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Briefly Noted

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presented such alternatives, and points toward the possibility that other religious movements such as the cult of Murukan were “a focus of low-caste restlessness in nineteenth-century South India” (p. 248). Although there seems to be little research on such movements, I would have liked to see some further discussion of the parallels with conversion to Christianity. I am also curious about the suggestion in Kent’s conclusion that it has not only been in the colonial period that “gaps and fissures” (p. 3) have appeared in Indian society which have provided the impetus and opportunity for social and religious self-transformation. What comparisons can be made between the conditions that prevailed in the colonial period and those of the times of the Buddha or the bhakti saints? Or is it the content of the message, rather than the context in which it is encountered, that is most responsible for its appeal?

It is likely that a consideration of such far-ranging questions would have led our author too far afield; the fact that they spring to mind at all is an indication of the quality and value of this book. For while Kent’s graceful prose and balanced presentation please the reader, the account she provides of the actions and experiences of her subjects is provocative. Part of the story is about collaboration, resourcefulness, and self-transformation, but Kent is right to remind us that these religious interactions also involved conflict, rupture, and uneasy compromise. Her focus on women in this arena, and on both Western and Indian women, gives her the opportunity to teach us much that is new about the processes and tensions of conversion and of the colonial encounter. And the sensitivity and imagination she brings to her portrayal of the people enmeshed with one another in this context makes their struggles and achievements poignant and compelling.

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The compilers, writers and editors of this fine three volume encyclopedia have taken on the formidable task of mapping historically, geographically, thematically and biographically the myriad expressions of Asian Christian theology. Of the three volumes, the first will be of greatest usefulness to those interested in the interaction of Hinduism and Christianity, since it covers South Asia and India. The general theme of Volume 2 (2003), by contrast, is Southeast Asia, that of Volume 3 (2004) Northeast Asia.

The project of compilation, which began in 1998, is ambitious; the editors’ expressed intent is to provide the “first wide-ranging attempt to chart the vast materials of Asian Christian theologies,” (p. xlv) to make available the key sources and tools in English for the study of Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Asian theology over the centuries. The focus throughout is on the understanding of Christian faith as expressed in theologies grounded in local contexts that draw on indigenous culture and religion. Accordingly, purely western theologies transplanted in Asia are of lesser interest. Special attention is also given to the voices of women in their “aspirations, faith and struggles against oppression” (p.
xxi), with the recognition of the urgent need “to rethink and review the development of feminist culture and theology, using it strategically and effectively to improve the social, economic, political and cultural status of women.” (p. xxii)

One may use this volume as a tool to research studies on a given country’s theological movements and leaders within a given historical era; or to seek information on general themes such as ethics, theologies of struggle, spirituality, and mission involving several countries at once; or to investigate regional movements in women’s theologies, ecumenism and biblical hermeneutics; or to study selected texts by country, period or movement. Thus, as regards Christian theologizing in India, one finds such topics as Ashram Movement; Christology; Church and Society, Liberation, and Development; Dalit Theology; Ecclesiology; Ecotheology; Ecumenism; Evangelising Mission; Holy Spirit; Incultration; Inter-religious Dialogue; Theological Methodology; Theology of Religions; Tribal Theology; Trinity; Women

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