



January 2000

Briefly Noted

Harold Coward

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/jhcs>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Coward, Harold (2000) "Briefly Noted," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 13, Article 22.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1242>

The *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* is a publication of the [Society for Hindu-Christian Studies](#). The digital version is made available by Digital Commons @ Butler University. For questions about the Journal or the Society, please contact cbauman@butler.edu. For more information about Digital Commons @ Butler University, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

biblical commentaries published during the colonial period, shows how these commentaries scripted India – the people and the culture – in particularly colonial ways. He points out that while “the commentaries proclaim the liberation that the gospel brings, the writers also replicate colonial attitudes and use rhetoric to redeem, educate, discipline, and convert Indians who are under their charge” (79).

Though the book is primarily on biblical hermeneutics, it addresses the issue of Hindu-Christian encounter in novel and interesting ways, especially in chapters 2 and 6. In “The Indian Textual Mutiny of 1820” the author discusses “the interpretative skirmish” between the Christian missionary Joshua Marshman and the Hindu reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The portrait of Roy that emerges in this chapter is refreshingly novel. The author ably shows that in the “skirmish” Roy comes as a victor with a better and interesting hermeneutics of the Bible than Marshman. While Marshman’s interpretation of the Bible was “pietistic, sectarian, and hegemonic”, Roy was able to perceive “a close interplay between interpretation and power” (42), and “rendered a valuable service by reasserting an aspect of Christianity [praxis] which the missionaries were overlooking” (45).

In the chapter entitled “Jesus in Saffron Robes? The ‘Other’ Jesus Whom Recent Biographers Forget”, the author shows how the present-day biographers of Jesus “ignore the possible presence, impact, and contributions of Eastern thinking in the Mediterranean region during the time in which Christian faith emerged” (113). He

calls for an engagement with the Asian concept of personality in understanding Jesus and his teachings, and a fresh understanding of the community of the faithful in light of the Eastern understandings of community. The issues raised in this chapter are highly relevant for those who seriously consider the future of Hindu-Christian relations in India and abroad. Sugirtharajah ends this brief chapter with an invitation to interreligious collaboration. He writes,

in a multireligious context like ours, the real contest is not between Jesus and other saviour figures like Buddha or Krishna, or religious leaders like Mohammed, as advocates of the “Decades of Evangelism” want us to believe, it is between mammon and Satan on the one side, and Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, and Mohammed on the other. Mammon stands for personal greed, avariciousness, accumulation, and selfishness, and Satan stands for structural and institutional violence. (119)

The book ends with a call to move away from easy and uncritical binary oppositions between East and West, Hindu and Christian, and Indian and Western, but to live with complexities of understanding. Not only biblical scholars but also those who are concerned with interreligious and intercultural relations will find this book extremely informative and illuminating.

M. Thomas Thangaraj
Candler School of Theology,
Emory University

Briefly Noted

Hinduism: A Short History. Klaus K. Klostermaier. Oxford: One World Publications, 2000, 342 pp.

One World’s very useful, accessible, and reasonably priced series of short histories of the various traditions has added a fine treatment of Hinduism by Klaus

Klostermaier. Chapter 1, the Introduction, discusses the term “Hinduism” and the problem inherent in offering a “History of Hinduism”. It concludes with a discussion of the basic Hindu source literature. Chapter 2 offers a short history of two prominent Hindu centres, Mathura and Varanasi, which

54 Book Reviews

mirror in microcosm fashion the vicissitudes of Hinduism over several thousands of years. Chapter 3 tells the controversial story of the beginnings of Hinduism including a critical assessment of the Aryan Invasion Theory. This is followed by a short history of Vedic India religion. One chapter each is then devoted to the parallel histories of Vaisnavism, Saivism, and Sabtism, the three major branches of "mainstream Hinduism, followed by a chapter on the Smartas, the non-sectarian orthodox Hindus. Chapter 9 offers a historical survey of Hindu philosophy in its intimate connection with Hindu religion. The final chapter is devoted to Modern Hinduism, covering the new movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries including discussion of the present situation and future prospects of Hinduism. An extensive glossary of the Sanskrit terms used is provided, along with a select but sizeable bibliography for further reading.

This book is a significant updating, revision, and expansion of Klostermaier's earlier *Mythologies and Philosophies of Salvation in the Theistic Traditions of India*, published in 1984 and now out of print. Written in a style that is manageable for both the beginner and erudite, this comprehensive study moves swiftly but thoroughly through the ages, from the early emergence of the Vedic tradition to recent developments in Hinduism. Filled with solid, comprehensive scholarship, this book is an excellent readable study of the development of the Hindu tradition.

Harold Coward
University of Victoria

René Daumal: The Life and Work of a Mystic Guide. Kathleen Ferrick Rosenblatt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, xviii + 252 pp.

René Daumal was one of the most gifted literary figures in France between the two world wars. His writings show a command of Sanskrit Hindu studies,

surrealism, biting social commentary, and genuine spirituality. He was the first to forge a link between classical Hindu poetics and the views of Gurdjieff.

Based on twenty years of research and personal interviews, Rosenblatt's very readable book is a comprehensive biography of all aspects of the life and work of René Daumal. At sixteen Daumal began to teach himself Sanskrit and to read Hindu philosophy and poetics. Daumal wrote, "For the Hindu, all applied teachings are linked by a common goal, call it deliverance or consciousness ... one learns to know oneself", (xi). At the age of twenty-four he became press secretary to Uday Shanbar, a master of Indian dance who was the first to introduce the art from to the West, and travelled with him to the United States. But it was the teaching of Gurdjieff that gave Daumal a practical knowledge of Eastern thought and changed his life. The book recounts Daumal's unique explorations of the major areas: the surrealist French world of literature and politics, his study of Hindu philosophy and poetics, and his acute participation in Gurdjieff's teachings.

Following the lead of René Guenon, Daumal adopted the Sanskrit view (he translated Bharata's *Natya Sastra*) that if the poet is able to connect with his inner spiritual essence, then his creative effort may achieve the goal of all art – not to distract, but to awaken the hearer to a higher state of consciousness. By integrating what he perceived to be the essence of Hinduism with the teaching of Gurdjieff, Daumal created original works of art suffused with spiritual expression.

Originally published in French, this revised English edition will introduce many in the English-speaking world to a modern literary figure who was one of the first to bridge between Hinduism and the West. Daumal died in 1944 at the age of thirty-six.

Harold Coward
University of Victoria