

Swami Nitya-Swarup-Ananda. *Education for Human Unity and World Civilization*. Indian Council of Philosophical Research, in association with Indian National Commission for Co-operation with UNESCO, 1986. (Available from Vedanta Book Center, 5423 S. Hyde Park Blvd., Chicago, IL 60615) 352 pp., \$47.50.

This work is of interest to any in ethnic studies for it outlines the need and process of establishing a new order of education which would serve the needs of cultural integrity and world unity. This latest version of Swami Nitya-Swarup-Ananda's description of such an education, published in 1986, is the culmination of decades of thought and observation by the author, who founded the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture in Calcutta. The Swami has also worked closely with UNESCO in furthering the aims of worldwide cultural education which would promote planetary diversity at the same time that it promotes world harmony.

This is a work of logic and practicality. Beginning with the notion of the spiritual tradition, the Swami argues throughout that we are thereby heirs not only to the culture we are born into, but to all the cultures that have flourished on the earth. Our responsibility to the integrity of each is as great as the wealth of the inheritance.

Building on this spiritual base, the Swami describes the basic principles of an educational system that will serve this vision. Basic to such an education is the theoretical assumption of the world as one and a careful consideration of individual cultures as they have contributed to the evolution of humanity. However, none of this can come to life until individual students are able to—in the Swami's word—"confront" the reality of other cultures in the flesh. The distinctive nature of each culture—the nuances of thinking, feeling, relating to others—can never be reduced to simplistic judgments of good or bad when experienced through human contact. As the Swami states, "Having viewed each culture from . . . the standpoint of its own special genius, the participant will experience a deep change in his mentality. His prejudices, his narrow attitudes and feelings will be swept away and he will begin to think in a new way."

In the third section of the book, the Swami discusses the need for a world community. Only the fostering of such a community will create the ground for genuine "world civilization." Without the shared purpose of such a community, the necessary dialogue and planning that will lead to new educational structures won't be possible. Responding to this need for structures, the Swami presents a detailed scheme which suggests how the curriculum of cultural study might be planned. He outlines the purpose and procedures, the framework and techniques; the method of study; and the central mechanism, which would be a center for cultural study. This center would be a residential institution for teaching, research, and training at the postgraduate level. The possibilities of such a center are

creative and affirmative. Administered with one eye on the ideal of human unity and another on a love of diversity, such an institution could become the nerve center of a new way of seeing human identity. Art, science, social skills—all that serves the growth of individuals and cultures—would find the truest reason for being, freed of the dogmatism and political biases that limit their usefulness.

In the fifth portion of his study, the Swami links the idea of such a center to UNESCO's Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation. This is a very important connection, for it demonstrates that the commitment to the goals discussed in this book is already embedded in the international organ devoted to world unity, the United Nations. Indeed, it may be that the unrealized potential of the UN as a guardian of world order is related to the establishment of the center for the study of culture and world civilization. By activating the ideals of the UN in the work of students, scholars, and creators, the center will strengthen the work of all organizations that serve world peace.

Any educator who reads this work will be challenged by its clear description of what is needed, an equally radical overhaul of the way we approach culture in the curriculum leading us to a global level of awareness. We in America who have so often failed to utilize our own riches, mistaking our strengths for our weaknesses, have much to ponder reading this presentation. For before we can take steps to meet other cultures on terms of equality and good will, we have to contemplate the cultural diversity of our own country. We have to recognize that as a part of the planet we do reflect the whole: all the cultures of the world have streamed into our nation; and as the Invisible Man of Ralph Ellison's novel sums up, "Diversity is the American word." This diversity is held together by a national ideal based on freedom and justice for all. If Americans were to come one step closer to actualizing the promise of these words—that it is possible to promote the well-being of the totality by respecting the distinct identities that make up the whole—this country would be serving the evolution of world civilization as well. The challenge we face is faced by every other country and culture in its own way: what are the highest values of each culture? How has each held true to its ideals? In confronting its own deepest self, each culture discovers its responsibility not only to its limited interests but also to the greater unity of the planet. This wider sense of responsibility is what is most needed in these times. As reflected in this work, the author's lifetime of effort on behalf of cultural harmony and world unity offers a model of what it means to take this responsibility seriously.

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