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Book Review: "Christianity for Hindus"

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either in the mainstream of her own tradition or in an academy that may happily tolerate "other biases" but exclude a robust faith (159)—paints a more pointed, candid and troubling portrait than we have seen before.

Precisely because Clooney so strongly emphasizes the autobiographical, his introduction to comparative theology is also necessarily an introduction to Hindu-Christian Studies. His reproduction of a 10-point sketch of "Hinduism" (71-73), developed as a Christian South Asianist for non-South Asianist students of theology, will be a gem for many teaching in the field. His defense of reading, commentary and textual study also stakes a clear claim in a friendly rivalry that has unfolded in this journal, particularly with such interlocutors as the late Selva J. Raj. "Texts are only part of a religion," Clooney writes, "but in my view they remain the single best resource, among many good resources, for knowing religious traditions deeply and subtly. They are legitimately the main object of comparative theological study . . ." (67). The test of such a claim, for many readers, will be chapter 7, where Clooney tries to articulate very clearly what he believes he has gained from his Hindu-Christian inquiry: a more robust and complex theism; a deeper sensitivity to the "image of God" in the human person and

the ascription (or not) of gender to the deity; the possibility of praying to Narayana as a Christian; and the aesthetic power of careful reading to intensify such devotion. Some critics may sense that Clooney, having started with reading as a theological practice, may ultimately learn more about such reading itself than about God. Yet, his deeper point seems to be that we should not expect neat divisions between what we learn and the process by which we learn it — and this realization may in turn provide "clearer insight into what God is like" (151).

But does it succeed as an *introduction*? Having used it already in the classroom, I would venture the following. For a concise, accessible entrée to the discipline, I prefer Clooney's essay in the *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (OUP, 2007). For a strong, coherent model of comparative theology in practice, *Theology After Vedanta* is still the better book. But for a vivid portrait of comparative theology as an existential, lifelong and largely instinctive project which proceeds through passionate faith, sustained study and "intuitive leaps" (96), this is the work we have been waiting for.

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Christianity for Hindus. Arvind Sharma. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 2009, 110 pp.

ARVIND Sharma's book fills an important gap between the academic study of Christianity and the need for an accessible presentation of Christianity that addresses the specific concerns of modern Hindus. Sharma condenses the essentials of Christianity into a concise presentation, often relating, comparing, or contrasting those essentials to relevant examples in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam.

Sharma begins his presentation with a chapter on why Hindus should study Christianity. He details very practical reasons, such as Christianity's impact on India and around the world. He also suggests that there are important moral and spiritual reasons for

learning about Christianity and points to some interesting connections between Hinduism and Christianity.

Chapter Two explains the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ. Sharma then outlines major Christian doctrines, including incarnation, atonement, and trinity. He presents the major branches of Christianity, with attention to their historical and theological differences. Sharma also explains Christian scriptures and shows how they are related to the Jewish Bible. Chapter Six is particularly helpful, as it details the long history of Christianity in India. Church historians and Christian theologians may quibble with Sharma's

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presentation, wanting greater nuance and diversity of scholarly sources. However, Sharma does often note different scholarly opinions.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, Sharma asks the question at the forefront of many Hindus' minds: Must Christianity Proselytize? This last chapter on whether Christians are obligated to proselytize is in many ways the most important, as it addresses one of the fundamental concerns Hindus have regarding Christianity. Sharma rightly shows that Christianity need not proselytize (although it has been and remains a strong impulse). However, I would have liked a longer and more sympathetic treatment of the many Christian groups that have labored to put their violent past behind them and move positively toward a more inclusive approach. There are many positive Christian resources for dialogue without proselytization, and it is just as valuable for Hindus to be aware of them as it is for Christians.

As a book intended for a popular audience, it is largely successful. Sharma distills a

remarkable amount of information into a short 100-pages. This is an impressive achievement for such a short book. Sharma's explanations and examples serve to render Christianity understandable to a Hindu reader. He argues convincingly that Hindus ought to learn about Christianity and understand it on its own terms. Sharma's many long quotes make the book less readable, though the text is on the whole quite accessible.

Sharma's book is valuable for a wide range of Hindus interested in learning the basics of Christianity. It is sufficiently nuanced to be a fairly accurate presentation of the major points of Christianity and addresses the key issues of concern for Hindu audiences. Sharma is to be thanked for this important contribution to Hindu and Christian understanding.

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Jesus as Guru: The Images of Christ Among Hindus and Christians in India. Jan Peter Schouten. Translated by Henry and Lucy Jansen. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008, 314pp.

SCHOUTEN sets out to "discuss Hindus and Christians from the last two centuries who have contributed to the development of Christology in India." (4) His discussion is presented in 11 chapters and five "intermezzos," short essays that focus on particular artists' images of Jesus. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to an individual or group, highlighting their background and relationship to religion. This is followed by a presentation of the person or group's understanding of, or teachings, regarding Jesus. Not surprisingly, Schouten's book basically confirms what R. S. Sugirtharajah once wrote: "Whereas Euro-American Christological reflections . . . prefer to discover Jesus in the pages of the written text and place him in a social, political and religious environment, Asian understandings of Jesus. . . take him out of his milieu and place him with the peoples of Asia and with other venerated

sages like Buddha, Krishna, and Confucius. They try to take Jesus out of the study into the dusty streets of Asia and let him mingle with other seers and savior figures." (Sugirtharajah, R. S. *Asian Faces of Jesus*. New York: Orbis Books, 1993; x)

In the introduction Schouten indicates that the "East and West have something to tell each other" (4), and in *Jesus as Guru* the author presents an interesting, richly diverse array of images of Jesus originating from India. Schouten begins chapter 2 with an exploration of Ram Mohan Roy's images of Jesus. Roy, a Hindu and one of the first to publically debate the meaning of Jesus in India, sees Jesus as a teacher, a divine guru teaching peace and happiness. Roy claims Jesus as a "fellow Asian" and questions the validity of Europeans seeing Jesus as their own. Nehemiah Goreh, India's "Hindu Paul," according to Schouten, is the