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Book Review: "Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity"

Ronald Neufeldt

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Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity. Arvind Sharma (ed.) Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988, 212 p, \$40 US

A GREAT DEAL of scholarly attention has in the past been paid to Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Till recently little scholarly interest has been shown in Hindu-Christian dialogue, or the interplay between Christianity and Hinduism. This volume, along with volumes such as *Hindu Christian Dialogue* edited by H. Coward, underline the importance of the interplay between Hinduism and Christianity. The work is comprised of nine chapters dealing with Neo-Hindu images of Christianity, Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Keshub Chandra Sen, Dayananda, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, and Aurobindo.

The introductory chapter of Eric Sharpe provides a useful overview of the shift in Neo-Hinduism from an interest in the Oriental Christ to a rejection of the need for such a Christ. The following chapters, however, deal not with this shift, but largely with figures who in some way accepted the idea of an Oriental Christ. Cromwell Crawford, in his chapter on Ram Mohan Roy, concentrates on Roy's feud with the Serampore Baptists with respect to the interpretation of the New Testament. There is a disconcerting tendency to hyperbole in the description of the encounters. Nonetheless, Crawford provides a great deal of detailed information on the feud. H.W. French's chapter on Ramakrishna is questionable in that the life of Ramakrishna does not provide much by way of actual encounters. We are left with speculations on parallels between Christ and Ramakrishna by followers of Ramakrishna and French. In his chapter on Vivekananda French does focus on actual controversies between Vivekananda and his opponents, Christian and otherwise. David Kopf provides an excellent presentation of Keshub Chandra Sen's Oriental Christ, arguing that Keshub's New Dispensation should be seen as a sensitive response to Western militarism, nationalism, and imperialism. J.T.F. Jordens, in dealing with Dayananda's treatment of the Bible provides a revealing comparison of Dayananda's approach to the Bible and his approach to the Vedas.

K.L.S. Rao emphasizes Gandhi's rejection of Christian exclusivism and proselytization. Ishwar Harris attempts to contrast the inclusiveness of Radhakrishnan's religion of the spirit to the exclusiveness of Christianity. The comparison is questionable in that, according to Radhakrishnan, the religion of the spirit is "religion" *per se*, while Christianity, along with other traditions, belongs in the category of "religions." Finally, Arabinda Basu attempts an exegetical account of Aurobindo's views of Christianity. It is, in fact, a presentation of Aurobindo's own words through extensive quotations, rather than an exegesis.

With the exception of the chapters by Crawford, Kopf, and Jordens, there is little attempt to evaluate and critique the views presented. Questionable interpretations of both Christianity and Hinduism by Vivekananda, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan, and Aurobindo are allowed to stand unchallenged. To use a case in point, we have had far too much uncritical acceptance of notions such as Hindu tolerance and Christian exclusivism, or India as spiritual and the West as materialistic. Nonetheless, the volume is valuable for its detailed descriptions of encounters between neo-Hindus and Christians in nineteenth and twentieth century India.

Ronald Neufeldt
University of Calgary
Calgary, Canada T2N 1N4