

These two books are about inter-religious dialogue. The contrast between their styles is more fascinating than their contents. It is a contrast between metaphysics and art, between a technical language and a literary language, between the jargon of specialists and the lay of a minstrel.

In the first book, Japanese Buddhist Masao Abe, considered the main representative of Zen Buddhism in Europe and North America, talks about the “Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata” in parts I and III, allowing in part II for the interventions of seven non-Buddhist scholars. One intervention, written by David Tracy, tactfully relativizes Abe’s position within Buddhism by calling attention to the Eckhart-Ruusbroec debate within Christian spirituality. John Cobb’s intervention underscores the Buddhist attachment to nondiscrimination, yet values the Buddhist challenges to Christian philosophies. The other five intervenors are also confrontational in varying degrees. All seven intervenors and Abe himself display a magnificent expertise in metaphysical polemics. This may be too heady for readers who are not comfortable with kataphatic metaphysics, let alone apophatic.

In stark contrast, Guglielminetti attempts a minstrel’s style of Italian songs and poems. His English translation may or may not have fully
succeeded in fine-tuning the harmonizing aim of Asian religions for one missioned like himself to intone the Good News of Christ to Asia. His lyrical mode shows promise. However, terms lifted from philosophical language and transferred to this mode should not be expected to retain their original precision. Are they perhaps volatilized here into artistic symbols? If so, readers who seek a philosophical critique of the symbolic expressions used must not expect it from this reviewer. For symbols do not address the critical consciousness. Symbols are concerned with multiple meanings that tend to evoke resonances in a contemplative's intuition. Asian contemplatives who have emptied their minds of concepts are open to the outpouring of harmonies between their spiritual traditions and the Spirit of Jesus poured into the heart of these traditions.

Philosophical inquiry and Asian theology of harmony are diverse but complementary, just as the expertise of a humble piano-tuner is very important for a concert pianist's virtuosity.

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As yet, there is no standard textbook for cosmic history. One attempt to approximate such a standard is made by Swimme and Berry. In their book of 13 chapters interfaced with as many illustrations, they trace the 15 billion years of cosmogenesis in a meditative style reminiscent of Teilhard de Chardin. (The authors acknowledge Teilhard's contribution in their endnote on p. 293 that the emergent universe had a psychic dimension from the beginning.) The latest theories of physics, chemistry, biology and astronomy come alive in their poetic prose that combines scientific data with dramatic, awe-inspiring imagery.

Functioning like the primitive shaman dramatizing the story of a tribe, Swimme and Berry span the 15 billion years of cosmic growth, beginning from the magical Flaring Forth that gave birth to the countless subatomic particles, dancing their seemingly random dance, alluring each other and innovating their motions and groupings with ever newer