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Book Review: "Finding Jesus in Dharma: Christianity in India"

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controversies have a long history in which both Indians and Europeans have participated vigorously.

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.
Boston College

Finding Jesus in Dharma: Christianity in India. Chaturvedi. Badrinath. ISPCK: Delhi, 2000, xii + 217 pp.

THE HISTORY of the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism is a fascinating yet frustrating project due to the complexity of both religious traditions and their respective histories. Chaturvedi Badrinath, a Hindu philosopher and thinker, offers in this book a penetrating analysis of this encounter, which both broadens and deepens our understandings of both traditions. Since his analysis takes Jesus and Dharma as its operative categories, the book opens by stating, "For me, Jesus Christ is the perfect embodiment of dharma." (p.1). Badrinath offers a way to understand what dharma stands for by looking at its three attributes: prabhava, dharana and a-himsa. Thus dharma is that which is nurturing life, supporting all living beings, and securing freedom from violence. Given such a view of dharma, the author goes on to claim that the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism in India is the interaction between "a deep sense of Hindu reverence for Jesus" and "an equally deep rejection of missionary arrogance." (p.3). The rest of the book is the unfolding or unpacking of this claim.

The author begins with a very brief summary of Christianity. He acknowledges that the abstract view of Christianity he offers is not an invitation to forget neither the manifestation of Christian faith in social practice, nor that the ideas of Christianity are dependent on the relationship between church and state. This means that "Christianity is the history of the Church." (p.7). Then follows an examination of the encounter between the Syrian Orthodox tradition and the Dharmic communities of India, and the meeting of Catholicism and

Hinduism. The author finds that the Syrian Orthodox tradition in India has more successfully accommodated itself into the Dharmic ordering of life in India than any of the other Christian traditions in India. The next three chapters deal specifically with the encounter between Protestant Christianity and the Dharmic communities. They outline two types of Christianity, viz., an abusive Christianity that tragically fails to understand the Hindu mind and life, and a sympathetic Christianity that, in spite of its good intentions, fails to grasp the core of what it means to live in a Dharmic society. Badrinath highlights some of the failures of Christianity in dealing with matters such as caste and image worship. He also exposes both the problems and complexities in attempts at self-governance of the Christian church in India and the processes of indigenisation of the Christian faith within the Indian and Dharmic setting.

While the earlier chapters focussed attention on what Western missionaries in India thought and wrote, the seventh chapter shifts attention to Indian Christian theologians of the 19th and 20th centuries who attempted to interpret Christianity in Hindu terms. The theologians considered in this chapter include Goreh, Chenchiah, M. Thomas, Raimon Panikkar and Paulos Mar Gregorios. From this Badrinath concludes that: "Christianity would mean little to India unless expressed in Dharmic idiom; but that idiom is so alien to the temper of historical Christianity, and so indefinite in itself, that its use is best calculated to neutralise whatever is distinctive in Christianity." (p.110). In the following chapter, the author

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goes on to discuss the promise and problems of dialogue between Hindus and Christians. He highlights the fear of syncretism that pervades the Christian mind and ably shows how the idea of syncretism is totally foreign to the Dharmic mind. Thus dialogue becomes difficult and dangerous given the profound differences between these two understandings of syncretism. Similar is the problem with regard to Christian and Dharmic understandings of pluralism. The book ends with a call to bring together Jesus and Dharma (the meaning of both rests in "faith, trust, caring, love and truth.") and thus "bring together what is falsely separated, making a journey towards both." (p.185).

This book is the work of a creative mind that is able to lay bare some of the complexities of the encounter between Christian faith and Dharma. The major strength of the book lies in its avowed refusal to accept reductionist views of Dharma, Christian faith, Indian Christian

identity, or the meeting of the Hindu and Christian in India and abroad. Badrinath dissuades a Western reader from containing Dharma within the confines of Western definitions of religion, while he will not allow an Indian reader to view Indian Christianity simply as a carbon copy of Western Christianity. There are a few places where one can detect lack of precision (for example using "Mar Thoma" to refer to all Eastern Orthodox Christians in India). Barring that the book is very readable and timely, since Christian and Hindu identities are matters of serious concern and debate. The Index at the end of the book serves both as an index of subjects and authors and also as an annotated Bibliography. This book is a required text for all those who are interested in and committed to Hindu-Christian dialogue and collaboration.

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Living with Hindus, Hindu-Christian Dialogues: My Experiences and Reflections. Vandana Mataji. IJA: Bangalore and ISPCK: Delhi, 1999, xvi + 106 pp.

VANDANA MATAJI (Sister Dhalla, rscj) will already be known to many readers of the *Bulletin*. She has written books on Christian Ashrams and on Japa, edited the monumental *Sabda, Sakti, Sangam*, has given retreats and lectured widely in England, America and Australia on Hindu-Christian dialogue. *Living with Hindus* provides in the first part a fairly detailed narrative of the author's background and dialogue experiences, and in the second part some scholarly reflections on issues connected with Hindu Christian dialogue.

She briefly writes about her Zoroastrian upbringing, her family and the pain it caused her parents when she decided to become a Christian. As a student in Sophia College (Mumbai), under the direction of sisters of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart, she

had come in contact with inspiring teachers. Her conversion to Catholicism stirred up the "Sophia College case" which almost cost the college its accreditation to Mumbai University. Never one to do things half-heartedly, she not only got baptized but joined the order and entered a three-year noviceship in England. Back in India, she started teaching at Sophia College where she also founded a Bharatiya Sanskriti Parishad (Indian Culture Academy) in which students explored Indian literature and music – then a novelty in college under Western religious leadership.

A further turning point in her life became her participation in the 1968 All-India Seminar "The Church in India Today" in Bangalore, at which over 500 delegates reflected on a great many crucial issues then