



January 2004

Introductory Information and Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Malkovsky, Bradley (2004) "Introductory Information and Introduction," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 17, Article 4.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1313>

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The *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* is an annual scholarly journal published jointly at the University of Notre Dame and at the Institute of Philosophy and Culture, Madras, India. It is the official publication of the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies.

The aim of the *Journal* 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 roughly 4000 words are preferred, though occasionally longer pieces will be published. Send manuscript in paper form as well as on diskette. A style sheet is available on request. The *Journal* adopts a policy of non-gender specific language where applicable. All articles are subject to review before acceptance and may be edited in the course of publication.

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JOURNAL OF HINDU-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

©2004 Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies

ISSN 0844-4587

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

WITH this issue and in its seventeenth year the *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* officially changes its name to the *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*. The change is intended to more clearly indicate that this periodical is an academic, peer-reviewed journal that explores the intersection of Hindu and Christian traditions in India and abroad. It is the only journal in the world that deals exclusively with this topic. The *Journal* is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association. Contributions are invited for the next issue and should be addressed to either the Editor or Co-Editor.

This year the major theme of the *Journal* is the encounter between Hindus and Christians that takes place "on the ground" in India. Much of contemporary discussion on dialogue and dialogical models has focused on the historical, colonial, missiological and doctrinal dimensions, too often leaving out the lived experiences and expressions of people on the ground or which does not take into account the more fluid and spontaneous dialogical models embraced by Hindu and Christian laity. In these new models of encounter and shared experience what is sometimes revealed is the complex and complicated identities of Hindus and Christians in India. There is a growing interest in this area of study among younger scholars as evidenced by an increasing number of Ph.D. dissertations on popular religion in India. An exploration of this theme should add breadth and depth to traditional notions of what constitutes "Hinduism," "Indian Christianity," and the "Hindu-Christian encounter."

In the first essay J. K. Bajaj and M. D. Srinivas summarize what Hindus in general feel and believe about *dharma*, especially as articulated in regard to idol-worship, cow protection and conversion. The two authors

enlist Mahatma Gandhi "as representative of the largely unarticulated dialogue ordinary Hindus have been having with Christianity," and they make him the spokesperson for the widespread Hindu revulsion against Christian attacks on Hindu practices and beliefs. The article underscores the difficulty of a real encounter and open and fruitful dialogue between Hindus and Christians, given Christianity's history of intolerance and attempted conversion of Hindus.

Bajaj and Srinivas are themselves the topic of the next article, as their *Religious Demography of India*, a recent analysis of Indian census data, is the subject of an extensive review by Francis Clooney. Bajaj and Srinivas present an impressive breadth of data on India's shifting demographics and express concern about the future of that nation's religious identity. While Clooney takes note of the book's very real accomplishments, he also points out its unnecessarily alarmist tone, its simplistic survey of data and perspective, its concern to exclude Christians and Muslims from the category of "Indian religionists" while including Parsis and Jews as such, its underlying "Clash of Civilizations" theme, and its need to defend a monolithic, neatly defined and well-demarcated Hindu identity. He ends with a plea to broaden the perspective beyond quantifiable statistical religious identity into a consideration of religious identities that are more complex, more personal, more theological, and more interactive, even to the point of an assertion of dual identities.

Vasudha Narayanan next introduces us to two places of lived popular religion in India that illustrate the difficulty of an orderly division of Hindu and Christian religious practice and belief: the Basilica of Our Lady of Health in Velankanni, Tamilnadu and the Infant Jesus Shrine at Viveknagar, Bangalore. Both churches are

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regarded as sacred by Christians and by Hindus representative of all castes and economic classes. Members of both religious traditions visit the sacred sites in order to avail themselves of the divine power that answers prayers for marriages, success in business and physical cures. While noting a commonality of devotional practices among Hindus and Christians at the two churches the author goes on to observe that the Hindu devotees will generally bring their own distinctive piety and practice with them. For Hindus at both churches tend to believe more in the efficacy of their own rituals and practices than those performed by the Christians at the Christian sites. Yet despite their concern not to lose their religious identity at a Christian church Hindus worshippers do also recognize that the spiritual power that they and Christian devotees testify to transcends institutional identification and categories.

In the final article Selva Raj presents one more example of shared religious space

and practice: the shrine of St. Antony at Uvari in Tamilnadu. His description of ritual exchange emphasizes even more than the previous article the reality of a kind of communion across religious boundaries, "of religious identities that reveal the fluidity and blurring of boundaries between Hindu and Catholic. At the shrine, religious distinctions are neither dismissed nor forgotten but temporarily obliterated and transcended as irrelevant to their pragmatic human concerns and existential religious experiences." He concludes that such a grassroots encounter anchored in religious praxis rather than in theological abstractions and conceptual, elitist and institutionally sanctioned dialogue is more in tune with the lived experience of Hindu and Christian laity and helps overcome rigid and oppositional notions of religious identity.

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