

Book Reviews

Martien E. Brinkman: *The Non-Western Jesus: Jesus as Boddhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer?* London: Equinox, 2009, 338 pp.

The global map of religions has undergone rapid transformation in recent decades. One of the most momentous of these is that the geographical center of gravity of Christianity has shifted to the global South. Unfortunately, profound upheavals in the global religious situation have not yet been widely recognized. Christianity is too often seen as an Occidental religion, even though the majority of Christians today live outside the Western world.

Most Christians in the global South are either Catholics or Pentecostals. The latter category also embraces a wide spectrum of independent communities that are not easily pigeonholed. This blurring of denominational boundaries is just one instance highlighting the fact that scholars of theology and comparative religion have to reconsider their analytical tools and also re-evaluate much of what they have learned.

The thriving of Christianity in the global South poses many challenges to the global North, in terms of both academic scholarship and church politics. For instance, southern interpretations of Christian life are often staunchly traditional by the standards of northern churches that live amid liberal societies. At the same time, the southern churches can be doctrinally surprisingly flexible.

Most Christians, of course, just read the Bible and practice their faith embedded in the local context, without reflecting as to how the Gospel relates to cultural context. When the surrounding culture is thoroughly 'religious', this means that borders of religious traditions are crossed. Christianity in the global South therefore poses a particular challenge to those who still believe in 'pure' doctrine. In its vividness it also exposes the fundamental bias of Western theology, which has mainly conversed with academic philosophy and has too often neglected significant areas of human existence, such as myth, narration and imagination.

Theologians now recognize that one of the main characteristics of the Christian faith is its translatability and its ability to find a home in different cultures. This has also been ecclesiastically sanctioned since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which encouraged Catholics to search for truly indigenous forms in each culture. In spite of Benedict XVI's regressive speech in Regensburg in 2006, highlighting the unbreakable connection between Hellenistic culture and Christian faith, theologians in the global South have put much effort into expressing their faith in a Non-Western way.

Against this background, Martien E. Brinkman's *The Non-Western Jesus* is a timely book, raising the question 'must Jesus always remain Greek', and providing many interesting examples that steer the reader

toward a definitely negative answer. The book, originally published in Dutch in 2007, covers a wide range of contemporary interpretations of the meaning of Christ in non-Western cultures.

Brinkman focuses on African and Asian Christologies, most of which have been forged in societies where Christians are a minority. Hence many of indigenous epithets employed in conveying the meaning of Christ originate in other religious traditions. Brinkman agrees that 'contemporary non-Western theology can no longer be imagined without interreligious dialogue' (ix) and also reconsiders the idea of syncretism. He wishes to use the disputed concept in a neutral way, finding room for legitimate syncretism: a 'fruitful integration of new concepts that are better able to express the meaning of Jesus in a certain place and time than the concepts that were thus far known' (p. 14).

In his analysis of contextual Christologies, Brinkman speaks of a 'double transformation'. By this he means that when a concept is employed in theological translation, its meaning always undergoes transformation. The Hindu concept of *avatara*, for instance, is changed in some crucial aspects when it is applied to Christ and enmeshed in the Christian frame of reference. The process of double transformation, however, means that transformation does not take place only in one direction: the former understanding of Jesus Christ is likewise enriched in the process of translation. It is worthy of note

that Brinkman's analysis seems to be critical, in the sense that concepts should mediate properly between divinity and humanity without relapsing into one-sidedness. For instance, he wishes to ensure that depicting Christ as *avatara* does not diminish his full humanity – or that characterizing him as *guru* does not dispense with his divinity. The main point of the Chalcedonian Creed, on the dual nature of Jesus, has to remain intact.

In fact, many theories of contextualization propose that the Christian faith should relate both affirmatively and critically to different cultural and religious contexts. Brinkman employs eloquent language to underscore that incorporating various cultural and religious concepts into the Christian narrative is a creative process with a critical edge:

The incarnation of the Word (John 1:14) implies that God wants to dwell among people. That means that the divine wants to take on cultural garb. While the incarnation represents the *fact* of assumption, the cross and resurrection represent the *nature* of the assumption and, in fact, its critical character. The cross and resurrection are a model for dying and rising with Christ, an event that is symbolized in baptism. [...] Baptism thus always refers to a critical *process of purification*, a catharsis. Whereas incarnation stands for confirmation, affirmation, the cross and resurrection stand for denial, negation and finding oneself through losing oneself. (P. 33–34, emphases in original.)

Brinkman is surely not alone in his understanding of inculturation as

a double-edged process. The most renowned definition of inculturation is to be found in a letter to the Society of Jesus written by the Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe in 1978. It ties inculturation solidly to the fact of incarnation of God. Consequently, inculturation is tantamount to the incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular context. This entails that Christian faith 'finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question' and also 'becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about "a new creation".'

Brinkman provides the reader not only with methodological reflections on the proper use of non-Western concepts but also with survey of various non-Western Christologies. Along with the Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indian and African understandings of Jesus, the book also includes a separate chapter on the Indonesian Jesus; this is a significant contribution, shedding some light on the difficult issue of how to present Jesus in a predominantly Islamic context.

The Non-Western Jesus takes the reader through Asia and Africa, to become acquainted with significant theological developments there. To gain a more balanced overall picture of Christianity in the global South, however, one should also read a book on global Pentecostalism. Textual sources are surely important, but familiarizing oneself only with theological enterprises of contextualization renders a very

limited understanding of the multifaceted phenomena taking place in the global South.

The Non-Western Jesus is to be recommended as a valuable textbook for basic courses in intercultural theology. In fact, this kind of reading should not be confined only to courses in 'missiology' or 'intercultural theology'. We are living in an epoch-making time, which calls for a new postcolonial awareness in religious studies and demands transcending familiar disciplinary boundaries. This means that theology should be thoroughly cross-cultural, shedding the last vestiges of the colonial era and taking into account the experience of faith in the global South with due seriousness.

Jyri Komulainen

University of Helsinki, Finland

John Bowen: *Can Islam be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, 230 pp.

During the last twenty years or so one topic has recurred frequently in the French public sphere. In 1989 three Muslim schoolgirls' refusal to take off their headscarves in secondary school ignited a debate about the compatibility of the French Republic and Islam. French legislation faced a new problem. The Islam to which these schoolgirls adhered was something new – or at least so the story was told. In fact, the first mosque in France dates as far back as the ninth century and French colonial

legislation had been wrestling with how to discipline Muslims since the nineteenth century; but these facts were soon forgotten.

There are of course many ways to shape a narrative entry into the topic of 'France and Islam'; the headscarf affairs are but one. And on this topic a large variety of studies have been conducted, mostly in French but to some extent in English. With regard to anthropological studies written in English and focusing explicitly on the French Islamic landscape, however, the body of literature is rather thin. For this reason, John Bowen's *Can Islam be French?* is a welcome and important book. It shifts focus from the republican state apparatus to local social and religious movements. Furthermore, with the historical insights laid bare by *College de France* professor Pierre Rosanvallon, Bowen's persuasive study shows how these movements partake in a long tradition of French grassroots movements that have in the past and indeed are still today shaping the contours of the Republic.

In *Can Islam be French?*, a companion work to Bowen's earlier *Why The French Don't Like Headscarves* (2004), Bowen seeks an answer to the following question: 'Can Islam become a generally accepted part of the French social landscape?' (p. 3) If in the previous study he focused on how non-Muslims in France perceived the visible presence of Islam in France, now he is asking 'What do certain Muslim public actors propose to make of Islam' (p. 10) and what kind of ideas and institutions will form this Islam into a reality.

Nevertheless, since Bowen asks how far the French state is ready to go 'in requiring not just obedience to the law and correct public comportment, but assimilation to a particular set of (post-)Christian values' (p. 5), there is a connection between the former book and this one.

Bowen calls his approach 'an anthropology of public reason'. Here anthropology means that the author applies a qualitative and local perspective on ongoing interactions in social life – in questions such as how an Islamic public actor persuades others or how this actor justifies her or his actions. 'Public reasoning' somewhat shifts the focus, asking how these actors deliberate and debate in public settings. In the book Bowen follows a handful of individuals, or Islamic public actors as he calls them, in what he perceives as two spatially different realms in France: a transnational Islamic one and a national one based on French civic values. 'Each repertoire', as he puts it, 'is a distinct assembly of norms and values that delimits acceptable from unacceptable ways of explaining and justifying actions.' (p. 6)

Why, then, has Bowen chosen to return to France? First of all, he sees France, with its republican take on citizenship, as an interesting case to compare with more multicultural approaches, such as that adopted in Britain; especially since in France Muslims have had a harder time acquiring religious recognition than in Britain. Second, Bowen finds France intriguing with regard to its colonial history. As he puts it, France has 'a

longer familiarity but a sharper set of obstacles in the way of Muslims seeking to create an Islamic way of life.' (p. 9)

The structure of the book is straightforward and pedagogical. There are nine chapters, forming three sections. In the first two chapters (Section 1), Bowen goes through the history of arrival and settlement of French 'sociological Muslims', as he calls them; the term refers to what is also commonly known as 'traditional Muslim'. That is, to paraphrase Bowen, anyone who in one way or the other considers himself to be a Muslim, and who is seen as such by others around them. In this section we also learn about the emergence of Islamic institutions vis-à-vis the French 'state control-through-support'.

In Section 2, Chapters 3–6, Bowen turns to organizational structures. He does so by inviting us on the one hand to a small 'apartment mosque', a Tawhid center in the Parisian suburb Seine-Saint-Denis, on the other to one of France's 'cathedral mosques' in Lyon. 'By looking at a range of mosques', Bowen explains, 'we are able to understand how Muslims have organized vis-a-vis a number of features of the French landscape in which they now find themselves: ethnic diversity, state management, financial assistance, and help in fulfilling religious obligations.' (p. 62)

Bowen analyses the content of Islam as it is taught on French soil. Given that the Islamic educational field is 'still emerging', and that France lacks an Islamic institutional

framework, Bowen asks, 'How, then, to teach Islamic norms to women and men who plan to make their lives in France?' (p. 63) In his search for answers Bowen navigates between CERCIC (Centre d'Études et de Recherches sur l'Islam) and the first Muslim day school in France, La Réussite, in the Parisian suburb Aubervilliers. Since Islamic public actors, Bowen concludes, have to a large degree based their teachings on societies where an institutional educational system already exists, this necessitates a re-reading and re-adaptation of these teachings in a French context.

In the final section, Chapters 7–9, Bowen maps out how Islamic public actors engage in reasoning about Islam at two levels: How should French Muslims live, work, marry and sacrifice? And what tools and traditions should we use to reason about such questions? Bowen argues that this dual preoccupation on the part of French Muslims contributes to the creation of somewhat heterogeneous and distinct Islamic realms, tied together by meta-reasoning: 'The transnational space that arises from Islamic justifications is global without being either "postnational", in the sense of succeeding earlier events bounded by state boundaries, or "European", in the sense of delimiting themselves to a normatively specific Europe. Nor does it depend on perduring ties to specific places, as is often the case with transnational religious movements.' (p. 156)

Here, Bowen moves on to 'the broader world of social life and

political debates in France' which forces him to consider 'the social and moral force of French objections to the sort of Islamic ideas and institutions we have been considering' (p. 179). Those who are worried about Muslim integration, he says, generally raise two objections. The first concerns Muslims' sociability, where they are often thought of as choosing a communal, parallel life not part of the imagined Republican unity. The second objection has to do with norms and values: mainly that Muslims fail to accept the premises of French secularism (*laïcité*). Bowen argues that placing too great a focus on Muslims as a homogenous group creates a sort of 'block thinking' that 'substitutes generalizations across a category of people for an inquiry into the motives of particular individuals.' (p. 196) The way out of this, according to Bowen, is a pragmatics of convergence. This means a break with the value-monism found in 'dominant ways of thinking about *laïcité* and about integration' and a shift towards 'an ideal of shared respect for a common legal and political framework.' (p. 198)

I would like to highlight two problematic and interrelated aspects in this book. First, although I would wish to share Bowen's optimism as to the acceptance of French Muslims by the non-Muslim French, recent polls contradict the statistics relied on by Bowen in his optimism. Bowen refers to a survey from 2006, in which 74 per cent of all French people 'said that there was no conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society.' (p.

3) However, a recent poll published in *Le Monde* (13/12/2010) suggests that 40 per cent of the French perceive Islam as a 'threat'. The words most often associated with Islam are 'rejection' of western values, 'fanaticism', and 'submission'. Moreover, is it not the case that the Islamic presence in the Republic is becoming a more and more infected topic? Politicians from right and left alike, as well as newly organized social movements, all seem to uncritically seek legitimacy in secularism to discipline and stigmatize the Muslim other. What is more, when this local French situation is interpreted in the light of a growing European Islamophobia, there is cause for concern and for further scholarly attention. This is why I find Bowen's initial question slightly misdirected. Islam is already part of the French social landscape, and has been so for quite a while, as a discursive formation that – together with values, especially secularism – has shaped the public debate from its very origins.

Second, although restrictive on normative enunciations, Bowen's proposal to come to terms with what might be seen as an imploding identity politics appears to me rather unexpected. In Bowen's words: 'The positive challenge to each country is to make more precise the background conditions of life in a country, so as to make clear what is required of new arrivals and therefore what is also required of people who have lived there longer. What precisely *is* the role of religion in U.S. public life? What precisely *are* British values?' (p. 9; italics in

original.) If one of the problems facing Muslim acceptance in France and Europe is value-monism, is the answer really to be found in a desire to establish the 'real' French, the 'real' European way of life? Is this not what European leaders are doing? Consider Nicolas Sarkozy's frequent statement that France is part of Judeo-Christian civilization, Angela Merkel's peculiar statement that secular Germany 'should become more open, to show that we are Christians', and David Cameron's statement that, whereas British 'state multiculturalism' has failed to stop Islamic radicalization, the new remedy against radicalization is a clearer 'sense of shared national identity'. In other words, today Islam has come to signify a non-tolerable stranger, legitimizing a revival in nationalist and civilizational politics; secularism has become the marker for the tolerant 'us', thus feeding ideas as to Christian-European superiority and legitimizing what constitutes this imagined prominence, of which the stranger can never become a full member. In other words, in desiring the 'real' of the nation, borders tend to be strengthened, not shattered.

To conclude: theoretical-normative problems aside, Bowen once again strengthens his position as one of the leading commentators on the French social landscape. What the study lacks in theoretical rigour is offset by a rigorous and vivid narration of the empirical material and by the author's extensive knowledge of the field. Together with *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves*, the

English-speaking student of France and Islam will find here an excellent introduction.

Per-Erik Nilsson
Uppsala University

Daiva Vaitkevičienė: *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai: gydymo formulės – Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms*. Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2008, 919 pp.

Research in Lithuanian folk traditions is well developed. Internationally well-known scholars of Lithuanian origins, such as Marija Gimbutas and A. J. Greimas, have set the standards for the field, and have made the substance of Lithuanian traditions accessible to those of us not well versed in Lithuanian. In Finland the study of Lithuanian folk tradition was pioneered in the early twentieth century by A. R. Niemi and to a lesser amount by V. J. Mansikka, who unfortunately have had only occasional successors.

In post-Soviet Lithuania, interest in folk tradition has resurged among scholars as well as among those who see it as a basis for lived religion. The latter include a well-known Lithuanian 'dissident' of Soviet times, Jonas Trinkūnas – a teacher at Vilnius Pedagogical University and reviver of a Lithuanian ethnic religion, Romuva. The former is represented for example by Daiva Vaitkevičienė, a scholar at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. Her recent publications include the volume under review here, *Lithuanian Verbal*

Healing Charms, a collection of healing tradition charms with a long and perceptive Introduction. For the reader without Lithuanian, the English translation of the Introduction is very helpful. Unfortunately, the charms themselves have been translated selectively (the 600 pages in Lithuanian are condensed into 150 pages in English), thus diminishing the usefulness of the work for those not fluent in Vaitkevičienė's native tongue.

Lithuanian terms for a charm – the most common is evidently *užkalbėjimas*, from the verb *kalbėti*, 'to talk' – all seem to be connected with talking or speech, indicating that Lithuanians link charms more closely with speech acts – an utterance which alters prevailing conditions – than with casting a spell upon something or someone. In other words, they emphasize the power of words more than the outcome of the act.

A large number of Lithuanian charms are used for healing or prevention. In addition, charms may be employed to secure the harvest, success in the hunt and other such activities, to inspire love or to harm someone. Closely related to charms are 'prayers' (*maldelės*), which according to Vaitkevičienė are unique because they include a number of pre-Christian elements. We may recall that officially Lithuania was the last European state to embrace Christianity (in 1386). However, many prayers seem to contain Christian elements as well, and seem rather familiar at least to those acquainted with the Finnish charm tradition.

The reason may be that these charms do not originate from Lithuania but have 'migrated' from other countries. Most of the charms have been recorded in areas bordering on Belarus or influenced by Belarusians or Old Believers (i.e. the Russian tradition), which makes one wonder as to the role of Orthodox tradition in preserving or retaining charms; the more so since other types of tradition, for example ritual songs and laments, also flourish in the same areas. An example of 'migration' is one of the charms against snake-bite: 'Holy earth, earth, earth oh earth! Snake, snake, snake, give back [name of the person bitten] health!' After these words, the charmer says 'Hail Mary' three times. The reason for such a migration is evidently their common, 'transnational' function: healing, for instance, is not peculiar to Lithuanians (or Finns) alone, and the 'power of the word' is needed everywhere.

As Vaitkevičienė says, the most common way of classifying healing charms is according to their function, i.e. in terms of the illness(es) they are intended to heal. The other two classifications often used are by type (classifying charms with similar motifs and structures, as identified by the scholar, under the same heading; a classification also used by Vaitkevičienė) and by texture (sequences of narrative structures in the text). One of the advantages of classification by type is that the scholar can detect connections between charms related to different illnesses and textures, thus, one may suppose, uncovering interconnec-

tions of charms (and of the world of the charmer). Vaitkevičienė's work presents twelve (in the English part, only ten) main categories or types of healing methods, such as expulsion, purification and destruction, illustrated by 1716 items; these evidently constitute all Lithuanian healing charms collected since 1842. The various categories are represented rather unevenly. The reason is simple: some are common, others are not.

Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms is above all a collection of healing charms. It also tells us something about the performance of charms (although the reader might wish to know more about the ritual setting of a healing treatment), but almost nothing about the healer. This focus on the charms themselves forms a basis for the subsequent study not only of the healer but also for example of popular conceptions of illness and methods of healing. One clue to this is provided by Vaitkevičienė herself: in order to cure an illness, the healer first has to separate it from the ill person's body and dispose of it. The cause of an illness is thus outside oneself and has to be returned there.

This conception is of course well-known from folk medicine in general, but I think that adopting a typological approach – which illnesses are treated in this way, what exactly is extracted, where the cause of an illness is believed to come from and where it is dispelled to – might bring some extra light to the study of popular healing traditions. For example: why are certain illnesses

expelled into the natural environment (ground, water, swamp etc.), whereas others are sent to a mythological, or sacred, place? Is there some inner logic to the popular healing tradition? Or is every occasion case-specific? Does the charmer expel the illness to a neighbour or an animal only if there is some particular reason (known to him or her) to do so? The idea as such is of course not new; over a century ago, for example, O. J. Brummer discussed the places to which illnesses were expelled (*Über die Bannungsorte der finnischen Zauberslieder*, Helsinki: Société finno-ougrienne 1909). What is needed, in my opinion, is a revision of such studies from the new perspectives offered by anthropology, ethnography and the history of religions.

Also worth studying, I believe, would be bodily aspects of healing, such as licking wounds or touching the hurting part, and their connection to the popular notion of a healthy person; the evident 'need' to add Christian elements to some charms; or a comparison of patient-healer relations as they occur in folklore material to their equivalents in medical treatment, as has been documented within anthropology. Briefly, Vaitkevičienė's work provides the reader with a rich ethnographic material and opens up new avenues for further theoretical research.

Teuvo Laitila

University of Eastern Finland