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Briefly Noted

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54 Book Reviews

The focus of the book is more on the conversion of the elite than mass conversions. The history of the Hindu response is also included, along with an analysis as to whether Hindu resistance to missionization owes more to traditional institutions than to nineteenth-century reform movements, and whether the reform movements compromise with their religious and cultural opponents and leave a disturbing legacy for contemporary Hinduism. As to the missionaries and their attributing the failure of conversion activity to the hold of caste, the author finds this to be a scapegoating of caste rather than an admission of the inherent power of India's ethical and metaphysical system.

Part I sets the context by examining the social and theological background the Christian missionaries brought to India (chapter 1), as well as the cultural encounter of Indians with European Christianity (chapter 2). The analysis exposes a serious gap in the failure of the missionary enterprise to take sufficient interest in the Indian Christian community itself, and the need to train an Indian priesthood. These themes are well illustrated in the case studies of Part II. These case studies focus on Bengal (chapter 3), Lower Hindustan (chapter 4), Upper Hindustan (chapter 5), and The South (chapter 6). These case studies concentrate on itinerating missionaries expressly, for here the missionary activity was at its most confrontational, highlighting the clash of religions and

cultures in the mid-nineteenth century.

Part III analyses the response of Indian Christians in Bengal (chapter 8) and in the South (chapter 7). Here the author seeks to answer questions such as: Were there predisposing factors in their backgrounds which help to explain their conversions? In the south, was there alienation from the strong temple culture? In Bengal, did the Vaishnavite culture of Bengal predispose intellectuals toward Christianity?

Copley concludes that, on the whole, a study of the cultural contact between the Christian Mission and India's culture is a gloomy one (256). However, the response of the Indian Christians and their churches is interesting. Whereas some almost entirely assimilated, others sought a way back to their own cultures. The degree of assimilation, the author suggests, was always greater in the South, where Christianity had put down deeper roots and larger Christian communities offered a closer sense of belonging than in Bengal, where Bengali Christians were more exposed to the forces of cultural nationalism. While the focus of this study is on the Protestant rather than the Catholic missions to India, it is a significant addition to our knowledge of the missions, their cultural context, and their interaction with Indian Christians.

Harold Coward
University of Victoria

Briefly Noted

Shiva's Other Children: Religion and Social Identity amongst Overseas Indians. David J. Mearns. Delhi: Sage, 1995, 300 pp.

Mearns uses an anthropological ethnographic approach to study the Hindu diaspora population of Melaka, Malaysia. Those studied are mostly Tamil Hindus from Sri Lanka and Southern India who arrived in Melaka prior to the advent of Islam in the area and continued to come during the

Portuguese and British colonial periods. Using various theoretical approaches to the study of social, cultural, and ritual practices, Mearns examines the role of religion in the formation of ethnic and social identity in the changing diaspora minority situation. By examining practices of pollution, caste, sacred space, and religious ritual, the author shows the capacity of Hinduism to become an almost inexhaustible source for the reworking of unifying symbols by a diaspora

community.

Religion is not a static system, nor does it simply transform itself to reflect the requirements of the social or economic context. Rather, religion's conceptions of the cosmos give shape to the world and are given shape by it in the process of seeking to transcend its mundane limits. Therefore, the author concludes, it "is not a statement about what is 'authentic' religious practice ... but rather to record the range of practices and stated beliefs across the spectrum of Hindus as they make their lives in Melaka" (290).

This book presents a model of how to do careful research on the changes happening in a Hindu diaspora community.

Harold Coward

Written on the Flyleaf. Peter D. Bishop. Peterborough: Epworth Press, 1998, viii + 152 pp.

Peter D. Bishop is a Methodist minister and a specialist in the history of religions. He was Presbyterian of the Church of South India for seven years.

The title of his book, *Written on the Flyleaf*, is taken from T. S. Eliot who used the phrase to describe the influence that Hinduism had on his Christian faith. The book offers Dr Bishop's reflections on the impact that thirty-five years of study and teaching Indian religions has had on his own Christian beliefs.

The book, written in an informal style, addresses some of the contemporary issues that often call Christian beliefs into question. The author suggests that

if our own religious traditions appear tired and unconvincing, it may be that we can find refreshment for jaded palates in re-examining our own faith traditions in the light of the religions of other people.

Reflecting on the good, the not-so-good, and the possible in the Christian tradition, he examines prayer forms, perceptions of God, self-knowledge, the problem of religious values in public life,

and religious practices, and allows insights from Hindu and Buddhist traditions to widen his, and the reader's, views on these topics. Dr Bishop succeeds in demonstrating that the rewards of "crossing cultural boundaries, and as a result waking up to new ways of believing and practising our faith", outweigh any possible risks in the undertaking.

Shirley Embra

A Concise Encyclopedia of Hinduism. Klaus K. Klostermaier (Ed.). Oxford: One World Publications, 1998, 182 pp.

A Short Introduction to Hinduism. Klaus K. Klostermaier. Oxford: One World Publications, 288 pp.

Klaus Klostermaier, whose *A Survey of Hinduism* has become a standard work, has written the above two books which are very well suited for use with introductory students. Published in inexpensive paperback by One World, Oxford, these volumes offer a concise presentation of the key elements of Hinduism by a scholar who has mastery of the field.

Foregoing the complexity of detail contained in *A Survey of Hinduism*, Klostermaier has forced himself to write clear, "nutshell" summaries of his comprehensive knowledge on everything from the vedas, geography, persons, epics, gods and goddesses, the philosophies, daily life, modern reform movements and gurus, to the Rashtriya Swamyamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the BJP. Short additional readings are included along with excellent indexes and, in the Encyclopedia, a chronology that runs from Harappan civilization right up to the Bharatiya Janata Party forming a minority government in 1998.

Beginning students and general readers will find these two new books attractive, comprehensive, easy to read, and hard to put down. I will be using them with my students.

Harold Coward

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Responses to 101 Questions on Hinduism. John Renard. New York: Paulist Press, 1999, x + 179 pp.

This is the second of three volumes by John Renard, St Louis University, on Eastern religions. The other two are on Islam and Buddhism. Together they offer handy and easy comparisons of similar issues across the three traditions.

Renard's *Responses to 101 Questions on Hinduism* is a learned but down-to-earth volume that makes it easier to begin to learn about Hinduism by clearing away many of the inevitable confusions and doubts. Its excellent questions and answers introduce a wide set of issues and topics essential to understanding Hinduism, including ancient origins, classic traditions, different gods and goddesses, key texts, ritual practices, popular myths, historical developments, and

features of contemporary Hindu belief and practice. Christians involved in Hindu-Christian dialogue will surely want to keep this book near at hand.

Francis X. Clooney, SJ

Vedanta: A Simple Introduction. Pravrajika Vrajaprana. Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1999, 90 pp.

This little book offers a clear, concise introduction to *Vedanta* for the lay reader who is unfamiliar with the topic. A concluding section covers the revitalization movement of the last century which led to the establishment of the Ramakrishna Order and Vedanta Societies in the West. A short reading list provides primary source materials.

Shirley Embra

Articles of Interest

William Cenkner, "Christians and the Hindu Experience of Prayer", *Prayer: The Global Experience*, ed. Francis A. Eigo, Philadelphia: Villanova University, 1997.

Tessa Bartholomeus, "Spiritual Wealth and Neo-Orientalism", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 19-32.

Anantanand Rambachan, "The Nature and Authority of Scripture: Implications for Hindu-Christian Dialogue", *Current Dialogue*, December 1998, 3-11.

Judson B. Trapnell, "Indian Sources on the Possibility of a Pluralist View of Religions", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 35, No 2, Spring 1998, 210-234.