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certainly elicits further dialogue and productive debate in the public sphere.

George Pati
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Journal of Vaishnava Studies 20.2 (Spring 2012). Steven J. Rosen and Graham M. Schweig, senior editors.

THE *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* has produced a fine volume of interfaith reflection that covers fifteen years of Vaishnava/Christian dialogue, most of which has taken place at an annual conference at Rockwood Manor in Potomac, Maryland. This volume is an edited anthology. Brief reviews of edited anthologies, such as this one, present certain difficulties to the reviewer, since each article cannot be treated equally or even fairly. I will proceed by providing an overview of the anthology, then addressing some (for me) salient articles in the volume. Naturally, the salience of these few articles has to do with my own personal interests. The volume itself is remarkably even.

The anthology is divided into three parts. Introductory articles explain the genesis and nature of the annual Vaishnava/Christian conference in Maryland, as well as the theological and ethical motivations for the dialogue. The second section offers some exemplary presentations from those conferences and is more academic and theological in nature. Finally, the last section presents participants' spiritual experience of the dialogue—how it transformed their understanding of the divine, of the religious other, and themselves. The last section is perhaps the most interesting since such heartfelt, honest, autobiographical reflections rarely seep into our academic thinktanks.

One of the great benefits of such an anthology is the variety of methods used. The

authors variously emphasize scripture, theology, experience, imagery, conversation, and friendship. Most articles present a Vaishnava or Christian perspective, but some are internally comparative. Some are academic and erudite, others deeply personal. The multiple approaches allow the reader to compare and contrast methods. Perhaps more importantly, they allow the reader to discover the importance of a variety of approaches. The collection is eclectic, and its success lies in its eclecticism.

In the Introduction, Steven Rosen talks about the origins of the Vaishnava/Christian dialogue in Maryland and the decision by *JVS* to produce an edited volume celebrating the first fifteen years of the conference. In the Prologue, Francis X. Clooney discusses his own conversion to comparison as a young teacher in Kathmandu, and the transformative effect that comparison has had on his academic and spiritual life. John Borelli confesses the Roman Catholic call to dialogue with the religious other through historical, doctrinal, and documentary (primarily *Nostra Aetate*) arguments.

Anuttama Dasa is the North American Director of Communications for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and the principal initiator of the annual conference, so I would like to consider his entry more lengthily. In his article “Thoughts on the Vaishnava-Christian

Dialogue,” he provides a history of the gatherings. The theme of the first conference was the destiny of the soul, a topic Anuttama Dasa chose himself since he believed his fellow ISKCON members would shine theologically. He was impressed and proud of his colleagues’ presentations, but challenged by the presentation of Larry Shinn, a Methodist minister. Shinn confessed that the Bible didn’t provide much detail about the Kingdom of God (i.e. the destiny of the soul), so he pleaded a humble agnosticism. Instead, said Shinn, he hoped to live in accord with the Kingdom of God in this world, sharing its light with a suffering world. Shinn’s humility and theological minimalism impressed Anuttama Dasa, who saw that spiritual poverty may make more room for God than theological riches. Strikingly, that revelation came from a religious other, emphasizing that our traditions are as impoverished as we are. According to this insight we need each other and our traditions need each other. So, interfaith dialogue is a necessary endeavor for those seeking the depths of the riches.

In the theological section, the editors have juxtaposed articles primarily on the soul/self. They alternate between Christian and Vaishnava perspectives, reproducing for the reader the very experience of dialogue that the conferees experienced. Together, the multiple articles constitute a lengthy dialectic, inviting the reader to consider the soul/self from one perspective, then another, and again. The perspectives inform each other in different ways, in ways controlled neither by the authors nor by the readers. And just as the participants in a conversation walk away with different experiences of that conversation, so readers of these chapters will walk away with different

experiences of the dialogue, hence a different understanding of the soul/self, transformed in different directions. Such is the power of comparison—the stimulation of one perspective added to the stimulation of another perspective does not increase arithmetically; it increases geometrically, perhaps even logarithmically. The more we compare, the more broadly and deeply we can think. The editors of JVS have provided a fine example of this boon.

Although the conference organizers have chosen to focus mainly on textual contemplation, the anthology is not limited to textual theology. Graham Schweig provides a fascinating comparison of two images, St. John of the Cross’s *Crucifixion* and an image of the Rasa Mandala, Krishna’s dance with the cowherdesses, that Schweig himself commissioned. I took a personal interest in this chapter since I have often been perplexed by these two symbols, one depicting a man tortured to death on a cross, the other depicting a flutist dancing with cowherdesses under a full moon. Divine life must exceed this stark contrast, and Schweig expertly elicits the complexities of each tradition, both of which acknowledge the sacred interdependence of joy and suffering.

The final section of the anthology, reflecting on the spiritual experiences of the participants, is quite moving. Participants discuss finding fellowship with practitioners of another religion. One participant is quite surprised to find this fellowship physically healing. A modernist ISKCON member receives assistance from Christians as he struggles to reconcile his religious convictions with Enlightenment rationality. Over the years, the conference has moved from alternating

126 Book Reviews

prayers, to parallel prayers, to praying together, provoking an experience of the spirit that theology has not yet caught up with.

I would like to make a critical observation, as well. Many of the Vaishnava assumptions about Christianity did not resonate with my own progressive Protestantism. For example, I do not believe that Christ's crucifixion is the primary locus of salvation, as some of the Vaishnava contributors seemed to assume. Indeed, I actively resist atonement theories that place salvation in the torturous death of an innocent man. Instead, I and others place the primary locus of salvation in the resurrection, God's resounding defeat of violence, evil, and

death. Also, as a progressive Protestant married to a female pastor, I would like to see the traditions discuss the role of women in leadership, explicating the theological, ethical, cultural, and political nuances that conversation would demand.

The editors of the *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* have produced a fine volume of interfaith dialogue. It is informing and inspiring. I hope to review their next anthology from the conference, although I hope not to wait a full fifteen years for it.

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***Christ and Krishna: Where the Jordan Meets the Ganges.* Steven J. Rosen (Swami Suryadas). New York: Folk Books, 2011, 140 pages.**

MUCH has been written of the Christian theology of the "non-Christian" religions and "Christian" inter-religious dialogue, far less on theologies of religion from said religions and *their* understanding of inter-religious dialogue. This monograph is an exception, providing the reader not an extensive, disinterested examination of two deities in theological juxtaposition (actual discussion of these religious figures is relatively sparse), but most useful in that it reveals how one branch of Vaiṣṇavism currently seeks to understand Jesus and Roman Catholic Christianity within a broader Vaiṣṇava worldview, underpinned by a belief that all the world religions are essentially one to the extent that they reveal *sanātana*, or eternal *dharma* in the Vaiṣṇava mold. The import of a text may not necessarily align with

its stated purpose. Looking at the work at an angle, so to speak, will likely prove more useful than searching for similarities and differences between Christ, Krishna, and their representative traditions in the pages of this monograph.

The text answers the following questions both intentionally and inadvertently: How might Vaiṣṇavas, particularly those of the Gauḍīya tradition committed to explicating its teachings globally, understand Jesus Christ and, by extension, Roman Catholicism? What are some points of convergence between Krishna and Christ, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism and Roman Catholicism? What constitutes some significant differences? How might Christian doctrines be articulated using Hindu categories, and vice versa? How might representative adepts model