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The Indianness of Christianity: The Task of Re-Imagination

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An important book was recently published with the title *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding*.[1] This volume is a festschrift honouring the work of Robert Eric Frykenberg who taught South Asian History at the University of Wisconsin, Madison for many years beginning in 1962. Frykenberg served as the external examiner on my PhD dissertation committee with Professor Ron Neufeldt and others in 2004. Like the other contributors to this volume, I benefited tremendously from Dr. Neufeldt being a part of my academic training. It is a privilege to participate in this writing festival partially in honour of this respected scholar and truly admirable person. However, the last time I presented research to Dr. Neufeldt, I was in drastically different, and far more vulnerable, circumstances. I remain hopeful Ron will approve of the few thoughts I have prepared for this festschrift.

This chapter is in response to a question asked in the introductory chapter of the Frykenberg festschrift: "Is Christianity an Indian religion?"[2] This question was also posed by the University of Edinburgh historian Brian Stanley in his substantive review of Bob Frykenberg's sweeping *Christianity in India* for the *Times Literary Supplement*.[3] After asking the question, Stanley makes the provocative comment, "Read this book and you may change your mind."

So I begin by asking that question, Is Christianity an Indian religion? Myriad problems arise with the question because there is no definitive way to determine whether or not a religion

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[1] Richard Fox Young, ed., *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding—Historical, Theological, and Bibliographical—in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
[2] Richard Fox Young, "The Frykenberg *Vamsavali*: A South Asia Historian's Genealogy, Personal and Academic, with a Bibliography of His Works," in *India and the Indianness of Christianity*, p. 12.
[3] Brian Stanley, "Thomas's Tribes," *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5524 (February 13, 2009): p. 24.

"is" a national religion, as for example in the case of India. Most Indians are Hindu, but by no means does this imply that Indian Christians, Sikhs, or Muslims are not somehow equally Indian.

The distinguished Yale historian Lamin Sanneh explored similar themes in his 2003 book *Whose Religion is Christianity?*[4] Is Christianity a British religion, as many colonial subjects seem to have thought during the high tide of British Empire? Is it an American religion? After all, there are more Christians in the USA than in any other nation in the world. Is Christianity an Israeli or Palestinian religion, since that is where it began? Is it a Turkish religion, since that is the country where the term "Christian" originated and was the heart of Christianity for centuries? So where does that leave us with this religion today? Where is Christianity to be really and truly found? By what scale may we determine authentic Christianity?

The answer to the question, "Whose religion is Christianity?," is very complicated. Christianity has shifted throughout the ages, pulsating back and forth in various epochs, geographic regions, and cultures. Today, Christianity is recognized as the largest and most global religion in the world. Around 33 percent of the world's population claims to be Christian. It thrives in places and dies in others. Turkey is a fitting example of how Christianity's epicentre can change throughout time. When Constantine relocated his empire there from Rome in the 300s, Turkey quickly Christianized. However, statistical data today shows that Christianity is essentially gone from Turkey; according to the CIA, 99.8% of that nation is Islamic.[5]

So what has this to do with the Indianness of Christianity? Actually quite a lot. The changing demographics of Christianity are not just about Christianity moving out of one nation and into another. Christianity's overall ethos is changing, and it is linked to the shifting center of gravity of the faith. At this moment, the study of Christianity is an exciting and unpredictable

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[4] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
[5] CIA World Factbook, "Turkey," located at: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html.

field to be working in. Tables are being turned, empires are striking back, stereotypes are being shattered, and no one really knows where all of this is headed. What we do know is that the era of Western hegemony in Christianity is receding.[6]

However, while larger trends in religion are helpful, religion is, at its most basic level, an individual phenomenon. Religion cannot be adequately separated from the experience of the woman or man. Religiosity is interlaced with all kinds of identity issues, which is another angle this chapter attempts to take while considering the Indianness of Christianity.

Christianity is the third largest religion in India after Hinduism (81%) and Islam (13%), ranking just above Sikhism (2%) and Buddhism (.8%).[7] The history of Christianity in India is very complex. Essentially there have been four major waves of Christianity in India: the early era—which may have occurred as early as the first century AD, resulting in what is usually known as the Saint Thomas Christian community. The second era was the Roman Catholic era—which began in 1498 when "three small ships of Vasco da Gama cast anchor off a small village about eight miles north of Calicut on the south-west coast of India."[8] Third was the Protestant era, beginning when two German missionaries, employed by the King of Denmark, arrived to South India in 1706. Some historians are now arguing for a fourth era that is linked with the life of Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), a Brahmin woman who converted to Christianity in the late 1800s and sparked an Indian Pentecostal-like revival in 1905.[9]

It is important to note that none of these Christian movements in India were displaced by the later ones. The various forms of Christianity that went into India or arose within India were

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[6] On overall trends of a shifting Christianity, see Dyron Daughrity, *The Changing World of Christianity: The Global History of a Borderless Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).
[7] These statistics come from the Government of India 2001 Census, located at: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/India_at_glance/religion.aspx.
[8] Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 87. Calicut is today known as Kozhikode, in the state of Kerala.
[9] Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 408.

added to the already existing forms, resulting in an array of Christianities that continue to exist side by side. It is estimated that around two-thirds of India's Christians are Protestant—which includes indigenous and Pentecostal expressions of the faith. Approximately a third of India's Christians are Catholic. And there are small numbers, around five percent of the total Christian population, that are Orthodox, connecting themselves to the Judeo-Syrian tradition supposedly brought by the apostle Thomas in the year 52.[10] Just over 50% of India's Christians are from the Untouchable castes. About 15-20% of Christians are from tribal backgrounds, and about a quarter are from the upper castes.[11]

Whatever date a historian might entertain for the entrance of Christianity into India, the Thomas Christians have an established presence since, at the latest, the mid-300s.[12] Some scholars argue that coin evidence linked to a Parthian-Indian King Gundaphar lends credibility to the fanciful story of Thomas evangelizing India in *The Acts of Thomas*.[13] Other scholars argue this to be unlikely. The possibility is there. Trade between the Middle East and south Asia, as well as an ancient Jewish presence in India, means there certainly could have been Christians in India very early on.

Thus, if we were to answer the question "Is Christianity an Indian Religion?" in the affirmative, we might say, "Well, Christianity is *at least* as Indian as is Islam, predating it by

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[10] These statistics are from the World Christian Database published by Brill. By no means are these statistics consistent across the discipline, however. For example, Rowena Robinson claims nearly half of India's Christians are Roman Catholic, 40% are Protestant, 7% are Orthodox, and 6% are "indigenous sects." See Robinson, *Christians of India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), p. 28.

[11] Robinson, *Christians of India*, p. 29.

[12] Frykenberg writes, "Solid historical evidence of formal church life in India, albeit tenuous, dates from the year AD 345." Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, p. 107.

[13] Frykenberg owns a coin with Gundaphar's name on it, dated AD 30 to 55. The Gundaphar coins are important because this king was unknown until the last two centuries. Historically, the *Acts of Thomas* were considered suspect because of no known historical corroboration of Gundaphar. However, the troves of coin discoveries with Gundaphar's name have put the matter to rest. Gundaphar did exist, forcing scholars to reconsider the basic historical background of the *Acts of Thomas*. See Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, p. 98. Stephen Neill provides a helpful discussion of Charles Masson, "The wizard who performed the remarkable feat of bringing Gondopharnes [Gundaphar] back to life" through his coin discoveries in the 1830s. See Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 27.

centuries." However, one might retort that the ancient Orthodox Thomas Christians are only a tiny minority and thus the vast majority of Christians in India do not share the ancient heritage. The problem with this line of reasoning is that there are today many Christian traditions that connect themselves to the Thomas tradition, but have moved to other denominations for various reasons.[14] For example, when the Portuguese arrived to India, they managed to snatch some flocks from the ancient Orthodox Thomas Christians, but those new Catholics maintained their ancient Syrian liturgy and continued to esteem their Thomasite history and roots. Still other Christians in India have left the Orthodoxy of their youth to join up with Protestant or Independent—often Pentecostal—forms of faith without cutting ties completely with their ancient roots. For instance, V.V. Thomas, a friend of mine who is a church history professor in Pune, is from a Thomasite Orthodox family but he is Pentecostal. While he identifies himself with the larger Thomas Christians community, he is not formally connected to any of the Orthodox families of faith. Here is a Pentecostal Christian with a Thomasite heritage.

These issues of identity are important for Indian Christians because more outspoken voices of the Hindutva conception of Indianness generally have few qualms with the ancient Thomasite Christians of the Syrian Orthodox variety. These ancient communities observe Indian norms of pollution and caste and are classified within the upper echelons of Indian society. They tend not to proselytize and therefore "are neither at the centre of scholarly controversy over the place of Christianity in modern India nor in the primary line of fire of the champions of Hindu consciousness."[15] Judith Brown has written that "The Syrian Christians had an honoured place in their own localities, long accepted and integrated among Hindus and Muslims."[16] We must

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[14] See Michael Bergunder, *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 15.
[15] Brian Stanley, "Thomas's Tribes," p. 24.
[16] Judith Brown, "Who is an Indian? Dilemmas of National Identity at the End of the British Raj in India," in Brian

caution here, however, that Stephen Neill, the eminent historian of Christianity in India, points out that as late as AD 800 the Thomas Christians were "still retaining something of a foreign impress" in India despite the fact their communities had been long-established.[17]

The arrival of Vasco da Gama and his ships to Calicut on May 20, 1498 represents an unmistakeably foreign Christian presence in India, what we could call the second wave of Christianity in India. The Portuguese established their first trading station that very year and profited fabulously in the pepper trade with their base at Calicut.[18] Indians referred to these Portuguese voyagers and traders as *Farangi*—a term rooted in the Muslim word for the "Franks" but widely adopted as the preferred term for Europeans.[19] These Catholics were alarmed by the presence of Moors in the region. It is vital to understand the Portuguese landing on the Malabar Coast (modern-day state of Kerala) with the backdrop of Ferdinand and Isabella's Iberian *reconquista* in mind—a task that had been completed only six years prior, in 1492.

The Catholic attempt to reach Indians for Christ was spearheaded by Francis Xavier, one of the cofounders of the Society of Jesus, known better as the Jesuits. Xavier had remarkable success in missionary work among the seafaring Paravars of coastal south India in the 1540s. In time, however, the Jesuits divided over how best to evangelize India. Robert de Nobili and Goncalo Fernandes, two prominent Jesuits in the early 1600s, struggled mightily with each other over the issue of "going native." In missiological parlance, their debate centered on the issue of accommodation—how far should the missionary go in adapting Christian teachings for the sake

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Stanley, ed., *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 113-114.

[17] Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India, vol. 1*, p. 68.

[18] Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 257.

[19] Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, p. 119. See also Ines G. Zupanov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-century India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 5. Zupanov writes, "*Parangui* is a generic, xenophobic term for a European. In its many regional phonetic, semantic, and spelling variants … it was used throughout Asia and the Middle East from the medieval period (designating Franks, 'European Christians', crusaders, etc.) until today."

of attracting the host culture? The debate "… provoked at least two centuries of disputes between the Jesuits and other missionary orders and church hierarchy … [A]lmost every Jesuit in India chose one or the other side."[20]

There were other sources of turbulence during the early years of Roman Catholic and Indian contact. When the Portuguese first arrived they viewed the Thomas Christian communities, who were of high caste and very well respected in south India, as allies in their quest to establish trading ports and challenge Arab-Islamic dominance in the spice trade. Susan Bayly writes,

> Portugal's aim was to seize control of these great international commercial networks, to expel the hated "Moor", and to channel all sea-going vessels on the Indian Ocean spice trading routes through Portuguese customs posts under what was known as the *cartaz* or pass system. This dream of monopoly and extirpation was never fully realised, but the power of the Calicut Muslims was eventually cut back as the Portuguese built up the chain of settlements and fortified enclaves which came to constitute the *Estado da India*.[21]

For a time, the Portuguese friendship with the ruling Hindu Zamorins and influential Syrian Christians worked marvellously for the *Farangis*. Indeed they temporarily stemmed Arab-Islamic influence radiating southward from the Turkic Delhi Sultanates and after 1526 from the powerful Mughal Empire.[22] The *Padroado Real* (Royal Patronage) went to great lengths to please the well-connected Syrian Christian communities by spending large sums of money expanding and renovating their churches.[23] Eventually, however, it was a relationship doomed to

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[20] Zupanov, *Disputed Mission*, p. 5.
[21] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings*, p. 258.
[22] The Zamorins were based at Calicut and ruled from the twelfth to eighteenth centuries. Stephen Dale writes "No South Asian government prior to the British Raj was capable of eradicating the many autonomous or independent rulers and effectively disarming the Indian countryside. Both Delhi Sultans and their Mughal successors had to make innumerable compromises in order to dominate north India, or at least to control the cities and the major transportation arteries and overawe rulers in the countryside. Predominantly Hindu India was never overrun and overwhelmed by masses of Muslims." See Stephen Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 25.
[23] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings*, p. 259. The Padroado was a form of Portuguese jurisdiction dating to a series of papal bulls in the mid-fifteenth century whereby the king and Papacy ruled concomitantly. The system faded with the decline of Portuguese colonialism but lasted until Portuguese control of Macau ceased in 1999.

failure given the theological climate of the late fifteenth century and the rising ambitions of an expanding Portuguese trading empire with stations in India, Japan, and the African kingdom of the Kongo. In addition, the Mughal Empire was on the ascent in the early 1500s, peaking in 1707 (the death of Aurangzeb) with the entire Indian subcontinent minus the Malabar Coast, Tamil Nadu, and Sri Lanka. In spite of the rise of the Mughals, the Portuguese maintained superiority at sea and managed to protect their trading ports. These European bridgeheads were later inherited by Dutch and British competitors.[24]

The Catholic and Syrian Orthodox falling-out was remarkably similar to Catholic-Orthodox theological schisms throughout church history. While some of the surface issues were priestly marriage, eating beef, drinking alcohol, the Theotokos (Virgin Mary as Mother of God), and the veneration of images, the deeper issue was ecclesiastical authority. The Goa Inquisition, established in 1560, debilitated the leadership of the Syrian church, weakening it to the point of crisis. Eventually the Thomas Christians split over loyalty to Rome, which was becoming increasingly inevitable. Those who resisted "gathered at Matancherry in 1653 and took a solemn oath before a cross never to obey the Paulist Fathers or recognize the authority of the Latin bishops."[25] This incident came to be known as the "Coonan Cross Oath" and has plagued the south Indian Christian context to this day. For this reason it has been said that Syrian Christians are on better terms with Hindus and Muslims than with Catholics and Protestants.[26] This is not altogether surprising. The Orthodox Christians have an ancient presence on the subcontinent; they indigenized the Christian faith and worked hard for well over a thousand years to win the respectability of their compatriots. Yet their flock was relentlessly pilfered for five centuries by

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[24] Stephen Dale, *The Muslim Empires of the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals*, p. 266 (Aurangzeb) and p. 185 (rise of Portuguese in south Indian commerce).
[25] Leonard Fernando and G. Gispert-Sauch, *Christianity In India: Two Thousand Years of Faith* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2004), p. 78.
[26] Charlie Pye-Smith, *Rebels and Outcasts: A Journey Through Christian India* (London: Viking, 1997), p. 155.

other Christians.

The Protestant missionary presence is generally dated to the year 1706 when Bartholomaeus Zigenbalg and Heinrich Pluetschau established a Lutheran congregation of the Pietist variety in Tranquebar, a Danish port located in modern-day Tamil Nadu. These young men, aged 24 and 29, were quickly rejected by Danish East India Company merchants but persevered to eventually gain a foothold. After learning Tamil, they taught a form of bhakti Christianity that resonated with local people. They were Pietist Christians to the core, emphasizing the basic facts of the gospel and how these facts should change the heart of the individual, motivating him or her to lead a life of holiness.[27]

A core value of these Protestant missionaries was literacy. They set up a printing press and quickly began disseminating questionnaires, tracts, pamphlets, and books in the Tamil language. The first responders to the evangelistic efforts were pariah soldiers.[28] Europeans planted the seeds of Protestant Christianity, but Indian converts took it from there. While Zieganbalg's many publications were disseminated far and wide, Indians—not Europeans—were by far the primary agents for Christian conversion in south India.

When British missionaries arrived in the late 1700s, they generally worked to counter this Pietistic, "free-wheeling" zeal in favour of a more sober religion of propriety.[29] Catholics also had misgivings with this loosely organized Pietism, particularly when Catholics became targets for conversion. Catholic defections caused alarm. The pariah evangelists Rajanayakan and

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[27] D. Dennis Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians, 1706-1835* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 1 (for the reference to the age of the missionaries) and pp. 39-40.
[28] Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India*, p. 41.
[29] This tendency is brought into relief by the "Rhenius affair" wherein C.T.E. Rhenius, a Prussian Pietist who happened to be the first CMS (Church Missionary Society) missionary, was the center of a major crisis involving whether an Anglican bishop had to be present for an ordination. Rhenius, being Lutheran, saw little problem in ordaining someone without a bishop when the need was evident. He was promptly dismissed from the CMS for insubordination to Anglican protocol. On the Rhenius affair, see Frykenberg, *Christianity in India*, pp. 249-257 (for "free-wheeling" see p. 249) and Neill, *History of Christianity in India, vol. 2*, pp. 218-222 and pp. 454-455.

Sattianadan were two ex-Catholics who took leading roles in the effort to Protestantize Tranquebar and Tanjore in the 1700s. New problems emerged, however, when it was realized that higher castes were not comfortable receiving the sacraments from outcastes.[30]

In Indian Christian historiography, there is a fourth phase emerging among historians. One of the formative thinkers in this shift has been Michael Bergunder, who focuses on Indian Pentecostal history.[31] Bergunder and others point to the Mukti mission near Pune in Maharashtra as the epicenter of Pentecostal origins in India. The impressive leader of the revival there, Pandita Ramabai, was a Marathi Brahmin convert who, with Western aid, led a vibrant ministry for single women that thrives to this day.[32] The South Indian Revival began right around the same time as the famous Azusa Street Revival of 1906 although independently of it. Ramabai would eventually distance herself from the Pentecostal movement that began to spread all over the globe after 1906, but in reality the revival that took place in her mission had much in common with larger Pentecostal trends at the time. The Pentecostal awakening that originated with a "prayer circle" she started in 1905 has become a major movement in the south Indian Christian scene.[33] While half the Christian population in South India is Catholic, Pentecostals

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[30] For the discussion of Rajanayakan and Sattianadan see Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India*, pp. 42-48.
[31] See Michael Bergunder, *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century*.
[32] Ramabai has received significant scholarly treatment in recent years, notably by Frykenberg and Edith Blumhofer. See Robert Eric Frykenberg, ed., *Pandita Ramabai's America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Frykenberg wrote the 54-page biographical introduction to this work which is a translation of Ramabai's description and analysis of the United States of America. Kshitija Gomes translated the work into English. See also Edith Blumhofer, "Consuming Fire: Pandita Ramabai and the Global Pentecostal Impulse," in *Interpreting Contemporary Christianity: Global Processes and Identities* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, Currents in World Christianity Conference Paper, 3-7 July 2001). See also Edith Blumhofer, "From India's Coral Strand: Pandita Ramabai and U.S. Support for Foreign Missions," in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History*, ed. by Daniel Bays and Grant Wacker (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2003), pp. 152-170. Eliza Kent's otherwise excellent work *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) conspicuously leaves Ramabai's story out.
[33] Ramabai's prayer circle was probably due to Keswick influence that was strong in British realms of influence at the time. See Orr, *Evangelical Awakenings in India* (New Delhi: Masihi Sahitya Sanstha, 1970), p. 62.

account for around 20% of the total Protestant population, and they are growing.[34]

Reflecting back on this lively history, as well as on the current situation, is it possible to assert the Indianness of Christian faith? Several historians are saying yes. Their larger motive seems to be disentangling Indian Christianity from Westernization, arguing that Christianity in India is also an Indian religion, not exclusively a European one. And historians who enter the field today would do well to avoid repeating that interpretive mistake. Most Indian Christians today have no connection to missionaries from the West and little reason to assume their faith is anything but Indian. European missionaries are part of the history, but not nearly as central as previous historiography has suggested. Thus, the process of discovering local voices that were muted in the historical record has become a priority in documenting Indian Christianity. There is a new emphasis on Indian agency in the process of faith transmission.[35] These corrections are part of a wider mood in post-colonial history that tends to favour marginalized voices.[36] And in the case of Indian Christianity the stakes can be high, making the program to re-imagine and to reassert the Indianness of Christianity an urgent matter. It is critical that Indian Christians gain religious legitimacy in a context that can be quite unfavourable and even hostile toward their basic freedoms and human rights. Anti-Christian violence since the late 1990s—in Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Kashmir, Gujarat, and most notably in Orissa—has escalated Hindu-Christian tension.[37] There is a sense of urgency surrounding this discussion. The task of re-imagination—the task

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[34] Bergunder, *The South Indian Pentecostal Movement in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 14-17. For "prayer circle" see p. 23. For Ramabai distancing herself from Pentecostalism, Bergunder (on p. 24) cites J. Edwin Orr as having "shown" this to be the case but he does not provide a precise source for the claim.

[35] One notable example is *Tirunelveli's Evangelical Christians: Two Centuries of Family* Vamsavashi *Traditions* (Bangalore: SAIACS Press, 2003), ed by Robert Frykenberg, Chris Barriger, David Packiamuthu, and Sarojini Packiamuthu. Another example is B. Sobhanan, ed., *A History of the Christian Missions in South India* (Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Historical Society, 1996).

[36] The examples of this are numerous and of course not limited to India. See for example Casely Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanian: A History of the Methodist Church Ghana, 1961-2000* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2011).

[37] See Chad Bauman, "Identity, Conversion and Violence: Dalits, Adivasis and the 2007-2008 Riots in Orissa," chapter 12 in *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, ed. by Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2010), pp. 263-265. In the same volume, see Peggy Froerer, "Christian Piety and the Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in Central India," (chapter 6).

that brought this book into being—should be compulsory.

Christianity in India has indigenized, and the seminary faculties, publications, charities, clergy, and ethos all reflect that fact. This is obvious on numerous levels, from small village ministries to megachurches. The megachurch phenomenon, so common in American Christianity, is also prominent in India. For instance, the Mark Buntain Memorial Assembly of God Church in Kolkata holds services in eight languages: English, Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Nepali, Oriya, Tamil, and Telugu. The Full Gospel Assembly of God Church in Bangalore, founded by Paul Thangiah, a theologically trained Indian, claims seventeen thousand attendees each Sunday and a television viewership of 300 million per week.[38] Another Bangalore megachurch, the Bethel Assembly of God Church, has an impressive media ministry—Twitter and all—that rivals its American counterparts. The pastor, Rev. Varughese, is a former air force scientist and former Mar Thoma Orthodox Christian; however, today he is a highly successful Pentecostal entrepreneur who oversees 70 church-related meetings weekly.[39] One of the more remarkable Indian ministries is Gospel for Asia, led by former St. Thomas Syrian Christian K.P. Yohannan. Raised in India and theologically educated in the United States' Southern Baptist realm of influence, Yohannan has authored over 150 books and launched ministries in several Asian nations. His ministry claims 21,000 churches or missions, 13,500 missionaries, and 133 Bible Schools with 7000 students enrolled.[40] Founded in 1979, his annual operating budget is today around sixty million U.S. dollars.[41]

Thus, we might ask, why do many—alas, even in India—continue to associate Christianity in India with Western nations? Oxford historian Judith Brown has addressed this

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[38] For the two previous churches, see Imchen K. Sungjemmeren, "Indian Megachurches' Centripetal Mission," *Lausanne World Pulse* (January/February 2011 issue). Article located at: http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/perspectives.php/1360/01-2011.
[39] See the church history section of their website: http://www.bethelagindia.org/brief_history.php.
[40] See a balanced overview of Gospel for Asia at: http://www.ministrywatch.com/profile/gospel-for-asia.aspx.
[41] See their financial statement located at: http://www.ecfa.org/MemberProfile.aspx?ID=5294.

topic from a slightly different angle.[42] In her article "Who is an Indian?" she discusses those voices that identify Indianness with Hinduism. Critical to Brown's thinking are dilemmas that have emerged in the lives of non-Hindu Indians, notably in the twentieth century when literacy rates began to soar. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, tribal groups, and mixed race peoples often "faced questions about whether they were 'really Indian' or not, and what their position would be in a nation predicated on Brahmanical ideals, where the successful nationalist party, the Indian National Congress, was largely composed of higher caste Hindus."[43] In Brown's view, similar dilemmas were faced by low-caste Hindus who shared the same questions but formulated different responses. Untouchable Hindus often re-imagined the history of Hinduism, claiming the caste system was a superimposition by Aryan invaders. Some Hindus reinterpreted their texts in order to "redefine and reinvent themselves," which occasionally resulted in Untouchables claiming an ancient Kshatriya ancestry.[44] Still others created a new identity for themselves by converting to Christianity, or, under the influence of B.R. Ambedkar, to Buddhism.

Nehru and Gandhi were of course two prominent voices in discussions of India and Indianness, but they came to differing conclusions. While Nehru had in mind a "radical secular state … regardless of religious or social status," Gandhi saw India's pluralistically religious heritage as an asset in defining Indianness, but, according to Brown, "deep down it was a Hindu spirituality and culture" that Gandhi had in mind.[45] It was in this context that V. D. Savarkar and M. S. Golwalkar emerged as chief proponents of Hindutva, arguing that "those who did not comply with Hindu culture and standards should not even have citizens' rights in an independent

[42] Brown addresses this and related issues in "Who Is an Indian? Dilemmas of National Identity at the End of the British Raj in India," in Brian Stanley, ed., *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire*, and in "Indian Christians and Nehru's Nation-State," in Richard Fox Young, ed., *India and the Indianness of Christianity*.
[43] Judith Brown, "Who Is an Indian?," p. 112.
[44] Judith Brown, "Who Is an Indian?," p. 117.
[45] Judith Brown, "Who Is an Indian?," pp. 123-124.

India."[46] Both Nehru and Gandhi were loath to harassment of Christians but could do little to curb the equation of Indianness with Hinduism. Independence and partition may have had the effect of making Christians even more suspect. The new nation-state "posed critical problems for Indian Christians, problems that half a century on still remain."[47]

In her important work *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings*, Susan Bayly argues that while Thomas (or Syrian) Christians in India enjoy a prestigiously high status, those who converted to Christianity through the years due to European contact "have been thought of as being less authentically 'Indian' than other south Indians."[48] She places blame for this misconception on the fact that the preponderance of historical material for understanding Indian Christianity derives from Europeans, thus there is a tendency to conflate the faith with the foreigner, the *Farangi*. Bayly argues that the same problems vex Muslim communities.

Rowena Robinson cites the so-called "Hindu Code Bill" of 1955-56 as severely damaging the perceived Indianness of all non-Hindus in India because it divided the nation religiously.[49] She takes particular issue with the understanding of the term "Hindu" in the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act:

1) A person who is Hindu by religion in any of its forms or developments including Virashaiva, Lingayat or a follower of Brahman, Prarthana or Arya Samaj.
2) Any person who is Buddhist, Jain or Sikh by religion.
3) Any other person domiciled in territories to which this Act extends who is not a Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Jew by religion unless it is proved that any such person would not have been governed by Hindu law or custom.

In other words, according to this definition, "All Indians are 'Hindu' *other than those belonging*

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[46] Judith Brown, "Who Is an Indian?," p. 124. Savarkar published *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* in 1923 and Golwalkar published *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* in 1939.
[47] Judith Brown, "Who Is an Indian?," p. 131. Brown writes, "Christians and Muslims, however long their families had lived in the subcontinent, were not secure in their Indianness in the eyes of their neighbours, and in their own sense of identity."
[48] Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings*, p. 243.
[49] She refers to the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Succession Act, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act. See Robinson, *Christians of India*, pp. 18-19.

to religions originating outside India."[50] In her view, the implications on Indian identity for non-Hindus are profoundly damaging, and they cause unnecessary divisions among members of different religions. She argues that Christians and other religious minorities get slighted in almost every sphere of civil law and their rights become restricted in areas such as marriage, divorce, and the freedom of religion. Robinson declares the laws "extremely dubious" because they seem to be "exclusively directed to conversion from one of the indigenous religions to 'alien' religions like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or Zoroastrianism."[51] Robinson argues that Christians in India have historically struggled with acceptance from Christians outside of India (illustrated most formidably in the early Portuguese years) because of some of their practices being so clearly Indian, notably in their caste distinctions. What arises is a situation of: damned if they do, damned if they don't. Indian Christians are denigrated by Indian law for being somehow alien, yet critiqued by Christians outside India for being "somehow not quite authentic."[52]

Many of these tensions continue today, most conspicuously issues surrounding religious conversion. In a case study of religious conversions in court cases in the states of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Arunachal Pradesh, Ronald Neufeldt observes "conversion has been and continues to be a thorny issue for governments and legislators in India."[53] He concludes that the original framers of the Indian Constitution did not include clauses dealing specifically with conversions that may include coercion, improper inducement, fraud, or the case of "undue influence" over minors because, they reasoned, existing laws were adequate. There was considerable debate, however, about whether these clauses should be included, and "The

[50] Robinson, *Christians of India*, p. 19. Italics are hers.
[51] Robinson, *Christians of India*, p. 19.
[52] Robinson, *Christians of India*, p. 22.
[53] See p. 382 in Ronald Neufeldt, "To Convert or Not to Convert: Legal and Political Dimensions of Conversion in Independent India," in *Religion and Law in Independent India, Second Edition* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), ed. by Robert Baird.

dropped clauses do not fade from memory."[54] However, independent India *has* seen such clauses introduced on the state level, leading Neufeldt to remark, "Apparently, what is good for the States is not good for the whole of the country."[55] Neufeldt lists several misgivings with the outcomes of these laws, stemming largely from the confusion over the purpose of propagating one's faith. Some believe the intent of propagation is to edify while others believe the purpose is to lure someone to change faiths. Several problems arise here such as whether a person has the right to convert to another faith. The state courts have argued that it depends on the motives of the one propagating. And this is where problems proliferate. It is not at all uncommon in India for Hindu missionaries to propagate among non-Hindus, appealing to an indigenous sensibility or a nationalistic fervour that might attract a member of a minority, non-indigenous religion. Thus, the laws get interpreted in different directions depending upon several factors: the religion of the missionary under consideration, the socio-political context, or the governing body executing the decision. In this context there runs the risk of minority religions getting short-changed. In his conclusion, Neufeldt reasons:

> The majority commonly enjoys rights not accorded to the minorities … there appear to be no limitations placed on reconversion to Hinduism or on Hindu missionary activity. … Inducement may be available to reconversion to Hinduism, but not to conversion from Hinduism.[56]

At times the implications can be obvious: "Non-indigenous faiths are regarded as alien and therefore as endangering national interests. … Indigenous faith and nationalism are in some respects then to be seen as synonymous."[57]

Nationalism and Hinduism have been linked for generations in India, but became more fervent in the years leading up to Indian independence, notably in the rhetoric of Hindutva—a

[54] Neufeldt, "To Convert or Not to Convert," p. 389.
[55] Neufeldt, "To Convert or Not to Convert," p. 398.
[56] Neufeldt, "To Convert or Not to Convert," p. 399.
[57] Neufeldt, "To Convert or Not to Convert," p. 391.

cultural identity and political posture in India that is often linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Hindutva is nostalgic; it unrealistically pines for an unfettered, unpolluted India, shorn of its foreigners who have invaded through the years. It longs for a Hindustan where religious minorities are less than equals. In the pre-Independent era, it was the antithesis to Gandhi's multiethnic vision "that would recognize the multiple diversities and identities, and in which these diversities would somehow be united in a larger cause."[58] In Hindutva conceptions of India, however, there is no room for dual loyalties. If one is loyal to India, one must be loyal to Hinduism. Savarkar's theories might be dismissed as idiosyncratic or innocuous were it not for their popularity in India; the BJP party is India's second largest political party and was in power from 1998 to 2004. Ronald Neufeldt critiques the Hindutva conception of India as something to be taken much more seriously than conservative rancour: "It is a kind of language that is used, and has been used, to support violence of one religious group against another, of one cultural group against another."[59] It has been linked to violence against Christians in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa. It has also fuelled fires of violence between Hindus and Muslims.

When asking "Is Christianity an Indian religion?," we must realize the complicated, layered history involved. We must understand the peripheral role that non-Indians really have in offering up answers. John Carman asks, "What can scholars outside of India contribute to Christian interpretations of Hindu traditions?"[60] I think Carman's question can apply to Christianity as well, since Christianity is an Indian—and perhaps Hindu—religion on some level, depending on how one defines the word Hindu. Carman argues that "outside scholars can bring a useful perspective" but ultimately Indians have the greater right to speak to these issues

[58] See p. 170 in Ronald Neufeldt, "Hindutva and the Rhetoric of Violence: Interpreting the Past, Designing the Future," in *The Twenty-first Century Confronts Its Gods: Globalization, Technology, and War* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), ed. by David Hawkin.
[59] Neufeldt, "Hindutva and the Rhetoric of Violence," p. 170.
[60] John Carman, "Christian Interpretation of "Hinduism": Between Understanding and Theological Judgment," in *India and the Indianness of Christianity*, pp. 235-237.

because there is so much more at stake for them. This applies equally to Christians and Hindus.

Indeed there is much at stake. In September 2010, Terry Jones, a self-proclaimed pastor of a few dozen souls in Gainesville, Florida, announced he would burn a Quran in his small, bizarre church.[61] The outrage in India was intense, although few in the Western media realized the incident's seriousness on the other side of the globe. In Pakistan, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine, Indonesia, and India there were riots and protests. Many people were killed.[62] How could Christians in the Kashmir get linked to this bizarre preacher in Florida? The answer is that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of Christianity in India—that it is Western, colonial, and, ultimately, a foreigner's religion. As this strange episode reveals, associating Christianity with the West is gravely problematic on a number of levels. More importantly, it serves as a caution to Westerners who have little knowledge of the sensitivity of religious conviction in the world, and no connection to the repercussions such ignorance might instigate.

Eliza Kent is one who understands why Indian Christians must take the central role—and Westerners must take a peripheral role—in interpreting Christianity in India. In her well researched book *Converting Women*, she lays out a nuanced and convincing argument that during colonial India, conversion to Christianity meant something very different to Indians than it did to Westerners. Indians tended not to share the intensely personal, deeply experiential conversion common in evangelical Christianity. Rather, Kent emphasizes the social critique that

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[61] See Nirmala Carvalho, "Christian church and school set on fire in Punjab because of the 'Burn-the-Qur'an' proposal," *AsiaNews.it*, September 13, 2010, located at: http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christian-church-and-school-set-on-fire-in-Punjab-because-of-the-%E2%80%98Burn-the-Qur%E2%80%98an%E2%80%99-proposal-19445.html. See also "Quran-Burn Reports Spark Kashmir Clashes, 15 Die," *CBS News World*, September 13, 2010, located at: http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/09/13/world/main6861261.shtml. See also: "15 killed in disputed Kashmir in deadly protests," *MSNBC*, September 13, 2010, located at: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39147447/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/.

[62] See "Quran burning threat fuels protests," *AlJazeera*, September 10, 2010, located at: http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2010/09/2010910144912849393.html. See alsoNick Schifrin, "U.N. Staffers Killed in Afghanistan Over Terry Jones Koran Burning, Police Say," *ABC World News*, April 1, 2011, located at: http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/staffers-killed-terry-jones-stunt/story?id=13275234.

conversion to Christianity implied. She describes this phenomenon as the "critique of prevailing local hegemonies," accompanied by "the tendency to indigenize Christianity."[63] Indians often converted to Christianity in order to subvert and openly critique their own Hindu cultural context. Kent challenges those critiques which assert that Indians only converted to Christianity to receive a better living and increase their social status. Yes, that happened, but there were often much larger motives at play. For example, through conversion, low caste women could demonstrate their dissatisfaction with their own society's "patriarchal or hierarchal tendencies."[64] Whether or not conversion to Christianity actually made a positive difference in the lives of these Christians is debatable. For by fleeing one set of problems, a convert might find herself saddled with new problems, such as not being recognized as legitimately Indian. Each person would thus be forced to somehow gauge the cost-benefit. Would conversion to Christianity equate to less patriarchy? If so, then can it be assumed that less patriarchy would translate to a better life?

Studies of conversion to Christianity in India can make for riveting reading, but can also provide justifications for why Christianity is often understood with a measure of suspicion. Jesse Palsetia has documented two high profile cases of young Indians who converted to Christianity in Bombay in the 1830s and 1840s.[65] His research of a Parsi teenager and a later case involving two Hindu brothers is extremely helpful in understanding how Indians responded to Christianity and colonialism, particularly in Bombay. First, he discusses Dhanjibhai Nauroji, a sixteen-year-old Parsi who was converted by a zealously evangelical Scottish missionary named Dr. John Wilson in 1839. Dhanjibhai's father had died, placing a heavy burden on his mother to take care of him in addition to four sisters. Dhanjibhai was placed in the care of Wilson who, only two

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[63] Eliza Kent, *Converting Women*, p. 240.
[64] Eliza Kent, *Converting Women*, p. 239.
[65] Jesse Palsetia, "Parsi and Hindu Traditional and Nontraditional Responses to Christian Conversion in Bombay," 1839-45, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74:3 (September 2006).

weeks later, converted the teenager to Christianity. Another Parsi friend received Christian baptism the following day. This attracted the Parsi community's attention to the point that they took legal action against Wilson. They claimed Dhanjibhai's conversion had been coerced and was improper. The influential Parsi Panchayat—the internal government of Parsis in Bombay recognized by the British since 1787—took up the case in the Supreme Court of Bombay. The Parsis lost the case, mainly because Dhanjibhai was sixteen years old and, it was viewed, able to discern which religion he wanted to follow. The Parsi community ostracized the teenager and threatened violence against Dr. Wilson. Eventually they began bribing Dhanjibhai to come back to the community. They did not succeed. They did, however, argue forcefully that they had placed their children in the care of British educators with the understanding that their children would not be evangelized or pressured to become Christian. Thus, they felt betrayed by Dr. Wilson's act and by the British government's decision. This case was the first of its kind to come before a court in western India.[66] And it set a standard for many more court cases thereafter. The entire Indian community in Bombay responded by joining together for a "three-pronged" response: political agitation, interreligious (non-Christian) cooperation, and educational reform.[67] Leading Parsis, Hindus, and Muslims together drafted the "Anti-Conversion Memorial" to ban Christian missionary activity in all of India and fix the age of accountability at twenty-one so that teenagers could no longer decide their own religious affiliation. The impact was immediate and Indian pupils in Christian-affiliated schools declined dramatically.[68]

The second case involved two Hindu brothers, sixteen-year-old Narayan Sheshadri Parlikar and his ten-year-old brother Shripat Parlikar. They were from the Desastha Brahmin

[66] Palsetia, p. 627.
[67] Palsetia, p. 628.
[68] Palsetia writes that the General Assembly Institution's Indian enrollment dropped from 500 to between 60 and 70.

caste. The two brothers lived with Scottish missionary Robert Nesbit, a good friend to Dr. John Wilson. The older brother became baptized a Christian in 1843, leading to distress among the Hindu community in Bombay. Prominent Hindu leaders went to the Supreme Court of Bombay to get the younger boy, Shripat, returned to his father's custody. In this case the Supreme Court ruled against the missionaries, arguing that the ten-year-old was simply too young to make decisions for himself. Prominent Hindu leaders reacted strongly to the entire situation, declaring "All Hindus were forbidden to send their children to mission schools."[69] Shripat's reinstatement into the Hindu community was fraught with difficulties due to issues regarding pollution. Eighty one pandits in Pune concluded that a penalty of 18 years of penance would be handed to Shripat. He would undergo comprehensive purification rituals involving sacred cow products milk, curd, ghee, urine, and dung. He was to receive the sacred thread ceremony (*upanayana*), take a pilgrimage to Benares, and endure "several years of enforced isolation from the Brahmins."[70] Reactions, however, were mixed as many Hindus thought the boy should be outcasted, that he had been compromised beyond repair. Among those who thought he should be readmitted there was a broad range of perspectives. Some thought he should have been punished a lot harder than he was. The fact of the matter was that he was readmitted, albeit after a very heated and public discussion in the Hindu community.

Palsetia's article is seminal in that it points to larger developments that arose from these two cases. First, he argues that what actually resulted from these two scandals was a modernization of Indian law. Both Parsi and Hindu communities were forced to standardize their responses to a colonial government. While they both continued to oppose Christian conversion, they were compelled to learn how to present their arguments within the British court

[69] Palsetia, p. 631.
[70] Palsetia, p. 635. It should be pointed out that Shripat married a Brahmin girl when he grew up, indicating a measure of acceptance and respectability.

system. Palsetia writes,

> The Parsi and Brahmin conversion cases contributed to a process of self-inquiry and introspection taking place among Indians in the nineteenth century. Indians' use of traditional norms and the mechanisms of the colonial environment in defense of their interests were indicative of Indians' vigorous and creative engagement of western ideologies.[71]

We could add that by self-reflecting and adapting, Parsis and Hindus took a great leap forward in their quest for legitimacy and autonomy that would end in independence a century later. The British courts had the effect of galvanizing an Indian population, equipping them for larger battles down the road.

Parsis and Hindus in 1840s India were thrust into a situation where they had to craft arguments and defenses for their way of life. They had to justify their beliefs in a system that operated on assumptions very different from their own, particularly on issues related to identity. Whereas Western thinking was based on the individual and his or her rights, among Indians the "foundational assumption was the concern for the community."[72] The Indian voices involved in these cases were pressed to rethink their convictions in a way that preserved the integrity of the past without failing to recognize the reality of living under foreign rule, and adjusting creatively to that reality.

It is here I think parallels can be made between the Hindus and Parsis of the 1840s and Indian Christians of today. Both represent the weaker partner in a power-relationship. Christians in India today are a very small minority and must remain flexible, continuously adapting to a changing context. They are part of the system—the nation of India—yet they are outsiders in ways. Christians in India are mainly Untouchables and Adivasis. They often describe themselves as Dalits, or, crushed people. This is not altogether different from Hindus,

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[71] Palsetia, p. 638.
[72] Palsetia, p. 627.

Muslims, Sikhs and Parsis living under the powerful Raj—part of the system, yet somehow not an equal stakeholder.

So we return to the fundamental question of this chapter: Is Christianity an Indian religion? It is important for Indian Christians to decide this, since they have much more at stake than those outside of India. Indians who have converted to Christianity through the years have done so at a great personal price. John Carman writes,

> Even today, the decision to be an active member of a small Christian minority can prove costly. It is this potentially risky involvement with the Christian community that gives Indian Christians a greater right to speak than less involved outsiders. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for keeping Christian theological interpretations international. It is the genius of Christianity to be local and to express its universal character in terms intelligible to every "family, tribe, and nation."[73]

Thus, while many Christians in India will identify with the voice of the Dalit, others may, and do, choose to identify with a high caste, or with Indian nationalism. It was a similar situation with Hindus and Parsis in the 1840s. Many chose to react against Britain, while some, especially Parsis, saw the benefit of nurturing good relations with Britain for the sake of their own communities. However, responses were always mixed. A similar phenomenon is happening today within Indian Christianity. All voices at the table will collectively shape the larger Indian consciousness of Christianity. And this emphasizes the point that while Western voices need to be heard, since they are outsiders, they are unable to identify with fundamental questions regarding Indian identity. Indian Christians must *re-imagine* fresh responses that preserve the integrity of Christian faith, yet also redefine Christian faith over against the backdrop of a colonial past. Outsiders have less need for solidarity within the complex tapestry of India and therefore have less direct accountability for the consequences of their actions.

The new historiography of Indian Christianity is having an impact on the entire

[73] Carman, p. 237.

discipline. The Indianness of Christianity is both a reality and a pressing need. The myth of Christianity being exclusively a foreigner's religion has been dispelled. Christianity has long indigenized in India. To understand it as a European faith is to prolong a distorted stereotype that may foster hazardous implications and stifle interreligious harmony in the region. It is also unfair to Indian theologians and historians who will always remain the real experts on the topic. It will be their task to lead the re-imagination of Christianity in India, from an Indian perspective.

In conclusion, I will remark on the task of the non-Indian, Christian perspective. If Christianity is an Indian religion, and if it is the duty of Indian Christians to take the lead in re-imagining Christianity in India, then what role is left to play by a Westerner like myself? Harold Coward published a fascinating article in 1994 that I believe sheds tremendous light on what kinds of responses are appropriate for a Western Christian. In "Hindu-Christian Dialogue as 'Mutual Conversation'," he argues against a "mutual evangelization" model of interreligious dialogue in favour of what he believes to be something that is "more open in nature."[74] Coward's paper is a fitting conclusion to this chapter because it offers a way forward for the non-Indian who happens to research Indian religion.

Coward's paper begins by emphasizing that interreligious dialogue must always be a conversation rather than a monologue. As an example, he uses the cooperative Bible translation efforts of William Carey (1761-1834) and Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, arguing they were faithful to a "conversation" model in their work together. Coward also discusses the shining example of Madras Christian College (MCC), founded in 1837 by the Church of Scotland. The college produced exemplary graduates such as Oxford University professor and president of India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), and

[74] Harold Coward, "Hindu-Christian Dialogue as 'Mutual Conversation'," in *Studia Missionalia* 43 (1994), pp. 177-192. For the quotation see p. 178. Coward draws deeply from the work of Francis Clooney in his paper.

helped spawn the "Hindu Renaissance" in South India.[75] This Coward refers to as a "golden era" preceding the age of the Orientalists who "established a program of one-sided acculturation which insisted that Indians completely assimilate themselves to British culture."[76] Coward believes the success of Madras Christian College had everything to do with the mutual conversation approach exemplified by the Scottish missionary teachers, most notably A. G. Hogg (1875-1954) who was at MCC from 1903 to 1938, serving as principal from 1928 until retirement to parish ministry in Scotland.[77] Hogg had a deep reverence for Hinduism and made a profound impact on his students, most notably Radhakrishnan. Hogg and Radhakrishnan's dialogical relationship enriched both of them, and Radhakrishnan instilled this same method into his own students, especially T.R.V. Murti. Radhakrishnan appointed Murti to take over the Spaulding Professorship of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford when he vacated in order to serve as President of India from 1962 to 1967.[78] Later, Murti became Coward's PhD supervisor and taught him this method through lengthy, challenging, and ultimately transforming conversations that lasted to the end of Murti's life.[79] Thus, in Harold Coward, one can still find the "mutual conversation" approach of A.G. Hogg in the unbroken thread running through Radhakrishnan and Murti.

When considering the Indianness of Christianity—whether Christianity can be considered Indian or not—I would like to emphasize two *modi operandi*: 1) Indian Christians must take the lead in the conversation—and increasingly they are; and 2) when the Westerner enters the conversation, he or she must function from a conversational approach. This is critical to the task

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[75] Coward, p. 181.
[76] Coward, p. 180.
[77] See Eric J. Sharpe, "Hogg, Alfred George," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. by Gerald Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).
[78] Coward, p. 189. See also Michael Hawley, "Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975)," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, located at: http://www.iep.utm.edu/radhakri/.
[79] Coward, p. 189.

of dealing with such a loaded subject fraught with a turbulent history. Christianity often conjures up thoughts in the Indian mind that are not nearly as pronounced in the Western mind: colonization, subjugation, imperialism, foreignness, intolerance, or elitism. Indian Christians however must teach Western Christians how to handle these matters sensitively, in a context of mutual conversation. There is no question that as Christianity has interacted with Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and other religions in India, it has been changed. Thus, the Christianities found in India can appear quite foreign to the Westerner. Christians in India must take the lead here, as on a trek, leading and pointing the way, shining a light when necessary. The Indianness of Christianity is a reality for many Indians. Some Indians, however, feel that they are members of a foreign religion. This, however, is unnecessary. Westerners and Indians alike must learn to rethink their own conceptions of Christianity in the light of millennia of south Asian thinking. It promises to be a project of profound re-imagination.

Like William Carey, Ram Mohun Roy, Alfred Hogg, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, professors Ronald Neufeldt and Harold Coward are "paradigm examples" of Hindu-Christian dialogue.[80] Both of these men represent an admirable posture towards re-imagining Indian religion. However, my suggestion is that scholars incorporate the mutual conversation method they admirably manifested throughout their careers into the study and practice of Christianity in India. In other words, the method which they showed *their* students—the contributors to this festschrift—serves as a commendable example for Western Christian/Indian Christian dialogue. It is only through openness and receptivity that Christianity can ever become Indian. And intuition tells me that when Christianity enters the realm of mutuality and openness, it will not only improve the faith, it will bring out the best in a faith that was hardwired for adaptation.

[80] Coward, p. 192.

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