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recommendation is that the poems, as “scriptural manifestation”, be read each day, one at a time, and assimilated into one’s daily life.

Hixon’s work is a personal meditation on the divine Mother, which bases itself on the skeletal work of Ramprasad Sen. This in itself is not objectionable. All beings are entitled to such meditations, and seen from this perspective, the poems are quite sensitively reworked. As a scholarly enterprise, however, the book is highly inadequate. It is riddled with generalizations and absolutist statements, too many to even mention. There is an utter lack of self-consciousness about scholarly method. For example, even though Hixon assures us that the poems’ “startling imagery and naked honesty belong to Ramprasad. My expansions have added nothing that diverges from his spirit” (p.xii), one is given no indication whatsoever as to where Ramprasad left off, and where Hixon’s contemplative commentary begins. Similarly, Hixon is sometimes so indulgent to mystical language that one sometimes becomes quite lost in a quagmire of profundity. Mother of the Universe, in short, is best read as a devotional work, suited for like-minded devotees. To read it with any other aim is to be disappointed.

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THEO-MONISTIC MYSTICISM is a thoughtful and challenging study which seeks a middle path between two influential interpretations of mystical experiences. The constructivist interpreters, represented here by John Hick, admit that mystical experiences are different but argue that the differences are explicable by reference to the socio-religious framework which the particular mystic brings to her experience. Stoeber is critical of this school for its inability to account for the transmission of new religious knowledge and insight through mystical experience, since the information which the mystic receives is entirely dependent on the prior conceptual framework. In addition, the constructivist thesis cannot adequately account for mystic heresy or for the similarities in mystical experiences where there are no shared socio-religious factors.

The essentialist school, represented by interpreters like Evelyn Underhill, W. T. Stace and Ninian Smart, see mystical experience as the same everywhere, but subject to a variety of socio-religious interpretations. Stoeber is critical of the essentialist position for its disregard of vital differences between monistic experiences, which involve a loss of duality and exclude personal experience, and theistic experiences, which encounter the Real as dynamic and where “some sense of differentiating self-identity is maintained by the participants” (p.24). These important differences are illustrated by analysis of the writings of Meister Eckhart and Jan Van Ruusbroec.

The study of these two mystics leads Stoeber to propose a third experiential possibility which he calls theo-monistic mysticism. He calls it a theo-monistic experience “because although it involves an impersonal monistic realization, it issues in a perspective that also reflects an active, creative, and personal Real” (p.35). Theo-monistic mysticism avoids the extremes of the constructivist and essentialist schools by positing that mystical experiences differ and that these differences cannot be explained
only by socio-religious factors. The theo-
monistic experiences of mystics like
Eckhart, Ruusbroec, Ramanuja, Aurobindo,
and others can be explained only by positing
a divine which is "both passive and active,
non-dualistic and distinctive, impersonal and
personal".

In this work, however, Stoeber does not
argue only for the reality of the theo-
monistic type experiences. Even more
importantly, he proposes, in chapters 3 and
5, a theistic mystic typology which
culminates in theo-monistic experiences but
which authenticates the monistic experience
and can account meaningfully for
experiences of the paranormal, of nature and
of the numinous. Monistic hierarchies, on
the other hand, fail to fully authenticate
theistic experiences and relegate them finally
to the realm of the illusory.

Theo-Monistic Mysticism is a fine
example of a creative scholarly work which
draws deeply from the rich resources of
Christianity and Hinduism while offering
various possibilities for enriching dialogue.
While the issue of liberation (mokṣa), for
example, goes beyond the scope of Stoeber's
work, it is central to all Hindu traditions and
it needs to be raised in connection with
Stoeber's characterization of monistic
mysticism vis-à-vis theo-monistic mysticism.
If monistic experiences are preliminary to
the theo-monistic ones, are the former still
liberative? What do theo-monistic
experiences reveal to us about the meaning
of mokṣa? If the divine is both personal and
impersonal, non-dualistic and distinctive, we
need to consider also the value of
hierarchies, monistic or theo-monistic. There
is little doubt that the theo-monistic category
is an appropriate one for viewing a wide
variety of experiences in the Hindu tradition
and Stoeber's work is a catalyst for the
clarification of the significance of such
experiences from the Hindu point of view.

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The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the
xi + 170pp.

EVERY NOW AND then one encounters a
book which brings unexpected illumination
to long-standing questions. This is such a
volume. Rambachan's critical analysis of
Vivekananda's thought and its legacy in the
Hinduism of today is as important a
contribution as Wilhelm Halbfass' India and
Europe. While others have highlighted
Vivekananda's influence on Indian
nationalism and the impact of the
Ramakrishna mission, this is the first critical
assessment of his thought and its influence
on contemporary Hinduism - especially
Advaita Vedānta of which Vivekananda
claimed to be a contemporary exponent. For
me this book brought answers to puzzles
which had been in my mind for years: why
do Hindus not show much serious scholarly
interest in dialogue?; why has Hindu
scholarship in this century become so
flabby?; and why does Vivekananda use this
extra category of rājayoga? Rambachan's
critical study of Vivekananda's view of
scripture (śruti), in comparison with that of
Sankara, provides surprising and convincing
answers to these questions.

Whereas Sankara gives priority to śruti
as the only valid way to obtain knowledge of
brahman and release (mokṣa), Vivekananda,
responding to the enlightenment critique of
the authority of scripture, superimposes
direct personal experience (anubhava,