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Book Review: Anti-Christian Violence in India. By Chad M. Bauman

Dyron Daugherty
Pepperdine University

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The third theme is legacy. “I feel like I am continuously pestered by an inner voice that tells me I am destined for a higher function, a more important role, a more universal profession (than that of university professor)” (131). Despite his repeated claims of indifference to the mundane fortunes of this world, on several occasions Panikkar questioned his own legacy. He lived with surprise—although not disappointment—about what he perceived to be a relatively modest impact on the history of the world (95-6). He shared with other giants of the twentieth century, including Karl Barth and Henri de Lubac, the inclination to see reality from a spiritual perspective. And much like Barth in Switzerland and de Lubac in France, he attempted to elaborate a remedy that was at once spiritual and theological. Unlike Barth and de Lubac, however, he never ignited a “controversy” that was at the same time theological and political (“political” in the sense that challenges the establishment’s ideology). Several entries of *Fragments* testify that, for temperament and circumstances, Panikkar carefully avoided academic debates and doctrinal disagreements. If one were to take Panikkar’s words at face value, he never raised an argument of the magnitude of Barth’s and de Lubac’s, mostly for lack of courage, not of intellectual stamina (184). He recognized

that his life was much more private than, say, that of Heidegger, and with that he probably meant that he did not make himself a public figure (198). His disagreement with the mainstream ideology of the Church was rather consummated in the private circle of his friends, disciples, and followers, and in the internal space of his conscience. His distance from the academic world is equally documented in the diary (138). On the concrete ground of practical (and risky) decisions, his more dramatic form of protest was his marriage. But *Fragments* offers several alternative motivations for that union, and the entire question is still open to debate (105). In the end, he saw his legacy in his life, words, and books—and in that precise order (220-1).

The volume cannot be properly regarded as a contribution to the field of Panikkar scholarship; still, it provides details and angles of observations that might help scholars advance in their investigation of the sage of Tavertet. The book belongs in every academic library and could be used fruitfully—in whole or in part—in graduate and advanced undergraduate classrooms in the fields of theology or religions and interfaith dialogue.

Enrico Beltramini

Notre Dame de Namur University

***Anti-Christian Violence in India.* By Chad M. Bauman. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020. 310 pp.**

BUTLER University professor Chad M. Bauman has produced another well-researched book on Christianity in India, once again focusing on anti-Christian violence. His previous

monographs include the award-winning *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India, 1868–1947* (2008), and *Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India*

(2015). He has also co-edited two helpful works focusing on Christian interactions with other religions in India: *Constructing Indian Christianities: Culture, Conversion and Caste* (2014) with Richard Fox Young, and *The Routledge Handbook of Hindu-Christian Relations* (2020) with Michelle Voss Roberts.

The present volume, *Anti-Christian Violence in India*, is similar to Bauman's 2015 monograph, although the previous focused specifically on Pentecostalism. The current work is organized into five chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. In Ch.1, Bauman interacts with key questions around religion and violence such as whether religion causes violence, whether religious conflict is unique, and a consideration of why religious violence is so appealing to so many people.

In Ch.2, the author presents a very helpful history, or what he calls a "prehistory" of Hindu-Christian conflict. He first looks at conflict between the St. Thomas Christians and the Portuguese, which began shortly after the arrival of Vasco da Gama in 1498. He then analyzes Hindu-Christian conflict in the context of colonialism. He argues that missionaries depicted Hinduism in ways that offended Indian sensibilities, leading to the rise of various Hindu responses, some more reactionary than others. The 1857 rebellion is singled out as a particularly important flashpoint in the development of Hindu-Christian tension. The rise of more aggressive reactionary movements such as Hindutva and the RSS in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is discussed, followed by an examination of issues around Indian independence, and seeds that were sown around that time that blossomed into intense political controversies around the idea of religious conversion.

Bauman argues that "... in the 1950s, the work of Christian missionaries, particularly *foreign* missionaries, came under greater scrutiny" (99, italics his). Hindu nationalism, as a movement, had made great gains by the late 1980s. Hindu-Muslim conflict always grabbed the headlines, but it may well have been Christianity that posed the greater, more fundamental threat for Hindus (111).

Ch.3 looks at what Bauman calls "everyday" violence against Christians, focusing on various incidents occurring in various places across India. I found this chapter useful, as Bauman has scoured many lesser-known sources to fortify his thesis that anti-Christian violence is far more common today than one might think simply by reading Western papers. It is a daily occurrence in India: schools and churches are burned, wells are poisoned, homes and shops are destroyed, people are intimidated, hundreds have been injured, and many have been killed—often without any fanfare. Bauman argues that Catholics, Orthodox, and older Western denominations (e.g., CSI and CNI) are not typically attacked in these ways. Rather, the forms of Christianity that tend to be associated with *evangelism* are far more likely to be targeted, particularly if their churches are growing (130–131).

Ch.4-5 are an ethnographic case study focused on the anti-Christian riots in the Kandhamal district of Odisha (formerly Orissa) in 2007–2008. Bauman's handling of this very sensitive topic is helpful to Western academics who tend to know little about the rising anti-Christian posture in India that sometimes spills over into violence. Bauman has devoted his career to this specific topic and there is no one else I am aware of who understands the literature, the historical background, and the

particular context on the ground in India as well as he does. Many of us lived in or traveled to India earlier in our research careers without much concern. The social climate has changed, and Bauman explains clearly why and how this all happened.

Despite the changes in the social and political climate of India, part of Bauman's interpretation is that the recent violence against Christians is actually "more of the same" (6). The rise of BJP rule, in Bauman's view, is not necessarily connected to a correlative rise in anti-Christian violence. He rightly points out that some of the worst violence against Christians in Indian history occurred during the reign of the Congress Party, particularly the massacres and riots in 2007–2008 which the author examines in detail in this book. This is an important fact that often gets missed. The BJP is routinely decried as antagonistic towards Christians, but the intensity of the persecution has been heightening over the course of many years, not solely since the rise of the BJP in the 21st century. Further, according to the author, religious violence in general is on the rise globally, so this is not a uniquely Indian or anti-Christian phenomenon.

What Bauman's book accomplishes well is establishing that violence against Christians goes on all across India today. It has happened for a long time, and it will likely continue. There is "no single factor" for the anti-Christian violence. It is linked to many moving pieces which are explained well throughout. Bauman utilizes a constructivist approach—emphasizing the role of material interests—to show that religion cannot be overlooked when trying to assess why anti-Christian violence is so prominent. Christianity is widely perceived

by Hindutva advocates as being a threat to the Indian and specifically Hindu way of life.

Some of Bauman's arguments are complex, but he patiently unpacks them in the conclusion. One important idea is that Christianity is often associated with Western values such as equality, human rights, privatization of religion, and extreme individualism. And Christianity – perceived as the religion of the West – carries these values within it. Hindutva is clearly threatened by all of this, as Hinduism tends to represent values such as collectivism, communitarianism, and ethnic unity. What results is a clash of loyalties: if one is loyal to Hinduism, concomitant loyalties must be to Hindu business, the Indian homeland, Indian heritage and culture, and Hindu ways of seeing the world. Christianity—with its emphasis on loyalty to God, on the *global church*, and with a historical proclivity towards the West (at least in the postcolonial experience)—potentially undermines Indianness, or Hindutva, in so many cultural and existential ways. Christianity is also linked to concepts thoroughly bathed in Westernness such as globalization, merit-based economies, liberal education, widespread literacy and the consequential social power that comes with it, greater access to foreign money and consequent opportunity, human rights for all, uplift of the marginalized, and—importantly for Bauman—freedom of religion. Bauman's theories also delve into caste issues, such as the fact that, at least in his case study of Odisha, most of the Christians targeted were from low castes (225). Indian Christians, therefore, become "convenient proxies" (217) for nationalistic Hindus who long for a united, thoroughly Indian, homeland. There is a nostalgia that seems to be happening here,

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with Hindutva actors perceiving a halcyon, united past.

Bauman's final few pages are fascinating, revealing, and brilliantly written. He affirms Paul Marshall's ideas on what is at stake in the politics of religious conversion. Central to the ideas Bauman is attracted to is the nature of choice. Traditional societies emphasize that "you are what you were born to be" (235); you should follow the path of your ancestors. Globalization, however, presents choices: you might depart from your ancestral calling; you might become something else. You might forsake your traditional, ancestral, or even ethnic identity. Christians threaten others because they are not only open to change, but their entire religion is founded upon the notion of change. Born again Christians, in particular—those who experience a "new birth"—pose a way of seeing the world where you can completely reorient your alliances. This is

unnerving to those rooted in tradition, ancestry, indigeneity, and ethnic uniformity. Christian conversion potentially disrupts completely, allowing people the choice of which community they want to be part of. Great freedom is offered, albeit at the cost of losing one's communal connectivity.

Bauman concludes by, again, affirming Paul Marshall's notion that Christianity denies an all-encompassing state. Christianity confesses that Caesar is decidedly *not* God. Inherent in Christianity is a challenge to "monistic conceptions of social order" (236). He also argues that where we find Christian dominance in the modern era, we also find Western secularism. And for many Hindus, therein lies the greatest threat of all.

Dyron Daugherty
Pepperdine University

***Essays in Hindu Theology.* By Anantanand Rambachan. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019, 187 pages.**

IN these days of interreligious dialogue and cross-cultural friendships, it is good to have an insightful and critical account of a major Hindu theological viewpoint, with strong dialogic overtones, by an eminent Hindu practitioner. This book is all the more welcome because Hindu theologians of stature today who give an account of the nature of the Supreme Being and its relationship with the world and human beings from a Hindu point of view in the context of a respectful and knowledgeable understanding of non-Hindu religious standpoints, are, to coin an expression, as scarce as hens' teeth. Further, as Rambachan

points out, the Hindu diaspora is growing steadily, not least in his own country, the USA, where alone the "estimated Hindu population....is now over 2 million" (13). So, a book like this one, with a slant towards a Hindu understanding of Christian belief and practice, is all the more important for keeping abreast of current developments in Hindu dialogic approaches.

Rambachan states that his "analysis is particularly influenced by the nondualism of Advaita Vedānta" (p.47) which affirms that, in the final analysis, the seething multiplicity of produced being is ontologically non-different