

2001

Book Review: "Living with Hindus, Hindu-Christian Dialogues: My Experiences and Reflections"

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Recommended Citation

Klostermaier, Klaus K. (2001) "Book Review: "Living with Hindus, Hindu-Christian Dialogues: My Experiences and Reflections","
Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies: Vol. 14, Article 20.
Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1263>

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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

concerning the Catholic Church in India. At this gathering she also met Swami Abhishiktananda and was more and more captivated by his idea of living the life of a Hindu samnyasi. Together with two fellow-sisters she revived the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune. Founded in 1927 by a group of Oxford Anglicans under the leadership of (later) Bishop Jack Winslow, it had been vacant for many years. To become better acquainted with life in Hindu Ashrams, she undertook an extensive tour of North-Indian ashrams and felt particularly attracted by the ecumenical, welcoming atmosphere of Sivananda Ashram, under the headship of Swami Cidananda, who became a personal friend and guide.

Vandana Mataji describes with great warmth the six years she spent at Sivananda Ashram and summarizes Swami Cidananda's teaching in the maxime: "Adapt, Adjust, Accommodate. This is the highest sadhana." The next great step was the foundation of an independent Ashram some distance away from Rishikesh – Jivan Dhara Ashram in Jaiharikal. The practical problems of finding a suitable place, dealing with suspicious locals, establishing a routine and – surviving are vividly described. In the process some very fundamental issues are being raised about the meaning of the Christian presence in Hindu India.

It is not the purpose of a book-review to go into every detail – but everyone with a vital interest in the encounter of Christianity with India should carefully reflect on Vandana Mataji's observations, coming as they do from many years of living with

Hindus. This is especially true of the essays in the second part, where she shares many insights on vital issues in Hindu-Christian dialogue (and the absence of it) in India and the West. Not being a salaried theologian of the Catholic Church, but possessing theological learning and vast experience, and informed by a life of meditation, Vandana Mataji boldly suggests new approaches to evangelization, mission, conversion – touchy issues that have agitated lately not only India but also the West. In the final chapter – "The Third Millennium" – Vandana Mataji offers a number of practical suggestions for Hindu-Christian dialogue. If these were taken up, they would go a long way to improve Hindu-Christian relations. Only those who have tried themselves to live as Christians with Hindus will be able to fully appreciate the wisdom of this book, distilled from prayer, meditation, patience, suffering, talking and being talked about. I conclude this review by reproducing the motto found at the beginning of the book, which truly expresses the spirit in which it has been written: "Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy, else we may find ourselves treading on another person's dream. More serious still – we may forget that God was there before our arrival."

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Multiculturalism & Minority Religions in Britain: Krishna Consciousness, Religious Freedom, and the Politics of Location.

Malory Nye. Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001, 331 pp.

IN 1973 GEORGE HARRISON, the former "Beatle" donated a country house in the village of Lechmore Heath, England, to ISKCON (the "Hare Krishnas"). The house was renamed Bhaktivedanta Manor and was

to function as a theological seminar and as a place of worship. This book is a case study of the 15 year legal dispute that arose over the use of the Manor as a place of worship. It highlights the place of this minority Hindu