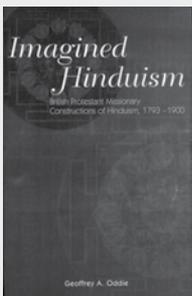


Book Reviews

Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793–1900, by Geoffrey A. Oddie (New Delhi/London: SAGE Publications, 2006, pp. 375)

—reviewed by H. L. Richard



There is no end in sight to academic discussions of the validity and (if valid at all) meaning of “Hinduism.” Christian

academics confused by the seeming cacophony emanating from Indological studies now have at hand a brilliant introduction to the debate based on the history of British Protestant missionary discussions of “Hinduism.”

Geoffrey Oddie (Honorary Research Associate, Department of History, University of Sydney, Australia) does not propose a solution for this conundrum; rather he analyzes one particular aspect of the root of the problem. Precursors to the British Protestant missionary analysts of “Hinduism” are introduced and discussed at some depth; these are European travelers, Roman Catholic missionaries (de Nobili, Dubois, etc.), south Indian Protestant missionaries (Ziegenbalg in particular), British Protestant friends of missions (Charles Grant, Claudius Buchanan and Bishop Heber) and the Orientalists.

By the time William Carey and William Ward in Serampore

began wrestling with “Hindu” realities, a consensus of opinion had developed. Oddie summarizes that “the Orientalists thought of Hinduism as an all-India unified phenomenon, based on Sanskrit and still controlled, policed and enforced by brahmins” (pg. 100). True religion was found in texts (Sanskrit), and “pantheism” was the basic philosophy of this imagined textual Hindu religion.

Oddie seeks information on the training in Britain of 19th century missionaries; most noteworthy is a focus on language, which led to dependence after arrival in India on (usually) Brahman informants (language teachers), who encouraged the self-aggrandizing view of Brahmanical influence on “Hinduism.”

One of Oddie’s central insights is how missionary students of Hinduism were in a unique position, forerunners of later anthropologists, as many of them faced, described and analyzed the practical religion of the people of India. But the textual orientation of scholars impacted them as well, and Oddie sees Carey as one who moved away from the “experiential” to the “textual” approach, clearly a move in the wrong direction. William Ward’s massive and influential volumes were even worse:

Ward picked up and promoted the idea of Hinduism. Indian “paganism,” “the Hindu religion” or “Hindu superstition” was now, quite simply, “Hindooism.” Furthermore, for Ward especially, “Hindooism” was a word for “the Hindu other,” for everything that was evil and different from Christianity. Indeed, in helping to popularize the term he helped develop a very valuable and effective weapon in the arsenal of Christian propaganda. As a result of its increasing usage, English-speaking commentators were tempted more strongly into stereotyping, oversimplification and misunderstanding (pg. 179).

This “dominant paradigm” of Hinduism, developed by the Serampore Trio, was guarded by Alexander Duff and many others. Evidences were at hand that

Ward had really described Bengali realities, and even then was very selective in the midst of massive diversity. (Most striking is Oddie’s clear evidence presented from Ward’s journal that he understood the Khartabhaja anti-brahman, anti-idolatry, theistic *bhakti* (devotional) movement; “as he was so intent on demonizing ‘the other,’ he could hardly afford to dwell for too long on Kartabhaja virtues, on their monotheism, rejection of caste and love of one another!”) So a bias towards the dominant paradigm long triumphed over empirical evidences against this unified Brahmanical system. (Ironically, one of the chief complaints against “Hinduism” was its internal contradictions; but there was never a unified system within which contradictions could exist.)

Reality finally impinged on this imagined Hinduism of the early 19th century. Despite the longevity of the dominant paradigm (particularly in popular motivational missionary literature, which is also analyzed), many missionaries moved away from the idea of a monolithic brahman-dominated “Hinduism.” Oddie gives a lengthy explanation for why the “pantheistic” view of Hinduism held on so long when so much evidence was against it; but that this view still has proponents in some circles today is quite astonishing. One of the reasons

is that missionaries may have placed undue emphasis on pantheism partly because of their ignorance of *bhakti* (loving devotion to a personal god) or failure to see it as a distinctive tradition. There was, indeed, comparatively little discussion of *bhakti* among European scholars for the greater part of the nineteenth century and it was only in the 1880s and 1890s that Ramanuja’s philosophy, “dualism,” and the ideas implicit in *bhakti* movements appear to have received more systematic attention (pg. 270).

As the idea of Hinduism as pantheism came under attack, so did the

concept that it was a monolithic religion. Regional variations were increasingly noted, as were differences between the faith and practices of the high and low castes. Robert Caldwell in the Tamil country was one who saw clearly and trusted what he saw. He is noteworthy for destroying the idea that Sanskrit lay behind all Indian languages (in his *Comparative Grammar* in 1856, although the truth of a Dravidian language family did not originate with him (see pg. 99)); already in 1840 he noted that

It does not throw much light upon the Shanar [Nadar] religion to describe it as a form of Hinduism. It is no doubt equally deserving of the name with most of the religions of India; but as those religions are not only multi-form, but mutually opposed, the use of the common term "Hinduism" is liable to mislead (pg. 285).

Yet, as Oddie shows, by 1874 Caldwell was speaking on "The Relation of Christianity to Hinduism;" the dominant paradigm was too strong, and a new term had taken root.

Underlying perspectives on "Hinduism" was a basic attitude, and whether one was sympathetic or hostile played a large role in one's view of "Hinduism." As knowledge of Hinduism increased and the problems of maintaining a hostile perspective became apparent, sympathetic views of Hinduism came to prominence in the missionary community.

Oddie summarizes three types of approach to Hinduism. The first, dominant through the first half of the nineteenth century, was "radical displacement" (Kenneth Cracknell's term), "the belief that the purpose of mission was to wage war and destroy Hinduism (the citadel of Satan) replacing it with what amounted to a European version of Christianity" (pg. 301). The second approach developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, which was Christianity as the fulfillment of Hinduism. Oddie points

out that before academics in Britain began to talk of fulfillment it had been suggested and applied to various degrees on Indian mission fields, again most notably by Robert Caldwell.

William Miller of Madras Christian College went a step further and propounded the viewpoint that though Christ is one it is not necessary to think that the Christian religion is the only true representation of his life and work and way. The separation of Christ and Christianity was axiomatic even in that time, with many recognizing the need to preach Christ and not Western Christianity or denominationalism. But Miller went well beyond this, as Oddie summarizes:

If individuals felt they should be baptized into the Christian church then baptism should occur, but, generally speaking, there was no need for baptism as people drawn from all nations and communities could continue to develop Christian ideas and ideals while continuing to operate within their existing communities, and without a "shifting of camps." It was, therefore, the task of the church and of the Christian colleges to diffuse Christ's teachings and ideals throughout the country so as to enable Hindus to follow Christ within their own particular tradition. It was this last point that was especially challenging for most missionaries (pg. 315).

Oddie has a closing chapter addressing gender issues in missionary perspectives and practices, commending the careful work of missionary women among Hindu women, and lamenting that this was largely ignored by the leaders of missionary thought.

In his conclusion Oddie notes two areas where the missionary perspective on Hinduism had a great impact. Ironically, the first was on Hindu self-perspectives; the ideal of a unified national religion had an appeal to educated Hindus, and in a context where Hindu ways were often reproached and abused there was a natural defensiveness. Political action against *sati*

and British support for modernist reforms ignited a sense of concern that was easily communicated as the Christian system against the Hindu system. Ironically, the sense of a unified Hinduism took root among Indians in just the same late nineteenth century decades when missionaries were realizing they had it all wrong, there really was no such unified Hinduism.

Missionary thought about Hinduism had a lasting impact in Britain as well, where popularist propaganda for missions carried on the old paradigm long after thinking missionaries had abandoned it. Oddie concludes that this is Orientalism at its worst, "Western misunderstanding and mistreatment of the East" (David Smith's phrase, pg. 348). But missionaries had generally moved beyond this and are best understood as closer to what today are described as anthropologists rather than being textual scholars like the classical Orientalists.

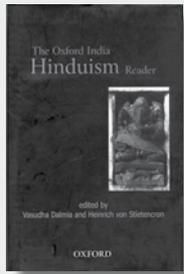
Oddie's survey and analysis of the significant shift in nineteenth century missionary thought is full of insight, and his conclusions need still to impact missionary thinking about "Hinduism" today. This is an essential book for every serious student of the Hindu-Christian encounter and for every library of mission studies.

The Oxford India Reader, Ed. Vasudha Dalmima and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp. 397 + vi)

—reviewed by H. L. Richard

Scholarly wrestling with the concepts of "Hindu" and "Hinduism" continues, and this collection of papers from symposia of the Department of Indology and Comparative Study of Religions at Tübingen University makes a significant contribution to the discussion. There is a particular focus on Hindu

Nationalism, the new syndicated Hinduism of the right wing which seeks to minimize cultural space for the Indian Muslim and Christian.



The papers are in four sections; historical perspectives; the changing face of religious authority; law, history, and the nationalization of Hinduism; and

the category “Hindu” in political discourse. Each paper individually speaks clearly against the Orientalist quest for an essential Hinduism, and the volume as a whole demonstrates beyond dispute that “Hindu” and “Hinduism” must be used to refer to plural and diverse phenomena if the terms are to be used with any reference to reality.

The three papers on the historical section analyze three major *sampradayas* (literally, “traditions;” akin to Christian “denominations”) and how distinctive their traditions are. The first paper by Friedhelm Hardy focuses on a Tamil Vaishnava text, the *Acaryabrdayam*, which is a definition and development of ideas latent in the “Tamil Veda” of Nammalvar. This is a thirteenth century composition in the Srivaishnava *bhakti* tradition, which strikingly sets *bhakti* in opposition to the Sanskrit Vedic heritage, as opposed to the standard Srivaishnava claim of *bhakti* as the fulfillment of Vedic developments. The exclusivism of this Vishnu *bhakti* theology feeds its universalism (“the Tamil Veda is the saving revelation meant for the whole of humanity,” pg. 38), and similar trends in other aspects of south Indian religion are compared and contrasted.

The second historical study by Heinrich von Stietencron provides an

analysis of an 11th century south Indian Saiva text and its variety of exclusive theology. This text places a strong emphasis on conversion to Saivism, and various aspects of that are evaluated and discussed, particularly the European failure to notice this striking exclusivism of various of the Hindu *sampradayas*.

The third historical paper by Vasudha Dalmia similarly focuses on exclusivist Hindu claims, this time in the late 19th century Vaishnavism of the Pustimarg in Varanasi, as articulated by Hariscandra (1850-1885). This is the heart of the colonial era, and this paper is a fascinating portrayal of the ideological battles between missionaries, Orientalists, Hindu reformers, and the defenders of the ancient *sampradayas*, all contesting for a definitive understanding of “Hinduism.”

The following section on changing aspects of religious authority also has three papers on three *sampradayas*. Angelika Malinar looks at the claims that Shankaracharya and his successors in Advaita Vedanta are *jagadgurus*, the authoritative teachers of the world. Robert Zydenbos studies the south Indian Vaishnavism of Madhva (Dvaita Vedanta) and his critique of Advaita. Wilhelm Halbfass writes on “practical Vedanta,” the title of a series of lectures that Swami Vivekananda presented in London in 1896. This develops into a provocative discussion of the relationship of metaphysics to ethics, suggesting that traditionally in Hindu thought ethics stands on its own without need for the type of metaphysical justification that Vivekananda developed in his transformation of traditional Vedanta.

The third section has three papers on various subjects related to “Hindu nationalism.” The first by Dieter Conrad outlines the history of the category of personal law in India and goes into great detail on complicated legal aspects of the related legislation, lamenting the current conundrum and suggesting a new approach to the problem (an approach unlikely to win favor). Hindu history and the development of Hindu nationalism is studied by

Partha Chatterjee. He demonstrates that Hindu nationalism is based on a simplistic and flawed historiography, particularly in relation to the centuries of Islamic rule. The impact of drama, particularly the depictions of gods and heroes, on the development of Hindu nationalism is discussed in Anuradha Kapur’s chapter.

Five papers on the use of “Hindu” in political contexts conclude the book. Richard Burghart considers the case of Nepal, and the shifting meanings of the term Hindu over the centuries that Nepal has claimed to be a Hindu kingdom. Veena Das considers the meaning of Hindu in the discourse of militant Sikhs, who see Hindus as the “other” who highlight their own strengths. Christophe Jaffrelot outlines the history of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, showing the weaknesses in their effort to unite Hindus, and demonstrating both how modern and how mimetic of the Semitic religions their program is. Gyanendra Pandey analyzes the appeal of “Hindu history,” the fallacious concept that there is a distinct history of Hindus that can be separated from general Indian history and particularly from Muslim history. He particularly focuses on Ayodhya and the dubious accounts of the great Ram temple that was destroyed by Muslims. Paola Bacchetta closes the volume with an interesting study of the Rashtra Sevika Samiti, a Hindu Nationalist women’s organization, analyzing differences in perspective from the male-dominated majority aspects of the various Hindu Nationalist organizations.

This is not an introductory volume for understanding Hinduism, but here are well written and well documented studies that contribute to a holistic understanding of the complex of events, ideas and practices that we have come to call Hindu. The book is thus highly recommended for moving the discussion of Hinduism beyond the simplistic summaries still handed down in too many introductory handbooks.

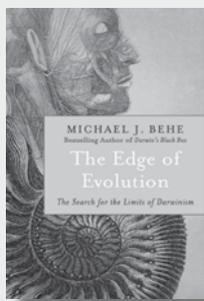
Book Notes

—by Ralph D. Winter

There has been a recent rash of books tearing down religion in general and Christianity in particular (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*; Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*; Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great*, etc.).

Now there are responses. We have, to name only four books, 1) Robert J. Hutchinson's *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Bible*, 2) Dinesh D'Souza's *What's So Great About Christianity*, 3) David Marshall's *The Truth Behind the New Atheism*, and 4) Michael J. Behe's *The Edge of Evolution*.

The first is one of a series that includes others on Islam, science, Darwinism, etc. The second, by a former Whitehouse staffer is substantial and serious. The third is the most readable and creative. The fourth, very impressive, moves miles beyond his groundbreaking book, *Darwin's Black Box* to show the boundaries (edge) of what random evolution can do.

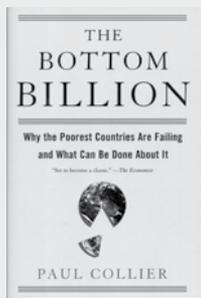


Ironically, although the fourth, *The Edge of Evolution*, has been out for months, and gives major attention to Behe, it was totally ignored by the recent blockbuster

PBS presentation on Intelligent Design (see Editorial Reflections, p. 218-19).

The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Falling and What Can Be Done About It, by Paul Collier (Oxford University Press, 2007) is a milestone book in the sphere of international development. *First Things* journal has commented on it three issues in a row,

and their in-depth review (Dec. 07, pp. 64-66) is an impressive sign of the importance of the book.



Paul Collier lived for 17 years in Malawi, and was for 13 years head of research for the World Bank. He is now is a professor at Oxford University. He claims that 58

countries presently have no hope whatsoever it terms of what we are doing for them or plan to do. They represent one billion people. Four billion are in countries that are making it and attract all of the attention of aid agencies, though they are not significantly helping. One billion at the top have made it.

He bluntly questions traditional aid. The aid “biz” are the agencies themselves whose bureaucracies defend their ways and their own existence “with all the intensity of bureaucracies endangered.” Then, there is the aid “buzz” of “rock stars, celebrities and NGOs,” driven by “slogans, images, and anger,” and who are sometimes “headless hearts.”

His own analysis lists four “traps” any of which make growth impossible for the bottom billion countries: 1) The Conflict Trap (civil war), 2) The Natural Resources Trap, 3) The Trap of Being Landlocked with Bad Neighbors, and 4) The Trap of Bad Governance.

This is all acutely important and helpful. You can almost throw away all the other books on development. I am puzzled by the absence of a “Disease Trap” when 45 million people are dragged out of the work force in Africa every day of the year by only one disease, malaria. **IJFM**

Editorial Reflection “Korean Leaders Discuss Frontier Mission Issues, Challenges” continued from page 219

In addition to the plenary sessions, participants joined one of eight work groups, which met four hours total. The work groups focused both on affinity blocs (Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist & Shinto, Post-Modern & Atheist) and various special issues (Frontier Mission Mobilization/Training, Media/Publications/Internet, Business and Frontier Mission, and Frontier Missiology). *IJFM* managing editor Rory Clark co-facilitated the Media/Publications/Internet work group along with *Korean Journal of Frontier Missions* editor Pastor Myoung Ho Chung and I3M mission leader and author on internet ministry, Rev. Jang-Hyouk Seo.

Many other themes were explored at the forum, including the role of the Korean diaspora around the world, what is being called “Immigrant mission.” John Kim, former editor of the *KJFM*, presented the newly formalized Asian Frontier Mission Initiative. A follow-up meeting on this initiative is planned for February 2008. We hope to have more on this in future issues of *IJFM* as well as more in-depth commentary on the meetings themselves. **IJFM**