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Book Review: "Hindu Wisdom for all God's Children"

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cultural flow within India. The Rodhes provide an account of the history of the Lingayat movement in Karnataka, the beliefs and codes of conduct within the Lingayat movement, the relationship of the movement to the majority Hindu culture, the fortunes of the early egalitarian impulses of the movement, and the current emphasis on education among Lingayats in Karnataka. Overall, the treatment has more to do with education than with religion. On the other hand the focus of Sten Rodhe's chapter on the encounter between Hinduism and Christianity, featuring the development of Shantivanam under Jules Monchanin and his successors, investigates the business of inculturation in the area of religion. Through the brief discussion we get a glimpse of the dream of inclusivism in Jules Monchanin, the synthesis attempted by Henri Le Saux, and the complementarity preferred by Bede Griffiths.

If one expects in the various chapters of this volume a thoroughgoing analysis of the

complexity of culture, approaches to cultural analysis, and issues such as inculturation and culture flows, the reader is bound to be disappointed. Other than acknowledging the complexity of culture and offering two brief definitions of culture, the editor and authors offer little by way of theoretical analysis. On the other hand, there are useful, albeit undeveloped suggestions that are pertinent to interreligious dialogue in general and Hindu-Christian dialogue in particular. For example, it seems to me that Pattanayak's definition of true transnationalism, and Bayer's comments on complementarity are relevant to the discussion of the place of religious minorities in India. Such proposals added to the insights on the attempt at inculturation of Shantivanam provided by Sten Rodhe provide useful material for further thought in the area of Hindu-Christian Studies.

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Hindu Wisdom for all God's Children. Francis X. Clooney, SJ. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998, xiv + 144 pp.

THERE IS SOMETHING very strange about an American-born Indian, trained by non-Indian American indologists, reviewing a book by an American-born American indologist about Hinduism for a Christian audience! It should not be surprising, though, when we remember who the author of the book is: Francis Clooney. Clooney is among a small group of scholars who have succeeded in crossing over many boundaries (some artificial and some real) between Hindu and Christian, between scholar of religion and religious scholar, and between the philosophical and the theological. His ability to do so is clearly evident in his *Hindu Wisdom for all God's Children*, yet another one of Clooney's successful experiments in comparative theology.

It is also not surprising that Clooney follows the trajectory that he established in his *Theology after Vedanta* and his *Seeing*

through Texts. The methodology that Clooney employs in these books is reminiscent of oral commentaries that are a large part of the pedagogical environment of many *mathas* in India today and in the past. To this end, Clooney closely examined portions of Hindu texts and commented on them when needed. In his *Hindu Wisdom*, then, he does the same. He thus walks his reader through a variety of texts and teaches the reader to approach them "as a lover, to caress, lick, smell, and savor the words on the page, and to return to them ever and again" by means of helpful comments and interpretative strategies.¹ Clooney asks his readers to learn to become, at least for the time being, virtuoso religious readers in training – to open themselves up to the religious wisdom of South Asia – of Hinduism, and for the Christians to use this wisdom to increase their own abilities to

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give meaningful religious accounts.²

Quite appropriately, Clooney begins with an examination of a creation myth taken from the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad. He also refers to portions of Genesis in this chapter. By juxtaposing these texts and traditions together, Clooney hopes to teach readers to expand their vocabulary and their beliefs, to learn new ways of thinking about old ones, and ultimately to learn through and from Hindu wisdom. This chapter sets the tone for the volume. The six chapters that follow are examinations of several themes and *dharshanas*. Clooney first focuses on the Advaita Vedanta of Shankaracarya and asks readers to wade through portions of the eighth-century scholar Vivekacudamani. Clooney next examines the wisdom of Buddhism. He does not, however, do so as an enactment of Advaita-like-*inklusivismus*.³ Instead he emphasizes the important interaction between Buddhism and Hinduism and holds that the study of one requires the study of the other. Clooney works through several Buddhist parables commenting on portions of the *Madhyamaka Nikaya* and then the mustard seed parable. Clooney then turns to the gods and goddesses of India with studies of Krishna, Shiva, and the Goddess in chapters four to six. He again guides his reader through portions of relevant texts such as the *Baghavad Gita*, *Shatakopan Tiruvayamoli*, and *Shankaracarya's Saundarya Lahari* among others. The last chapter of his book is a study of Gandhi and his paradigmatic experiment with truth.

In this way Clooney exposes his tyro reader to a wide variety of Hindu texts and themes. By working with readers as they read the passages and commenting on them, Clooney teaches and encourages his readers (primarily Christian) to open themselves up to the religious wisdom that can be found in Hinduism. According to Clooney, these interreligious encounters are fruitful for

readers regardless of the religious paths that they choose. His readers are thus encouraged to continue to experiment in this way and to broaden the understanding of their own tradition.

I am certainly not equipped to evaluate Clooney's attempt to make Hindu wisdom available to Christians. I leave such an evaluation to Christians. As a Hindu and Hindu scholar, though, I suspect that non-Indologist Christians will benefit from Clooney's book much in the same way that they have benefited from similar books such as Eck's *Encountering God*. This book is, in some sense, an introductory text for those interested in interreligious dialogue. I have, in fact, recommended the book to several of my Christian students who are confronting Hindu wisdom for the first time in the classes that I teach. I also expect to inform trustees at the Shri Ganesa Temple in Nashville that they would be well advised to keep the book in the temple library and to make it available to those non-Hindus who wish to learn to think about their own traditions by being exposed to Hindu wisdom. I have no doubt that this text will be useful for those interested in matters of interreligious dialogue and understanding. *Hindu Wisdom for all God's Children* – a successful experiment indeed!

Notes

1. Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 9.
2. I am indebted to Paul Griffiths' *Religious Reading* for this language.
3. For further reading on the concept of *Inklusivismus*, see Paul Hacker, "Religiöse Toleranz und Intoleranz in Hinduismus", in: *Kleine Schriften*, ed. L. Schmithausen (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1978).

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