



January 1995

Book Review: "The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas"

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Recommended Citation

Coward, Harold (1995) "Book Review: "The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas";" *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 8, Article 11.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1116>

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only by socio-religious factors. The theo-monistic experiences of mystics like Eckhart, Ruusbroec, Ramanuja, Aurobindo, and others can be explained only by positing a divine which is "both passive and active, non-dualistic and distinctive, impersonal and personal".

In this work, however, Stoeber does not argue only for the reality of the theo-monistic type experiences. Even more importantly, he proposes, in chapters 3 and 5, a theistic mystic typology which culminates in theo-monistic experiences but which authenticates the monistic experience and can account meaningfully for experiences of the paranormal, of nature and of the numinous. Monistic hierarchies, on the other hand, fail to fully authenticate theistic experiences and relegate them finally to the realm of the illusory.

Theo-Monistic Mysticism is a fine example of a creative scholarly work which draws deeply from the rich resources of Christianity and Hinduism while offering

various possibilities for enriching dialogue. While the issue of liberation (*mokṣa*), for example, goes beyond the scope of Stoeber's work, it is central to all Hindu traditions and it needs to be raised in connection with Stoeber's characterization of monistic mysticism vis-à-vis theo-monistic mysticism. If monistic experiences are preliminary to the theo-monistic ones, are the former still liberative? What do theo-monistic experiences reveal to us about the meaning of *mokṣa*? If the divine is both personal and impersonal, non-dualistic and distinctive, we need to consider also the value of hierarchies, monistic or theo-monistic. There is little doubt that the theo-monistic category is an appropriate one for viewing a wide variety of experiences in the Hindu tradition and Stoeber's work is a catalyst for the clarification of the significance of such experiences from the Hindu point of view.

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The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas. Anantanand Rambachan. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994, xi + 170pp.

EVERY NOW AND then one encounters a book which brings unexpected illumination to long-standing questions. This is such a volume. Rambachan's critical analysis of Vivekananda's thought and its legacy in the Hinduism of today is as important a contribution as Wilhelm Halbfass' *India and Europe*. While others have highlighted Vivekananda's influence on Indian nationalism and the impact of the Ramakrishna mission, this is the first critical assessment of his thought and its influence on contemporary Hinduism - especially Advaita Vedānta of which Vivekananda claimed to be a contemporary exponent. For me this book brought answers to puzzles

which had been in my mind for years: why do Hindus not show much serious scholarly interest in dialogue?; why has Hindu scholarship in this century become so flabby?; and why does Vivekananda use this extra category of *rājayoga*? Rambachan's critical study of Vivekananda's view of scripture (*śruti*), in comparison with that of Sankara, provides surprising and convincing answers to these questions.

Whereas Sankara gives priority to *śruti* as the only valid way to obtain knowledge of *brahman* and release (*mokṣa*), Vivekananda, responding to the enlightenment critique of the authority of scripture, superimposes direct personal experience (*anubhava*,

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samādhi) of *brahman* above scripture as its ultimate validation. And for Vivekananda, direct personal experience (*samādhi*) also provides the verifying capstone of the alternate paths to release of *karma* and *bhakti*. This insertion by Vivekananda of personal experience as the extra and final step in the achievement of knowledge of *brahman* and *moksa* raises the question as to how such *samādhi* is achieved? In answer Vivekananda presses into service the eight steps of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, of which *samādhi* is the last. The fact that this introduces a dualistic system (Sankhya) which hangs loose to scripture is not dealt with by Vivekananda. He is more interested in seeing the direct supersensuous *samādhi* experience of *brahman* as a parallel to the perceptual verification of knowledge offered by modern science. While Vivekananda's move of giving priority to *samādhi* over *śruti* may seem compatible with modern science, it introduces significant changes into Sankara's understanding of Vedanta and Hinduism – yet these are glossed over by Vivekananda and his followers. But this is much more than just an academic squabble between Sankara and Vivekananda, as Rambachan's analysis makes clear.

In Chapter 1 Rambachan traces the gradual ascendance of personal experience (*anubhava*, *samādhi*) over scripture (*śruti*) in the Indian Renaissance thinkers that preceded and influenced Vivekananda – Rammohun Roy, who places reason above scripture; Debendranath Tagore, who rejected the *māhāvakyas* of the Upanishads (e.g. "that thou art") as undercutting the separation of the devotee and God necessary for worship; Keshub Chandra Sen, who rejected books, priests, and rituals as stultifying forms of authority and instead embraced direct individual perception of God (*darśan*) as the way to spiritual knowledge; and Ramakrishna, who judged sacred scripture to be simply a map which pointed the way to God but required the confirmation of direct "seeing" for true knowledge of that to which the texts of all

religions point. As a follower of Keshub and then Ramakrishna, Vivekananda absorbed these influences which paved the way for his presentation of a non-scripturally based Hinduism.

In Chapter 2 Rambachan unfolds Vivekananda's view of *śruti* as having no authority in and of itself but only in terms of the purity of the *ṛṣi* who "sees" it. Such a scriptural direct perception is valid knowledge only if the *ṛṣi* is pure, if the content is unavailable through the senses, and if the content is not contradicted by other sources of valid knowledge (e.g. reason and science). For us as hearers, the Vedas (or any other scripture) act as "maps" pointing the way to a direct perception of God, which, when experienced, makes the scripture valid (p. 44). Chapter 3 contrasts this view with that of Sankara and demonstrates the significant changes that Vivekananda introduces – especially his claim that scripture (*śruti*) is not a valid source of knowledge (*pramāna*) but must be verified by the further step of direct personal experience. Chapter 4 is devoted to an assessment of Vivekananda's *rājayoga* as the method by which such personal experience is to be achieved. It is through Patanjali's eight yoga steps, detailed in the Yoga Sutras, that this capstone *samādhi* experience of *Brahman* (or other religions) is to be realized. The difficulties for both Advaita and Hinduism of this critical divergence from Sankara are elucidated in Chapters 5 and 6. For Sankara nothing can or needs to transcend *śruti* as the means for knowing *brahman*. For Vivekananda, *śruti* not only can be but must be transcended by the *samādhi* experience of *rājayoga* if knowledge of *brahman* is to be known. Implications of this shift for the theory of error, for the *jivanmukta* and for the mind as an independent source of knowledge of *brahman* are detailed by Rambachan. He concludes that in spite of its radical inconsistency with Sankara, Vivekananda's thought has been uncritically adopted by

Hindus of this century and is not serving them well.

Vivekananda's downgrading of scriptural scholarship to mere intellectual theory, requiring supplementation by the *samādhi* of *rājayoga*, has led to the glossing over of differences of doctrine as unimportant (e.g. differences between Sankhya and Advaita, between Hinduism and other religions). It asserts too easily that all religions lead to the same goal (p.135). The uncritical embracing of this view has not served Hinduism well in the religious pluralism of the twentieth century, for it fails to take *difference* seriously – something Sankara always did. It has led to a lack of rigour in scholarship

(since intellectual differences do not really matter) and to a failure to take the differences between religions seriously. While Vivekananda's attempt to respond to the nineteenth-century challenge of science was commendable, his solution of replacing Sankara's faith in *śruti* with an uncritical embracing of *samādhi* as the only valid religious knowledge has left Hinduism with a flawed legacy that needs critical reexamination. Rambachan's book is a first and most important step in this direction.

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The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology

M. Thomas Thangaraj. Nashville: Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

M. THOMAS THANGARAJ's *Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology* is a thought-provoking attempt to apply the Śaiva Siddhānta concept of guru to the interpretation of the significance of Jesus as the "crucified guru". A South Indian Christian, Thangaraj is presently the Ruth and D. W. Brooks Associate Professor of World Christianity at the Candler School of Theology. In his book he draws upon his own intimate knowledge of South Indian spirituality (both Christian and Śaiva) to suggest that the Śaiva concept of the guru, and not the better known Vaiṣṇava concept of avatara, provides the most useful model for conceiving an Indian Christology, one that is essentially functionalist and sees Jesus not as a divine man but as a teacher who makes God present to his disciples. As an experiment in cross-cultural Christology, aimed primarily at a Tamil audience but of obvious relevance to anyone doing theology in a global context, Thangaraj's book aims at a "mutual transformation" of the terms "guru" and "Christ". After a brief

introduction, in which he notes the inadequacy of incarnational language, the insufficiency of doctrinal orthodoxy, and the inappropriateness of absolutistic claims, Thangaraj outlines the Śaiva Siddhānta concept of guru and then surveys earlier uses of the guru concept in Indian Christian discourse. In a rather brief chapter he then attempts "to reconstruct a portrait of Jesus applying the title 'guru' to him" (p.91). This is then followed by an examination of the possibilities and problems raised by this portrait, and a concluding chapter on "The Christological Task Today".

The merit of Thangaraj's book is to have made a very specific proposal that deserves serious consideration. But the exploration of Śaiva Siddhānta and its concept of guru will require more than it receives here to make it fully understood to a western Christian audience. The application of this concept to Jesus, carried out in the shortest chapter of the book, could also benefit from a more extensive discussion. Thus one wishes that Thangaraj had written more, or perhaps that