

Book Review

R. C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity Edited by H. L. Richard ISPCK: Post Box 1585, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, India. 1999. 302pp. Paper \$15.95
—Reviewed by Jamie Bean,
Rethinking Forum

This book is a compilation of the most significant writings of Rajendra Chandra Das (1887–1976). It is a critical view of the church and mission scene in India, written for a Christian audience. Contents are divided into eight sections: Biography, Autobiography, Understanding Hinduism, Evangelism, Indigenisation, Theological Perspectives, Foreign Missions in India and the Indian Church and Political and Social Views. Readers will appreciate the efforts of the editor to bring the writings of Das under one cover, giving them greater accessibility.

Richard starts off with a balanced biographical sketch of Das. He presents both the strengths and weaknesses of Das' teaching, ideas and personality. R.C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity offers brief and extended quotations on numerous topics, most included in the thorough table of contents.

The story of Das is the story of a man who grew up in a spiritual environment and studied the Hindu scriptures as a youth. As a Christian evangelist, he faced the challenges of compromise and syncretism. (This not unlike those of our own day with an interest in making the gospel of Christ known among Hindus in a culturally relevant way). Many Indian Christians viewed Das as a man who compromised his faith. However, readers will find his writings give evidence to his conservative, contextual theology.

Das gives a sympathetic view of Hinduism as a system that is imperfect, like Christianity, but has the potential to lead individuals to Christ. Das' heart was for local expressions of the Biblical faith, not compromise.

Das was a critic of the church, yet he was not anti-church. He had a great desire for an Indian theology to develop out of the Indian church. His main criticism of Indian Christians was the way they were lead by westerners in their everyday witness, theology, spiritual practices, etc. He said that they were merely puppets, slaves, to the missionaries and donors from the west. It should be understood that Das opposed many mission practices, but not missionaries.

Das sheds light on the challenges India continues to face in establishing a truly Indian church that is free of the organizational and institutional influences of the west, which had by his time already penetrated the core of Christianity in India. His critiques are a sobering view of how the west had not helped empower the Indian church to build its own walls. And, is thus, critical of western missionaries for spoiling their converts in the ways of the west, leaving little hope of a truly indigenous church in light of the practices of his day.

Section D is filled with pointers for evangelism based on the observations and experiences of Das. Critical comments of Indian Christian and missionary attitudes, suggested approaches for a more Christlike witness and examples from Das' own ministry are included.

Other issues of importance include: reasons why missionaries should become servants versus leaders in the Indian church, examples of indigenous movements that never took off and reasons they failed, church leaders hindering indigenous practice of the faith, freedom of western administra-

tion and control, the artificiality and lack of loving unity of the church and the artificiality of conferences and church gatherings.

Suggestions for the next edition include caring for several typographical errors, ink blotches and word smears that exist in the current edition.

The reviewer commends *R.C. Das: Evangelical Prophet for Contextual Christianity* to those who are interested in contextualization in general and the Hindu world specifically. The book sets forth principles for how to present Christ to a Hindu as seen through the eyes of an Indian Christian and based on the inadequacy of past approaches

Anyone who is serious about the gospel advancing in India must take note of the life and work of R.C. Das.