

ISSN 1918-7351
Volume 3 (2011)

Review of Richard Kearney and Eileen Rizo-Patron, eds., *Traversing the Heart: Journeys of the Inter-religious Imagination* (Leiden, Brill: 2010). 502 pages.

It is difficult to categorize this recent anthology edited by Richard Kearney and Eileen Rizo-Patron. Broadly speaking, one might call it a work in “Religious Studies,” with many of its contributions venturing into closely related and often overlapping fields, such as philosophy of religion, theology (including of non-Christian religions), psychology of religion, religious ethics, phenomenology, the arts, and inter-faith dialogue; equally varied are the genres of its contributions, including biography, confessional writing, dialogue, and short reflection pieces interspersed among more formal essays. It is part of the Brill *Studies in Religion and the Arts* series, and while only a small handful of the chapters deal explicitly with actual art objects or practices, all the contributions more or less share what is in fact the basic premise of the book as a whole (which will not surprise anyone who is at all familiar with much of Richard Kearney’s work): namely, that the inter-religious *imagination* in its various expressions in narrative, symbol, myth, etc., is an invaluable resource in today’s world for the opening of genuine dialogue between wisdom / faith traditions.

That being said, it should be pointed out at once that there are a couple of things which the editors (see Kearney’s Introduction) have been careful in avoiding. First, the collection (generally) avoids religious syncretism; it harbours no aspiration towards indiscriminately painting over all religious differences in order to arrive at some vague, universal “spirituality.” Kearney makes quite clear that the “traversals” and “confluences” that unfold within the book’s pages do “not lead to some spiritual Super Highway which bypasses the multiple roads” (p. 7). Second, the book is also not a work of mere spiritual tourism; though the majority of the authors (but by no means all) are indeed Westerners who are engaged in various ways with non-Western traditions, it is clear that those engagements have been enduring and have given rise to deeply committed cross-cultural and inter-religious sharing. Their contributions are records of those engagements—serving as, as Kearney puts it, “vignettes rather than arguments, soundings rather than statements, musings rather than manifestos,” unified in their imaginative expression of the common goal of “inter-confessional hospitality” (p. 2).

In fact, the hospitality expressed in the book had been on-going among a number of scholars for several years, and had resulted in 2007 in an inter-confessional conference / conversation held in Bangalore, India. The proceedings from that conference, and from the post-conference pilgrimage to the caves of

Ajanta and Ellora (famous for their inter-religious imagery), make up the largest number of the contributions to the text (though also included are contributions from scholars who were unable to make the trip to India, but who have nevertheless been part of the on-going dialogue). Partly, the location of India for the gathering was chosen due to the fact that the engagements of the largest number of contributors have been primarily along Christian-Hindu lines (some, for example, are Christians who have been inculturated within the Indian context for several years). And while the book makes no pretenses to being equally representative of all or even many traditions (though it does include a few articles from other traditions as well), it is quite clear that a certain, even stereotypical romanticization of India is not entirely eschewed. It is pointed out, for example, that India has traditionally been (and still is, despite whatever cultural and political tensions exist among religious groups in India today) a “spiritual laboratory” — the ideal place, therefore, to conduct experiments (so to speak) in inter-religious imaginaries.

Another poignant feature of the Indian (especially Hindu, but also Buddhist and Jain) context which serves as a significant focal point for these imaginaries is the long-standing tradition of meditation and yoga practice, with an especial appreciation of the heart centre (*chakra*), or cave (*guba*) of the heart into which one descends in meditation to discover the source of all. The main idea is that the *guba*, the heart-cave, is an *affective psychic space* at the source of all imaginaries, and is thus precisely the space from out of which peaceful and mutually nurturing inter-religious dialogue can grow. It is thus no accident that one finds in particular in a number of the articles gathered here concerns for an integration of spiritual (or even theological) insights with the body, for an overcoming of spirit-matter dualities, for an expression of the divine in immanentist terms as much as in transcendentalist ones — this latter theme being a particular concern in many areas of religious studies (especially philosophy of religion, phenomenology, and religious ethics) in the late 20th and 21st centuries.

Finally, there is a concern that this book serve as an example of and a call to inter-confessional hospitality as a prescriptive ethic for inter-religious relations in our world. For all too often it has been shown that inter-faith dialogue, though well-intentioned, is “in vain if it does not go beyond words to action” (p. 10). At the same time, however, genuine action, truly effective action, can only spring forth from deep roots and deep wells — and thus the emphasis here on the heart-cave as not only the source of all religious imaginaries, but also the source of all action or impetus to action. At the very least, hospitality requires an overcoming of hatred and a willingness to listen to and be open to different imaginaries from one’s own, and in dialogue with which one can expand one’s own. The core prescriptive vision of the book, then, is, as Kearney puts it, “that in our third millennium religions will be inter-religious, or they will not be at peace” (p. 30).

As a whole, the book is an interesting read — though at 502 pages, and due to the fact that the quality of the individual articles varies, one is unlikely to read through the entire collection with an equally sustained interest. A very few

contributions, on occasion, do seem to lean a bit too much in the direction of an overly facile, syncretist approach; and as stated already, there is a certain overall romanticization of “spiritual India” at play in the book’s very origin. But the goal of the book is commendable, and it is surely very timely and creative in its particular expression of the realization of that goal through the traversing and sharing of religious imaginaries. Of more formal concern is the tight hard-cover binding, the inclusion of a number of black and white pictures as well as numerous colour plates illustrating various of the authors’ contributions, and a useful index of terms / topics as well as one of names / titles. The book’s price, however, at nearly \$200 CN, is prohibitive.

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