different religious
communities can understand each other
and come to terms with global economy.
The fanatics and enthusiasts with
desperate agendas do not make the task
any easier. There is, nonetheless, a serious
interfaith debate to be undertaken
between the thinkers of these hallowed
traditions as to how to address the
pressing concerns of our precarious
situation at this time. This book is a
welcome example of such an effort. All
who have been involved in this excellent
enterprise are to be greatly lauded.

ETHNICITY VERSUS NATIONALISM: THE
DEVELOTION DISCOURSE IN SRI LANKA
PARTHA S. GHOSH
(in association with The Indian Council of World
Affairs, New Delhi)

S. D. MUNI

Sri Lanka’s ethnic conflict is a
reasonably well-explored theme by
scholars and policy analysts. Both
historical as well as contemporary aspects
of this theme have been
written about and some of the
publications reflect a high degree of
scholarship on, and understanding of this
very complex and persisting conflict. Dr
Partha Ghosh’s latest publication is a
welcome addition to this literature as it
updates the theme by focusing on the
question of devolution which is key to
the resolution of the conflict and hence
of the current peace process.

The author presents a copiously
researched narrative on the issue of
devolution. The unfolding of the
devolution discourse is traced from as
far back as 1931, and is systematically
chronicled through nearly one-third of
the book. This narrative lists major
political landmarks in the evolution of
the Tamil-Sinhala conflict, by
highlighting the 1956 “Sinhala Only”
movement and the 1983 violence against
the Tamils as “watershed” events. The
author has discussed various aspects of
the devolution package evolved under
President Chandrika Kumaratunga’s
initiative and underlines political failure