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Book Review: *Meeting of Opposites? Hindus and Christians in the West*

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while asserting also their distinctive Catholic identity-- "covering all the bases." Together, Dempsey summarizes, they "...produce a ritual blending across religious boundaries that he [Raj] identifies as a form of ongoing, authentic interreligious dialogue, arising organically from lived experiences rather than abstracted theologies." (p. 201) Though today many Hindus and Christians voice opposition to the mix, yet it would seem impossible, arrogant, and unwise to attempt to pour the new wine back into the old wineskins.

Sacred Matters is short collection of disparate papers, but with the help of a pithy introduction and the concluding essay they cohere remarkably well. The essays give interesting directions for further exploration of material cultural studies and to Hindu-Christian studies

as well. The work certainly does not eschew or replace textual studies of meaning, doctrine, ideology or theology, which are, somewhat ironically, still well represented in the nine papers. The study of materiality can contribute new sociological, anthropological, historical, and economic insights to the study of religion. The field might also be enriched, one feels, by thicker descriptive and phenomenological work on the lived experience of apprehending materiality as an epiphany of the divine. The volume has a useful index and 27 photographs, all black and white (would that they were color). *Sacred Matters* invites perusal, and adds materially to the field.

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Meeting of Opposites? Hindus and Christians in the West. Andrew Wingate. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015, x + 216 pp.

IN the preface to this helpful book, Wingate indicates that it is not an academic work, but intended rather "to encourage a wider interest in its subject across the churches, clergy, theological students and lay people, and Hindus who wish to go deeper into their engagement with Christians." (7) For readers who still think that Christians live in the West while Hindus live far-off in India, the book will offer a useful corrective that brings home in vivid detail the crucial insight that the world religions today are here, wherever we live.

The book begins with a brave chapter entitled, "Christian-Hindu encounter in India: From the beginnings of Christianity in Kerala to the present day," offering useful background for those unfamiliar with this history. But most of

the book dwells on contemporary particulars, what Wingate has noticed and noted down over many years of interfaith work and in the travels leading to this book. Three chapters respectively cover three Hindu devotional movements in the UK and USA (ISKCON, south Indian bhakti and, as Wingate calls them, Jesu bhakters). After a self-standing chapter on the Swaminarayan tradition, three additional chapters report on his visits to Leicester (UK), to several cities in the United States, and to Sweden. Throughout, Wingate is interested in temples and their communities, attitudes toward the practice of yoga, organizations such as the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society and ISKCON, and existing interfaith ventures on the local level.

76 Book Reviews

Wingate believes in conversation and met with many scholars and practitioners, priests and laity, and the book is all the more vivid for noting down details of many conversations with individuals named in the various chapters. I assume that the interviews are generally reliable, but his report on his meeting with me does not mesh very well with my own memory of what I said. I do not recall saying that Christians are “only” interested in the Abrahamic faiths, even if most attention stays in that realm; I myself was not at all recommending the avoidance of dialogue with Hindus, but meant only that this dialogue, daunting as it is, is by many not considered urgent enough to warrant the work required; there is no “University of Los Angeles” (and Wingate may have meant the University of Southern California); in any case, Tracy Tiemeier, who teaches at Loyola Marymount, the Jesuit university, does not hold a chair of Hindu studie; an attempted Hindu-Catholic dialogue in Minneapolis did not involve “mixed families,” but rather was intended to bring Hindu families and Catholic families into dialogue with one another.

The last two chapters are particularly practical. Chapter 10 considers in depth the Leicester Hindu-Christian Forum and similar national initiatives wherein Hindus and Christians have met regularly over time. The chapter is full of advice based on the experience of participants and Wingate’s own perception. Chapter 11 (“Theological, spiritual, and missiological challenges”) steps back from descriptive detail and raises a number of larger theological issues susceptible to disagreement and misunderstanding: God and the gods; idols, images, and symbols; grace, works, and karma; the uniqueness of Christ and the cross; salvation

and ways of salvation. Wingate hopes to inform a wide group of readers of basic issues that may arise in dialogue but, as posed, the topics seem detached from the vivid complexity of shifting social contexts that make up the bulk of the book. It would have been interesting to ask a different kind of question, too: how do Hindus and Christians in Leicester talk about the divine? Do Americans, Hindu or Christian, think differently of grace and karma than do the Swedes and British? For the sake of Christian readers, the chapter includes also a briefer treatment of “challenging ideas” such as ahimsa; desireless (nishkama) karma; the wholeness of life, reincarnation, and vegetarianism. Here too one might use the vivid data of earlier chapters to introduce multiple angles: is it true that more younger Christians today are inclined not only to vegetarianism but also to at least tolerance of the idea of rebirth? The chapter concludes with practical advice on how to form local dialogue groups, on recommended methods of dialogue, etc.

A brief afterword returns to the title question — is the Hindu-Christian encounter a meeting of opposites? — with a plea to remember that despite all differences, we meet one another “as fellow human beings, fellow citizens, fellow religious and spiritual friends.” (201) Here too, the detailed studies comprising most of the book suggest that only on some levels ought Hinduism and Christianity be termed opposites. Even regarding doctrine, one can conjecture that shifting views of truth and tradition leave room for a fluidity of views of both communities, and variations according to locale. Perhaps the title question might better have been something like, *Complicated Neighbors? Hindus and Christians in the West*. Nevertheless, we can only hope that this well-

intentioned book is read widely, prompting both Christians and Hindus to engage intentionally and with hope in the important work of dialogue.

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***Indian Thought and Western Theism: the Vedānta of Rāmānuja.* Martin Ganeri. London: Routledge, 2015, x + 176 pp.**

MARTIN Ganeri's *Indian Thought and Western Theism* is an ambitious study of the theology of Thomas Aquinas (~13th CE) and the Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta of Rāmānuja (~12th CE). While the main goal of this work is to illustrate the affinity between Thomism and Rāmānuja's Vedānta it also questions certain long-held claims of compatibility between the latter and certain forms of Western theism such as Process thought. The emphasis of the study is two-fold. First, the parallels between scholasticism and Rāmānuja's Vedānta are illustrated by noting the similarities in methodology of scholasticism and Vedānta (Chapter 2) and reading the *Summa Theologica* and the *Śrī Bhāṣya* together (Chapters 3-4). This is indeed novel, as earlier Indologists had denied commonality between these two theologies (Chapter 1). Second, the comparison drawn between Rāmānuja's Vedānta and Process thought by Viśiṣṭādvaita scholars is reevaluated (Chapter 5).

Ganeri demonstrates the strong parallels in the method and concepts utilized by Aquinas and Rāmānuja though they engage with different texts and contexts. Applying Jose Cabezón's enumeration of characteristics that define the scholastic mode of inquiry, he argues that the methodology of Rāmānuja qualifies as scholasticism much more than prior designations such as philosophy, theology, or philosophy of religion (pp 37-41). Ganeri then

brings the two theologians into conversation with an in-depth analysis of their discussions on ultimate reality and its connection to the world. For instance, early Indologists rejected Rāmānuja's view of Brahman as a differentiated (*viśiṣṭa*) complex possessed of many essential attributes as contrary to the Thomist doctrine of the divine simplicity of God. Furthermore, since Rāmānuja claims that Brahman as the material cause of the world undergoes real transformation, this was also seen as a contradiction to Aquinas's doctrine of the absolute independence of God. Ganeri digs deeper to show that though this may be true superficially both thinkers work with certain polarity discourses that when adequately understood reveal that both Aquinas and Rāmānuja are working towards similar views in regard to divinity. Whilst it is not possible to duplicate Ganeri's sophisticated analyses of Rāmānuja and Aquinas as it concerns the nature of the ultimate reality and its relationship to the world, a cursory discussion of the two issues is provided below.

For Rāmānuja, though Brahman is a complex reality he is also indivisible, suggesting immutability and a non-composite nature. The self-body relation affirms the complexity of Brahman but also upholds the immutability of Brahman even though the world evolves from him. According to Ganeri, we cannot therefore,