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Book Review: *Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India*

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BOOK REVIEWS

***Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India.* By Chad Bauman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, xiii + 208 pages.**

ONE rarely gets to review a book in the field of Hindu-Christian studies that is a path-breaker in a double sense: it identifies a significant lacuna in the academic space, and also begins to fill in the missing details. Chad Bauman, in his *Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India*, brings his theologically informed cultural anthropological perspective to bear on the rarely addressed topic of the routinization of anti-Christian violence in India, through fine-grained ethnographic portraits that seek to illuminate the disproportionate targeting of Pentecostals and ‘Pentecostalised’ Evangelicals. A common explanation is that Pentecostals bring it on themselves through their ‘in the face’ antagonistic, adversarial, and inflammatory forms of evangelism directed at Hindus. Bauman’s painstaking anthropological engagements point to a more complex picture, where Pentecostal provocativeness is only one thread in a criss-crossing tapestry constituted by the global flows of missionary finances, the appropriation by some Indian Pentecostals of the American mission vocabulary of ‘harvest’, the social marginalization of the Pentecostals vis-à-vis both Hindus and (upper-caste) mainstream Indian Christians, and the counter-cultural stances that some Pentecostals adopt towards the ‘Hindu’ Indian social milieu.

After setting out these conflicts in Chapter 2 within the *longue durée* of Hindu-Christian relations on the subcontinent, Bauman provides several vignettes in succeeding chapters of the ‘everydayness’ of Hindu-Christian conflict in rural India. Bauman concurs that there is a grain of truth in the thesis of Pentecostal belligerence, because Pentecostals often pursue more combative forms of spiritual warfare with ‘demonic’ Hinduism than are acceptable to the mainline Catholic and Protestant churches India. While the latter tend to view the rapidly burgeoning fissiparous ‘hybrid swarm’ of Pentecostal Christians as uncouth, illiterate, theologically naïve, ostentatious, and boorish, Pentecostals in turn regard mainstream Indian Christians as, at best, thoroughly assimilated to upper-caste Hindu idioms, and, at worst, living under the sinister shadow of Satan. Indeed, Pentecostals sometimes view the violence directed at them—the remnant of the true Church—as a fulfilment of biblical prophecies relating to the trials and tribulations of the last times.

The axes of caste and gender are pivotal to many of these violent conflicts, for Pentecostals are significantly more *dalitized* than mainstream Catholics and Protestants, and also their congregations are often shaped by the participation of (relatively) socially mobile

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women. Bauman perceptively locates these internal fissures on Indian social landscapes and in Indian Christian congregations within the wider circuits of globalisation. The (urban Indian) shift away from ascriptive caste-based notions to skill-based institutions, increasingly after the economic liberalization of the 1990s, intersects in complex ways with the Christian egalitarian gospel (which is often 'good news' that remains unrealized in Indian Christianity and elsewhere). While mainstream Indian Christianity generally co-exists with wider Hindu configurations in a somewhat uneasy calm, Pentecostalism often shatters this peace through its vocabulary of *dalitization*, which is imbricated in the 'secular' state's affirmative action programmes.

The 'rupture' that Pentecostal theology—in India and elsewhere—demands from individuals under the sway of the 'world' is also reflected sociologically in the counter-cultural orientations of some Pentecostals, whether in terms of their 'westernized' dress-styles, American musical tunes for church singing, 'loud' music systems for worship, and so on. Equally crucially, the very translatability or portability of Pentecostalism, expressed in the 'need for speed' that the 'new breed' of Pentecostals demonstrates in their spiritual warfare, directly conflicts with rural Hindu notions of religiosity which are tied to the hearth and the home, with the concomitant stratifications of caste and gender. At the same time, Bauman is careful not to construct yet another 'civilizational clash', this time between Pentecostals and Hindus: he notes that one feature of the 'everydayness' of rural India is the search, almost free-market style, by both Hindus and Christians for any spiritual healers who can offer them physical healing, liberation

from malignant spirits, or solutions to domestic ills. Many of these 'recuperative conversions' of Hindus are not socially disruptive. Further, these conversions, though they are usually not lasting, destabilise another well-worn polemical Hindu caricature of Christian conversions, namely, that they are propelled by the heavy machinery of European finance and westernised idioms, for these conversions operate outside not only the (relatively more) westernised locales of urban India but also the mainline (city-based) mainstream Christian churches. Hindu theological spaces often have rich demonologies (a point obscured by romanticised re-presentations of 'intrinsically peaceful Hinduism'), so that it is not surprising, as Bauman astutely notes, that for some rural Hindus a powerful guru and a Pentecostal leader who promises liberation from demons are virtually indistinguishable.

In the course of tracing the outlines of these conflicts, Bauman revisits one of the most vexed issues in Hindu-Christian violence, namely, whether Christians are exercising an 'unfair' advantage when drawing Hindus to Christ. This question depends, according to Bauman, on whether Pentecostal effectiveness is 'rooted in the superior power of their particular faith or in the superior power of their rhetoric to convince people that they can be cured through prayer?' (129). Thus Bauman's theologically sensitive social anthropological portraits can help us to bridge what is (in the opinion of this reviewer) a dangerous divide that exists in the specialism of Hindu-Christian studies between the 'textualists' (who tend to read the original texts in a dehistoricized manner) and the 'contextualists' (who are often unfamiliar with the conceptual depths of Hindu and Christian theological systems). It would be

tragic if in exploring Indian Christian theology against the backdrop of Hindu thought (or vice versa) we forgot the flesh-and-blood Hindus and Christians who continually intersect through the blood, sweat, and tears—and hopes—of everyday India, just as it would be facile if in investigating their mundanity we neglected the scriptural resources that they themselves often draw upon in their quotidian

negotiations. Bauman is to be thanked for giving us a volume that directs us towards the elusive middle way through our academic insularities.

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***Debating 'Conversion' in Hinduism and Christianity.* By Ankur Barua. London: Routledge, 2015, x + 217 pp.**

ANKUR Barua is Lecturer in Hindu Studies in the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Cambridge (U.K.), and has written extensively on Hindu-Christian dynamics (including, multiple times, within the pages of this journal). As the title suggests, the volume considers debates about the nature, utility, and desirability of conversion (and the political implications of these debates) both *intra*-religiously (i.e., within Hinduism and Christianity) and *inter*-religiously (i.e., between Christians and Hindus).

When it comes to the intra-religious debates, the author provides considerably more information from the Christian side. For example, after two introductory chapters, Chapter Three focuses on the historical relationship of Christian missionaries to the ideology and politics of empire. Chapter Four discusses the development of Christian representations, constructions, and evaluations of “Hinduism.” The focus of Chapter Five is on the vexing question of caste within Indian Christianity, as well as the relevance of that question to debates about conversion, both within Christianity and in the context of

Christians’ debates with Hindus (about agency, “allurement,” etc.). And Chapter Seven gives treatment to changing understandings of mission and debates about “inculturation” (or “interculturalization”) among Christians, and how Hindus have received these changing Christian evangelistic views and strategies.

These chapters are all sensitively written, and are particularly successful at highlighting the diversity, development, and complexity of Christian views about such matters. For the sake of balance, however, one wishes that the author had included somewhat more about Hindu reflections on these topics in and of themselves, where relevant, and not primarily—as is the case—in the context of their *reactions* to what Christians and colonial figures do (or have done). For example, it seems to me a particularly fine opportunity was lost in Chapter Seven to deal more thoroughly, for the sake of comparison, with Hindu “missions,” “missionaries,” and “missiology,” as Reid Locklin and others have recently done. These chapters are also a bit more dependent on well-known secondary source material, and