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Book Review: Christianity in India: Conversion, Community Development, and Religious Freedom. Edited by Rebecca Samuel Shah and Joel Carpenter. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018, xix + 311 pages.

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reach the goal of God-realization—because of, not in spite of such oppositions.

We should be grateful for Maharaj's work to construct such a stable cross-cultural intellectual basis from which to reinterpret Sri Ramakrishna's contemporary relevance. Teachers and students of religious studies, comparative theology, interreligious dialogue,

and contemporary analytic philosophy will be drawn to this text; and owing to what I consider Maharaj's devotion-as-scholarship, they will be enticed to encounter more deeply the matchless Sri Ramakrishna.

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***Christianity in India: Conversion, Community Development, and Religious Freedom.* Edited by Rebecca Samuel Shah and Joel Carpenter. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018, xix + 311 pages.**

REVIEWING edited volumes is always difficult, and even more so in the case of this particular volume, both because its theme is a somewhat general and loosely-imposed one, and because the quality of its chapters varies considerably. To some extent, the chapters' varied quality is a function of the fact that they emerged from a workshop in India that brought seasoned India scholars together with other scholars who were encountering India academically (and maybe even personally) for the very first time. Another challenge is the range of disciplines represented in the volume. While interdisciplinarity is a generally good thing, in this case the disciplinary range includes both openly partisan Christian theological/missiological essays, on the one hand, and, on the other, essays striving for impartiality and conforming more closely to secular norms of scholarship. There is of course nothing inherently wrong with the juxtaposition of such disparate disciplines, but the oscillation between them can be somewhat disorienting. At the very least, this juxtaposition requires that I acknowledge the fact I work more comfortably in that latter, more secular scholarly vein, which may prejudice my appreciation of essays in the former. *Caveat lector.*

While not all of the volume's chapters contribute to it equally, the primary focus of the book is on the contributions of Christians to Indian society in the context of increasing anti-Christian discrimination and violence. A further argument—implicit throughout, but stated explicitly in the Introduction and then more fully in Chapter 11 (by political scientist Paul S. Rowe)—is that India stands to lose the important contribution of Christians to civil society if anti-Christian persecution should continue or increase. To that end, the volume opens with a strong chapter by Rebecca Samuel Shah, who reviews the history of Hindu nationalism and provides both an overview and critique of its central obsessions (e.g., conversion, inducement, the unity of Hinduism) with special attention to their ramifications for India's Christians. This overview is so strong, in fact, that one wishes other authors in the volume hadn't felt the need, as several of them did, to clutter their own essays with introductory (and far more general/unsatisfying) overviews covering the same territory.

In the second chapter, Sean Doyle provides a biographical essay on the famous high-caste Hindu convert to Christianity, Lakshmibai Tilak (1868-1936). Along with her

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much better-known husband, Narayan, Lakshmibai was a well-respected Marathi poet, and one of the contributions of this chapter is that it helps bring her, as it were, out from Narayan's shadow. Bernardo Michael's third chapter focuses on C.F. Andrews's "willingness to become undone" in his encounter with Indian others. In the fourth chapter, Joshua Iyadurai attempts to undermine the common Hindu nationalist assertion that conversions to Christianity in India primarily result from members of lower-caste and poorer communities being lured to Christianity through promises of material advance. Disappointingly, however, he does so by focusing on the putatively spiritual conversions of *high-caste* Hindus, which does nothing to undermine the notion that low-caste conversions result from the pursuit of material interests. Why not discuss "spiritual" conversions among low-caste Christians, for example, or work in other ways to undermine the false and untenable spiritual/material dichotomy altogether?

Following these four chapters of Part 1 are two chapters in Part 2 that focus on missiological issues in the Indian context, and that therefore connect somewhat more tangentially than other chapters with the theme of the volume. In Chapter 5, Aminta Arrington discusses whether Indian praxis might help Evangelicals resolve longstanding tensions regarding the proper balance of evangelism and social service. One striking aspect of the essay is her relatively positive portrayal of short-term missions, which departs from (and seems oblivious to) the widespread critique of such missions that has recently emerged both from within Christianity and from among its external critics. In Chapter 6, Darren Duerksen urges India's Christian Development Organizations to work more closely with local churches

where they provide services in a process of "mutually adaptive change" that could benefit and develop the capacities of both.

The five chapters of Part 3 are, in my view, the strongest in the volume, and the primary basis for the appreciative blurb I supplied for its back cover. In Chapter 7, Samuel Thambusamy analyzes the pervasive nostalgia for "traditional" Hindu social and religious practices in Karan Johar's famous Bollywood films, and shows how this nostalgia perhaps unwittingly supports Hindu nationalist projects, both in India and abroad. In Chapter 8, Karuna John interviews Indian Christian and human rights leaders, Dr. John Dayal and Rev. Vijayesh Lal, who are admirably concise and insightful in their piercing critique of the marginalization of India's Christians at the hands of Hindu nationalists of both the extreme and softer varieties. In the subsequent chapter, Vikas Ram and Kay Higuera Smith use case studies and draw upon trauma studies, memory studies, and post-holocaust studies to demonstrate the variety of individual Christian responses to experiences of anti-Christian violence. Among other prominent responses they found were the creation of new narratives to counter those of nationalists, and intensification of piety, more frequent expressions of hope for an improved future, and the ritualized expression of coping mechanisms (e.g., regular fasting and prayer services focused on securing divine protection and easing anxiety about persecution). As indicated above, in the final chapter of volume, Paul Rowe, a political scientist, makes the case that Indian Christians punch far above their weight in terms of contributions to Indian civil society, and that India therefore has much to lose if it continues down the road of anti-Christian discrimination, repression, and violence.

The most compelling and provocative chapter of the volume is, in my view, the penultimate (Chapter 10), in which Rebecca Samuel Shah and Timothy Samuel Shah provide data on the unusually rational and financially beneficial lifestyle changes adopted by converts to Christianity in a Bangalore slum in order to refute the nationalist narrative that such converts lack the ability to be thoughtful about religious affairs and therefore lack religious agency until lured to Christianity by duplicitous missionaries. Data from their survey of hundreds of female slum residents indicates that Christians (particularly *Protestants*, and especially *converts* to Christianity) were far less likely than members of other religious groups to spend on luxury goods, far more likely to spend on functional items (e.g., refrigerators, washing machines), far more likely to negotiate with their bosses for better salaries, and far more likely to talk to

authorities in their life (e.g., pastors) about experiences of domestic violence. Conversion therefore *contributes* to the expression of agency among low-caste slum-dwellers. These data, the authors argue, provide more evidence of the benefits of religious freedom, which in their view is under attack not only from religious nationalists around the world, but also from western secular intellectuals like Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, Saba Mahmood, and others.

While uneven, and only loosely organized around a theme, then, this volume has much to offer. It is accessible and current, and contains essays both complex and more general/introductory. For this reason, surely everyone could find in it at least several chapters of interest and value.

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***Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893.* By Michael J. Altman. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017, vii + 175 pages.**

ALTMAN'S book contributes much to our understanding of how "Hinduism" came to be imagined in America. He dismantles neat narratives, replacing them with a sophisticated analysis of ever-changing fragments that have long intersected in a variety of ways. His keen attention to historical details presents a complex set of developments that disrupt, in particular, notions of Hinduism as a stable category predicated on conceptions of belief and practice.

The author's intended goal is to analyze a variety of terms used to represent Hindus and Hinduism in order to illustrate how these

categories were constructed and deployed in America. The goal is neither to show Hinduism to be merely a constructed term nor to argue that Hinduism does not really exist.

Previous studies of Hinduism in America, argues Altman, tended to locate a Hinduism that neatly aligned with a pre-defined "Hinduism" replete with beliefs, practices, and sacred texts. Such studies presented a Hinduism marked by its movement, as though describing a stable object. Not only do these representations miss the wildly varied forms of Hinduism, they fail to mention the representations of Hinduism in American discourse about the so-called Hindoos. That is,