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Book Review: "Monastic Journey to India"

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movements seeking new identities at a time of profound social change.

Moulton ("The Beginnings of the Theosophical Movement in India, 1879-1885: Conversion and Non-Conversion Experiences") is an exception to the other chapters in this volume in that it deals ostensibly with conversion moving in the other direction, toward Hinduism. It is a sensitive treatment of Hume's spiritual journey to a troubled relationship with Theosophy, to his rejection of Theosophy, and conversion to Advaita. Moulton may, in the end, be too convinced of Hume's eventual view of the Theosophical Society – a selfish organization that turned its back on its philanthropic and societal concerns. Does such a judgement of the Society ignore the overall utopian goals of the Society and its teachings?

Copley ("George Uglow Pope contra Vedanayagam Sastriar: A case study in the clash of 'new' and 'old' mission") provides a wealth of information concerning differences in mission strategies through his juxtaposition of old and new missions in mid-nineteenth-century Tanjore. The old mission emphasized accommodation to existing belief and practice while the new mission expected converts to shake off old loyalties. That Copley finds the latter unrealistic is a given, since his starting point is that conversion is a process of adjustments between the demands of the new faith and old loyalties. The attitude of the old mission is highlighted through the case of Vedanayagam Sastriar, a convert and court poet and the example of the new is the controversial and argumentative George Uglow Pope.

A dominant theme running through the various chapters and case studies is the emphasis on conversion as a process. Indeed the volume offers a good deal of useful and interesting information on this process. Less successful is the attempt to deal with the factors leading to and supporting conversion. A variety of factors are mentioned (pre-existing beliefs, social change, strategies of communication) but none of these are developed in any sustained fashion. Disappointing is the fact that not enough attention is given to the process of self-definition by the converts themselves. The business of dual loyalties is mentioned in the introduction but not taken up in any of the chapters, except in hints here and there. Yet this would appear to be a significant item in the conversions of members of the educated elite, the mass movements, and the controversy between Pope and Sastriar. Crucial in this respect is allowing the converts to have their own voice. This is done successfully in Moulton's account of Hume and in Copley's treatment of conflict between old and new mission, but seems to be missing in the other chapters, even in Powell's treatment of the conversion of members of the educated elite.

Nonetheless, this is a significant addition to the growing tradition of scholarship on religious conversion, and a valuable resource for scholars and students who are interested in religious, social, and cultural developments of South Asia.

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Monastic Journey to India. M. Basil Pennington. Junction City, OR: Beacon Point Press, 1999, 178 pp.

THE PERSONAL JOURNAL of M. Basil Pennington, Trappist monk and popular teacher of the Centring Prayer, followed upon his attendance at the third All-Asian Monastic Conference in Sri Lanka

in 1980. Although previously published twenty years ago, the journal is today as fresh and current as it was during his six-week pilgrimage to Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist centres of asceticism and

contemplation in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Pennington lectured and taught the Centring Prayer (an Appendix discusses it in brief) especially to his Christian hosts but also to Hindu *sadhus*. Much as his Christian monastic counterparts who had taken refuge in Hindu ashram life – Bede Griffith, Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda), and Ignatius Hridayam – he too is driven by the belief that the Hindu-Christian dialogue must be deeply rooted in the mystery of *sannyasa* between monk and *sadhu*. Yet the book remains a travel journal of one who is experiencing India for the first time, with all the wonder, shock, and perplexity of a neophyte.

He cites the hospitality of the people as one of the most moving experiences, and visits with Mother Teresa, her sisters and brothers, and their outcasts, as probably the most profound part of his experience. Reflecting upon his brief pilgrimage, anticipating distinctive spiritual experiences, it proved in fact to be a profoundly human

experience. The spiritual experience of India was, for him, more human than expected but not less but more sacred. He leaves India with a fuller openness to mystery and a greater sense of the connectedness of the expressions of divine presence and love. We do not have here a meeting of the faiths of ordinary people, Hindus or Christians, but a meeting of two ascetic traditions in mutual understanding.

The lasting value of this journal is the example it offers of one who possesses a readiness for interreligious encounter. Pennington went to India to learn from others, with such empathy and openness that he experienced *darshan* from many. His readiness for dialogue and encounter resulted from his rootedness in his own tradition, especially the Western meditative tradition.

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Jnaneshvari. Felix Machado. Mumbai: Somiya Publishers Pct., 1998, 145pp.

FELIX MACHADO IS a Maharashtra-born Roman Catholic priest, ordained in the Archdiocese of Bombay and presently serving as a staff member for the "Asia Desk" of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome. He was educated and has taught in Maharashtra, the United States, and Europe. In his book *Jnaneshvari*, Machado undertakes a study of one of the most important *bhakti* texts written in Marathi. He explains that this work was taken on as a response "to a curiosity, born out of love for being a Marathi Indian Christian, its conflicts and joys" (Acknowledgements). He also notes that the work is a direct fruit of his own commitment to interreligious dialogue as taught to its members by the Catholic Church.

Machado's study is preceded by a long preface by R. Panikkar and an even longer introduction by Kala Acharya. Panikkar expresses the opinion that this work might

become seminal for the "still relatively virgin field" of comparative mysticism (i). The work cannot be called comparative, however, in the sense that Machado consciously draws comparisons across different religious traditions. He focuses exclusively on the *Jnaneshvari*. The only place in which he tentatively begins to raise comparative concerns is in his conclusion (61-62). His study is interesting, however, in that it is done by a native Maharashtrian (Panikkar notes that Machado's family comes from the same place in which *Jnaneshvar* lived 700 years ago) who is also a Roman Catholic priest.

Kala Acharya, the director of the K. J. Somaiya Bharateeya Samskriti Vidyapeeth in Mumbai, has written an introduction that is also interesting from a comparative point of view. She presents a Hindu account of the desire of human beings for union with God but is also very aware that this desire is