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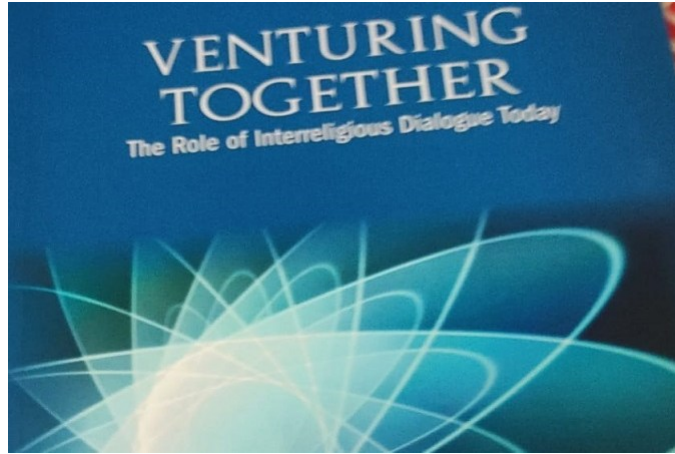
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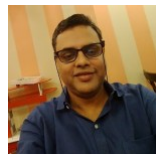
**Summary:** God is a merciful God. Weeping will turn into laughter. Thursday reflection on readings Acts 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23 & Gospel of John 16:16-20. Please click below to listen.



**Book Review: In Search of a Unique Practical Theodicy**

May 15, 2022 Team ICM Art / Book / Film

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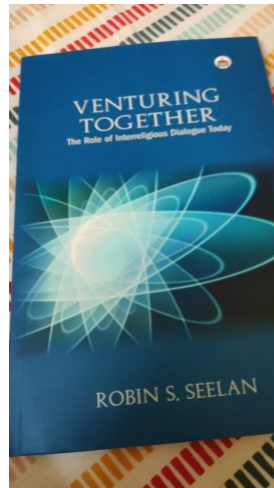


By Dr. Subhasis Chattopadhyay –

*Title: Venturing Together: The Role of Interreligious Dialogue Today*  
*Author: Dr Robin S. Seelan SJ.*  
*Authors Press. New Delhi, 2021.*  
*ISBN 978-93-5207-471-6.*

Price: Rs 295/\$35.

Very few philosophers and theologians, either Christian or Hindu, write on the real-life implications of the problem of evil. The problem of evil or hate is the leitmotif of this slim book on interreligious dialogue. Robin S. Seelan writes that we need "a paradigm shift" (18) so that we can free ourselves from "feelings of hatred" which "seem to engulf us" within all aspects of life: since "hate is institutionalized" even into religious discourses (63). Seelan's theodicy is thoroughly worked out and is to be found in his emphasis on love in praxes. The book under review needs to be contextualized within both Western and Eastern philosophies and even various theologies. Nowhere does Seelan claim to be a theologian yet he has much to say on mysticism where he attacks logical positivism by correctly defining mysticism as "being beyond the realm of reason" (46). This reviewer has not yet come across a book where mysticism is seen as "copulative" (48) and where a Christian priest correctly interprets the spiritualities of the Hindu philosophers Sri Ramanujacharya and Sri Madhvacharya as essentially mystical (48). Seelan gestures to the Achintya-Bheda-Abheda (अचिन्त्यभेदाभेद) philosophy within the Sanatana Dharma and finds within mysticism the answer to the problem of evil qua hatred. Again, one is stunned by Seelan's originality when he sees even within mysticism a way to social activism (58) and interreligious dialogue. In his stress on the practise of philosophy in the here and the now, Seelan is living out his vocation as a Jesuit schooled in the thoughts of the Second Vatican Council. In this he is an heir to not only to the late Raimundo Panikkar (1918-2010) whom he cites in this book but also to philosophers like Martha Nussbaum (see *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, 1994) and theologians like Hans Küng (1928-2021). Nussbaum, like many of the pre-Socratics, stressed on philosophy as being therapeutic and Küng wanted the Roman Catholic Church to be a sign against the times. These with the caveat that Seelan does not deviate from the Magisterial teachings of his Church: he ends the book quoting Saint Pope John Paul II at Assisi in 1986 (95). Let us now turn to his theodicy.



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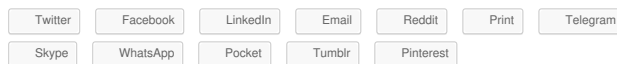
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Chapter 3, *Towards Harmony: Engaging Inter-Faith Dialogues for a Hate-Free World* (62-79) is crucial in understanding how Seelan reacts to systematic evil within India and the world. He even quotes William Hazlitt, the English essay writer, to first understand hate (66). This is a pleasant surprise for this reviewer since Hazlitt is hardly considered a philosopher by any literary scholar, leave alone by professional philosophers. Then Seelan hones onto the real inter-religious solution to hatred: ignorance. Section 3.4.2 (69-72) is unique to interreligious studies since Seelan is able to find in Sri Aurobindo's (1872-1950) works a theodicy to the problem of hatred which even Jacques Dupuis (1923-2004) missed in his *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (1997). Seelan alone amongst Indian philosophers and theologians successfully yokes together both his own religion and the Sanatana Dharma without distorting either. In Seelan's words: he retains his religious identity while "being open to multiple identities" (26). In this he is in the line of the Cosmopolitans and especially, Kwame Appiah (b.1954). Though Seelan would emphasize that he is an heir to Panikkar mentioned above because he repeatedly returns to Panikkar in this book; he goes beyond Panikkar's dialogue with Hinduism. (This aspect of Seelan is beyond the scope of this review.) Panikkar in an interview freely available online said that he wanted to look into others' religions: to peek into others' religions. Seelan does not merely peek into others' religions; he calls for an activism rooted in both the *Yoga Sutras* (37) and in Meister Eckhart (54) to make real the clarion call of the Christian liberation theologians beginning with Gustavo Gutiérrez (b.1928) and Jon Sobrino (b.1938). What they began in Latin America, Seelan brings to India. But his project is more difficult since he is not in a nation where any one religion is hegemonic. Gutiérrez and Sobrino theologized within Christian contexts for other Christians. Seelan wants to genuinely listen in Martin Buber's manner (76). This listening is itself a therapy against hate "spat out" (65) by various forms of the nameless Pharaoh of the Old Testament (*Hebrew Scriptures*) who demanded hard and continuous labour from the Israelites.

This book is in response to evil in the here and the now. Seelan succeeds in finding a unique practical theodicy which is not impossible to practice by both Hindus and Christians.

*Dr Subhasis Chattopadhyay has a Ph.D. from the University of Calcutta on Patristics, Theology and Theodicy in Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King. He has further qualifications in Biblical Theology and separately, in Hindu theology.*

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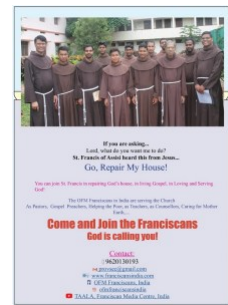


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