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Introductory Information and Introduction

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The aim of the *Bulletin* is to create a worldwide forum for the presentation of Hindu-Christian scholarly studies, book reviews, and news of past and upcoming events. Materials selected for publication will be balanced between historical research and contemporary practice and, where possible, will employ analytical and theoretical analysis set within the context of our shared contemporary experience. Contributions are invited and may be addressed to either the Editor or the Co-Editor. Articles of 3000-3500 words are preferred. Send manuscript in paper form as well as on diskette. A stylesheet is available on request. The *Bulletin* adopts a policy of non-gender specific language where applicable. All articles are subject to review before acceptance and may receive editorial modification in the course of publication.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the continuing controversy over conversion in India, this issue of the *Bulletin* offers a careful scholarly analysis of Christian misperceptions of Hindus and Hindu misperceptions of Christians. Pennington's essay shows that Rev. William Ward's 1806-11 study of Hindu thought and ritual was one of the most blatant Christian misperceptions of Hinduism ever written. The influence of Ward, a missionary and printer at the British Baptist College at Serampore, spread throughout the English-speaking world in the early nineteenth century and strongly influenced James Mill in the writing of his textbook, *The History of British India* (1817), which was used extensively in the preparation of East India Company employees for service in India. Ward's misperceptions of Hindu practices relating (in Ward's view) to sacrifice, idolatry, and eroticism helped to produce an image of Hindus as cruel, irrational, and licentious, that is still common among some Christians. Much of Ward's misperception of Hinduism was based on anecdote, which, as Pen-

nington shows, is very difficult to refute.

In his essay, Ronald Neufeldt takes us to the core of the conversion controversy and shows how Hindu perceptions (misperceptions) of Christians have functioned in court cases in India focused on conversion activities. Although the Constitution guarantees the right of propagation for the purpose of conversion as part of the freedom of religion to be enjoyed by Christians in India, attempts to convert through the use of "force or fraud" are ruled out. Neufeldt traces the interpretation of this provision in the Rev. Stanislaus case through the various levels to that of the Supreme Court. There, concludes Neufeldt, the language of the Chief Justice suggests that if one is offended by an attempt at conversion, this is enough to make the attempt illegal. However, this does not reduce to the statement of some VHP spokespersons that Christians do not have the right to convert another. Rather, what is prohibited is the seeking of conversions by force, fraud, or inducement. Still unclear, however, is the resolution of

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the debate over the purpose of propagation understood as "for edification only" (a more comfortable interpretation for the Hindu majority) or "for the sake of conversion". Neufeldt's careful analysis helpfully raises the discussion of conversion from the level of rhetoric to court reflections on the provisions of religious freedom in the Constitution.

Deepak Sarma's essay "Is Jesus a Hindu?" examines how one Hindu scholar, S. C. Vasu, comes to make such a claim while translating Madhva's *Chandogya Upanisad Bhasya* and in writing his own commentary on that work. In the course of his writings, Vayu, Hanuman, and Madhva all become Christ, understood as the "Son of God" through whom salvation can only be obtained. This claim, says Sarma, is a Hindu misrepresentation of Christianity caused by the mistake in scholarship in saying that Vayu *is Christ* rather than Vayu *is like Christ*. There is also the Hindu misperception of the Christian communion as involving cannibalism. Sarma concludes that Vasu, in presenting Madhva Vedanta as Christianity, succeeds in misrepresenting both Hinduism and Christianity.

In his provocative and original article, Tinu Ruparell shows convincingly that the Oriental-Occidental distinction works for both sides of the imposed divide: each opposite serves to reflect the other. In turning Said's analysis on its head, Ruparell shows how the Occident plays a rhetorical role in the imagination and rhetoric of Hindus – especially Hindu responses to Christians (e.g. Radhakrishnan and Vivekananda). But the unique aspect of Ruparell's analysis is his claim that these categories (Orientalism/Occidentalism), if allowed to remain open-ended (rather than manipulated for the interests of one religion), can create a space for mutual transformation which is not coercive or exploitative. The suggestion forms the basis for a new approach to religious pluralism and dialogue that Ruparell is developing.

The above thematic explorations offer clear corrections and constructive new approaches to the way Hindus and Christians perceive and misperceive each other.

Harold Coward, Editor
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