

BOOK REVIEWS

A BUDDHIST SPECTRUM: Contributions to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue. By Marco Pallis. New York: Seabury Press, 1981. iii+163 pp..

Marco Pallis must be well into his eighties, so this is probably the last book we can expect from him. Earlier there were *The Way and the Mountain* and his first book, *Peaks and Lamas*, one of the best meditative travelogues that has ever been written. Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard* is the latter's successor, but though it deserved its awards, Pallis's book is better. Even its prose is better for being less strained, and its reflective sections are far more Buddhist and universal for being less self-preoccupied.

Like *The Way and the Mountain*, *A Buddhist Spectrum* is a collection of essays, most of which appeared originally in *Studies in Comparative Religion*. I had read them all there—I never knowingly pass up anything Marco Pallis writes—but welcomed the occasion of this review to reread them and found them as interesting the second time as the first. Though Pallis respects scholarship, he doesn't consider himself a Buddhist scholar (see pp. 72–73). What he does is to focus on key Buddhist teachings and mine their essential and existential meaning. In the course of this project he regularly refers to other traditions, especially Christianity, which accounts for the book's subtitle. The result is completely satisfying. For insight, and the beauty insight requires if it is to be effective, I find no writer on Buddhism surpassing him.

Karma, *anatta*, and the Tibetan mantram OM MANI PADME HUM are treated in chapters of exceptional discernment. Two essays explore connections between Buddhist concepts: "Wisdom and Method" in one case, and "Dharma and the Dharmas" in the other. Two further essays make points that are interesting but less central to Buddhist thought. One of these deals with "The Metaphysics of Musical Polyphony"—Pallis was a musician by profession—and the other with "Archetypes as Seen through Buddhist Eyes."

The master essays in this collection, though, are the two that ask questions: "Is There Room for 'Grace' in Buddhism?"—yes—and "Is There a Problem of Evil?"—no. Readers of this journal will not find his first answer surprising;

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it is the systematic completeness of his answer that is original. His second answer, though, will surprise some readers. Evil is, of course, a practical problem, one that everyone must face and respond to constructively; but the theoretical problem of evil is illusory. It arises from premises that have not been rightly positioned. As the Buddha himself would say, the question is not well put.

A book that settles the problem of evil justifies its existence by that accomplishment alone, but in this book that achievement shares honors with many. Reading its pages, I sensed more than once that they may be those of a "non-returner." The spirit that infuses them seems bound for the Himalayas he loved and brought so many of us to love. The Himalayas and *śūnyata* beyond.

HUSTON SMITH

A ZEN WAVE: Bashō's Haiku and Zen. By Robert Aitken, with a foreword by W. S. Merwin. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1978. 192 pp. with illustrations; glossary, list of Japanese equivalents of Chinese names, notes.

The haiku is not an easy form to discuss. It sets up the kind of resistance to interpretation which makes most of the usual critical approaches to the text seem redundant. In this sense the form seems 'beyond interpretation', persistently deflecting the critic, pushing him towards more peripheral exegetic activities, towards easier options, such as writing its history (its origins and development), or its poetics (the grammar of its forms), or its 'psycho-genetics' (the background 'experience' which went to produce it). Each of these approaches may at least have the merit of presenting fresh information.

An engagement with its 'content' sets up the greatest resistance. The haiku exemplifies that form which eludes fixed significations, the easy extrapolation of 'themes'; it arrests the mind in its movement from image to concept; it represents the miniature form whose 'content' is forever deferred. Thus it offers minimal rewards in the way of representation (it says nothing *about* Mount Fuji or about Suma in summer or Kiso in autumn, thus tempting commentators to fill in the gaps which the haiku itself opens up); it has little metaphorical density (meanings are not projected on an axis of similarities); and it is plainly misguided to read it as symbolism.

How then can a critic engage with such an elusive form? How pin-point effects produced by verbal gestures or *tracks* which seem to vanish when scrutinized? How discourse on a text which refuses to yield up its 'truth'? How be 'serious' about a form whose name means 'play verse'?

In *A Zen Wave* Robert Aitken has found a way into the haiku which is at