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*Diana Câmpan, Gabriela Chiciudean, Rodica Chira, Sonia Elvireanu,
Maria-Ana Tupan*

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Indian Religions in the Roman Catholics' Gaze: 1920-1965

Enrico Beltramini

Notre Dame de Namur University in California, USA

Abstract

How contemporary European Roman Catholicism elaborated a representation of Indian religions as spiritual and mystical, or pre-modern, is the theme of this article. After a brief summary of the Catholic Church's recognition of the Indian religious Other in the context of the Second Vatican Council, and in particular the Church's watershed document *Nostra Aetate*, this article addresses the preparatory work of French Catholic theologians and missionaries in the decades before the council, particularly in relation to theological approaches to Indian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

[**Key Words:** Roman Catholicism, India, Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*]

1. Introduction

In a personal recollection of his participation in a session of the Second Vatican Council (also "Vatican II"), arguably the most significant event in the modern era of the Catholic Church, Francis Cardinal Arinze argued that "Thanks to Vatican II, the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to meeting other believers" (Madges and Daley 2012, 207).¹ He did not elaborate further about the identity of those categorized as "other believers." In this article, the notion of "other believers" is understood as a Catholic

representation according to Vatican II. The Catholic construction of the religious Other, including the Indian religious Other, at the Vatican II was significant for Catholicism's self-definition, at a time when the Church struggled to articulate a post-colonial missionary discourse and enter into dialogue with the modern world (*Nostra Aetate*, Part One and Five)²

2. *Nostra Aetate*

The "Declaration on the Relation of the Roman Catholic Church to Non-Christian Religions" *Nostra Aetate* (Latin: In our Time) was a major contribution of the Second Vatican Council. The original draft document was titled "Decree on the Jews." The decree was devoted to conveying details about the bond between Christians and Jews, while

¹ In this paper, when not alternately noted, translations from French texts are by the author. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (or "Vatican II") was opened under Pope John XXIII in 1962 and closed by Pope Paul VI in 1965. Francis Arinze, a former president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, was born in Nigeria in 1932. He was in Rome as a young priest when Pope John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council. Then he followed the three first sessions of the Council from afar. From September 11 to December 8, 1965, he attended the entire four session of the Council as the youngest bishop in the church and at the Council.

² In this regard, *Nostra Aetate* begins with the common destiny of all humanity and ends with an appeal to universal fraternity.

decrying all displays and acts of anti-Semitism—this only twenty years after the horrors of the Shoah. During preparation, the scope of the document was broadened to address the Catholic Church's relationships with the world's different faiths.³ *Nostra Aetate* mentions only four world religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism, arranged in an order indicating increasing closeness to Christianity. On Hinduism and Buddhism, the declaration states that:

In Hinduism people explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which people can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or with divine help (*Nostra Aetate*, Part Two).⁴

Nostra Aetate is not apologetic about the truth of the Christian faith. While the declaration does not display a sense of superiority or emphasize the limitations of other religious traditions, going so far as to state that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions,” it also does not indicate that non-Christian religions

might be considered as ways of salvation *per se*.

While inclusive of only a limited number of statements on Indian religions, *Nostra Aetate* stands as a document of momentous historical significance: it is the first official recognition in the history of the Catholic Church of the existence and relevance of non-Christian religions as living traditions, on which the declaration shows a convinced option for a paradigm of inclusion.⁵ In 1965, when *Nostra Aetate* was solemnly announced, the Church was probably ready for a substantial, official rethinking of its attitudes about other believers, thanks to the preparatory work of the previous decades in the different fields of historical theology, theology of religions and missiology, including a fundamental encyclical of pope Pius XI in terms of development of autonomous local churches.⁶ A deeper look at *Nostra Aetate* may help identify the issues that the declaration maintains with regard to Indian religions.

⁵ In presenting the text (draft D, not the final version of the declaration) of the document to the Council Fathers, Augustin Cardinal Bea, Pope John XXIII's appointed president of the newly created Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, on September 25, 1964, said, “Unless I am mistaken, this is the first time in the Church's history that a Council has in such a solemn manner enunciated principles with regard to [other religions].” The draft D only mentioned Muslims by name. See: *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancta Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 650.

⁶ An “inclusive” Christian view of non-Christian religions prioritizes the role of Christ in salvation over the role of the Church. However, the doctrine reminds that Jesus Christ is the “sole and universal mediator,” which means first that “what is true and holy” in non-Christian religions is expression of the Holy Spirit, and, secondly that non-Christian religions cannot be considered as ways of salvation *per se*. Source: Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, Notification on the book *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. January 24, 2001. The history of the theological shift in Catholicism from the previous view of non-Christian religions to inclusivism might require a paper on its own. Pius XI's major contribution to this shift was his vision of a missionary Church in a post-colonial world. His encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* (1926) set the tone of missionary activity and missiological research for decades to come.

³ Although the preparatory work began in mid-September 1960, an ample section on non-Christian religions was added to the text only in the draft E version, on November 18, 1964.

⁴ *Nostra Aetate*, Part Two, in a revised translation in inclusive language. Source: Austin Flannery, O.P. (ed.), *Vatican Council II: Constitutions Decrees, Declarations. A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996). For the original text of the declaration, see: *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancta Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II* (Vaticanis: Typis Polyglottis, 1970–77), vol. III, part VIII, 695.

One of the major issues about which the council chose not to pronounce was the question of the extent that non-Christian religions might be considered as ways of salvation *per se*. The declaration mentions Buddhism and Hinduism in terms of

ways of action and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though different from the ones she [the Catholic Church] sets forth, reflect nonetheless a ray of that Truth which enlightens all human beings (*Nostra Aetate*, Part Two).

Moreover, *Nostra Aetate* did not offer an explicit opinion on the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism or Buddhism in particular. The document left many with the impression that the assessment made of the Indian traditions necessarily is of quite a different order from the assessment made of the other traditions such as Islam and especially of Judaism. After all, the declaration mentioned Hinduism and Buddhism as collective denominations for the ancient religious traditions without attempting to capture their nuanced natures. As a matter of fact, the first time the Catholic Church officially recognized plurality of religions – including the Indian traditions -- was in the context of Jewish-Catholic reconciliation, attempts at which were more necessary than ever after Auschwitz, and critical to reaching consensus on a final version of the document.⁷

Finally, the brief text outlined a specific representation of Indian religions from the Catholic lens, a representation in which a selection of the mystical and the ascetical elements was predominant. The spiritual

deposit of these traditions was displayed in the declaration in terms of divine mystery and supreme illumination, Hindu expression through myths and the Buddhists' ultimate liberation. Moreover, these religions are framed as an active search via philosophical inquiry, ascetical practices and trusting "flight towards God." In the broad vision of inclusion, the text came to characterize the Indian religious Other primarily -- but not exclusively -- as a monastic, spiritual tradition, as spiritual values that might be poised for possible assimilation into the one universal tradition of the Catholic Church.

The main contribution of *Nostra Aetate* was to set a tone of openness and respect toward pluralism, though clearly with a reliance on Catholic tradition. The fundamental point of *Nostra Aetate* was that the variety of world religions reflects the common search for answers to life's great questions, a cause that preoccupies all members of the human race. The general attitude of the declaration was one of enthusiasm and optimism – an "excessive optimism," as pointed out decades later by Pope Benedict XVI -- which demonstrated the mid-1960s *Zeitgeist* and revealed the surprise and stupor of a new self-understanding of Catholicism in a diverse world of religions (Benedict XVI, 2012).⁸ Suddenly, Catholics found themselves in dialogue with the other religions of the world, including the Indian traditions, firmly committed to the path of mutual influence and enrichment. Although the declaration never stated that all religions are equally true, gone was the sense of superiority over all non-Christian religions, to the point that a vague but persistent recognition of equality among religions became prevalent in progressive Catholicism.

⁷ For an account of the activity that surrounded the development and approval of the text, see A. Melloni, "Nostra Aetate e la scoperta del sacramento dell'alterità" in N.J. Hoffmann et al. (eds.), *Chiesa ed Ebraismo Oggi: Percorsi Fatti Questioni Aperte* (Roma: Edizione Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2005), 153–181. Also: "I remain convinced that this inclusive concept [of non-Christian religions] saved De Judaeis intact." Source: Thomas Stransky, C.S.P., "The Genesis of Nostra Aetate" in *America. The National Catholic Review*, Oct 24, 2005.

⁸ The remark of Pope Benedict XVI says: "In the process of active reception, a weakness of this otherwise extraordinary text [i.e., the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*] has gradually emerged: it speaks of religion solely in a positive way and it disregards the sick and distorted forms of religion which, from the historical and theological viewpoints, are of far-reaching importance."

More importantly, the proclamation of *Nostra Aetate* designated the moment in which Catholicism came to terms with the theological status of the religious Other. For the first time, the religious Other received a name-- more accurately, a plurality of names – Hinduism, Buddhism and so on – rather than the one-size-fits-all label of “paganism.”⁹ Although initially thought to address the more problematic issues concerning the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism, the declaration became a document on all religions, the template of religious difference. *Nostra Aetate* acquired the status of *locus theologicus* in which the Church became conscious of the richness of religious otherness. This richness will be acknowledged and deepened in the postconciliar period. Indeed, the declaration designated India as ascetic, spiritual and mystical, a pattern of representation for Catholicism that will govern over the Indian religious Other in the decades to come.

3. Missiology

The representation in *Nostra Aetate* of the Indian religious Other as Spiritual India was partly the result of a shift in theology of mission and in the theology of religion in the Catholic Church. Although missions have been a fundamental component of Christianity since the very first generation in Jerusalem, it was only with Gustav Warneck, a German pastor turned academic and professor of mission at Halle (1897-1908), that missions became a scholarly area of research. His seminal work on mission studies (or “mission science” or “missiology”) has been recognized as the first to in turn stimulate the creation of Roman Catholic missiology. In 1919, Benedict XV was the first pope to write a mission

encyclical and to recognize the necessity of proper preparation for work in foreign cultures, as well as the need to train local clergy. The Catholic Church began establishing chairs and colleges focused specifically on missiology.¹⁰ Benedict XV’s successor, Pius XI, promoted a Vatican Missionary Exhibition in Rome, which included a 30,000-book library. On the day of the 1925 inauguration, the pontiff assured that “Just as today in industry, commerce, and the more material occupations in life there is a search for scientific guidelines, so these must not be lacking in the missionary field.”

The pope’s invitation to Catholic missionaries and missiologists was clear: in pursuing their difficult task of evangelization, “holiness, hardship, and sacrifice” were not enough. The evangelization of people could draw fully from the scientific knowledge that human sciences were elaborating those days (Cronistoria dell’Anno Santo 1925 1928, 117-18). In sum, mission of the post-WWI period became a project of modernity, an “interaction between missiology and science, modernity and missionary practice,” as argued by Carine Dujardin (Dujardine 2015, 12).

A second line of reasoning was also at work. The bridge between theology and science was encouraged along with the quest

⁹ For example, in the already quoted missionary encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Pope Pius XI pointed out that “converting the pagans is an obligation of clarity toward God and neighbor.” *Rerum Ecclesiae*, encyclical of Pope Pius XI promulgated on February 8, 1926, Part 5.

¹⁰ For example, a center of mission studies was created in the Collegio Urbano in Rome. See: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (Vaticanis: Typis Polyglottis, 1919), 448: “Itaque, dum alumni sacrorum, quos Dominus advocet, ad apostolicas expeditiones rite instituentur, omnino eos in omnibus disciplinis, tum sacris tum profanis, qua e Missionariis opus sint, erudiri oportebit. Id ipsum fieri, uti par est, in scholis Pontificii Collegii Urbaniani christiano nomini propagando, volumus: in quibus etiam proprium magisterium scientiae rerum qua e ad Missiones pertinent, tradendae posthac esse iubemus.” A chair of missiology was established at the Dutch University of Nijmegen in 1936. Source: *Peter Nissen, “Scientia Missionum Ancilla*. Alphons Mulders and the Beginnings of Mission Studies at Nijmegen University,” in *Carine Dujardin and Claude Prudhomme* (eds.), *Mission & Science: Missiology Revised / Missiologie Revisitee, 1850 - 1940* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 139-49, 141.

for a post-colonial Church organization and in continuity with a great Catholic cultural and religious *mission civilisatrice* to the rest of the world. In his 1926 missionary encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* Pius XI exhorted bishops to promote the formation of local clergy, who were less likely to be expelled from countries nearing their time of independence from colonial powers, while reaffirming the universalistic plan of Christian civilization that lies behind the missions themselves:

In reviewing attentively the history of the Church, one cannot fail to notice how, from the first ages of Christianity, the especial care and solicitude of the Roman Pontiffs have been directed to the end that they, undeterred by difficulties and obstacles, might spread the light of the Gospel and the benefits of Christian culture and civilization to the peoples who "sat in darkness and in the shadow of death" (*Rerum Ecclesia*, Part 1).

An important clarification rests on this point: the Catholic mission worked at two levels, as a project of evangelization *and* civilization of the peoples who "sat in darkness and in the shadow of death" at the closure of political colonialism. In a time of crisis of European colonial powers, the Roman pontiff was offering Catholicism as a universal model of civilization that was rooted in the medieval Christendom.

4. Theology of Religions

Henri de Lubac (1896-1991) was probably the most influential Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. De Lubac considered his work on the history of religions to be strictly connected to missiology, and from 1937 to 1955 he published extensively on both topics.¹¹

¹¹ See: Henri de Lubac, *Le Fondement Théologique des Missions* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1946), Henri de Lubac, *Aspects du Bouddhisme I* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1951), Henri de Lubac, *Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de*

While it is difficult to assess the direct role played by de Lubac at Vatican II, his influence is undisputable. He attended the council sessions as official *peritus* ("expert") after being a member of one of the preparatory commissions that elaborated documents for action at the council.¹² It was more through influence (rather than direct action) that he and other theologians accomplished the task of reducing the bewildering complexity of the Indian religious Other to the manageable level of Spiritual India.¹³

In 1930, as a junior professor of fundamental theology at the Université Catholique de Lyon, de Lubac was asked by

l'Occident (Paris: Aubier, 1952), Henri de Lubac, *Aspects du Bouddhisme II: Amida* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1955).

¹² Also Georges Jouassard, Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the Catholic Faculties in Lyons, was included in the Preparatory Theological Commission, which was composed of a total of sixty people.

¹³ The existing historiographical literature on the preconciliar work that led to the declaration *Nostra Aetate* is not exhaustive enough to identify the handwriter(s) of the text on Hinduism and Buddhism (initially introduced in the draft E on November 18, 1964). Accordingly, the connection between the group of Lyon and the text of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* can be only inferred. Fortunately, traces of this connection are everywhere in evidence. For example, the close relationship between Yves Congar (a French theologian involved in the text of *Nostra Aetate*) and Henri de Lubac (the leading theologian in Lyon) during the Vatican II is reportedly well documented. All said, more historiographical work still need to be done to understand the impact of the influences inside and outside the Secretariat for Christian Union on the different drafts of the declaration, and eventually identify the actual writer(s) who was/were responsible of the text on Hinduism and Buddhism. For the existing historiographical literature, see: J. M. Oesterreicher, *The New Encounter Between Christians and Jews* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1986); E.J. Fisher (ed.), *Visions of the Other: Jewish and Christian Theologians Assess the Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), G. Miccoli, "La Libertà Religiosa e le Relazioni con gli Ebrei" in G. Alberigo et al. (eds.), *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995-2001). For the relationship between Congar and de Lubac at Vatican II, see for example: Henri de Lubac, *Carnets du Concile*, Edited and annotated by Loïc Figueux. 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2007).

his dean to teach history of religions. This request was the beginning of a long academic journey that resulted in publication of three books on Buddhism twenty years later. Since he was not an orientalist by training, de Lubac's research relied exclusively on translations and secondary sources. As he recalled in his memories, de Lubac diligently investigated Buddhism and comparative mysticism, "without preparation, without books, without knowledge of any language, European or Asiatic." He also began to study Henri Bergson and his theory of "two sources" (Christianity and the cults), Alfred Loisy (an excommunicated priest who was later appointed chair of history of religions in the Collège of France) and his highly scientific and experiential approach to history and religion, and the positivistic religion of Auguste Comte (de Lubac 1993, 31-2). The influence of this secular work is particularly evident in one of de Lubac's books on Buddhism, *Rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (1952), a history of the West-East encounter from the Western point of view.

De Lubac's ultimate conclusion about Buddhism was a negative one. In his view, Buddhism expresses an atheism that "leaves no room at all for the living God" (de Lubac 1952, 278-79). The same conclusion is carried out in all three books on Buddhism under several points of view: the greatest spiritual tradition in the history of humankind, Buddhism is ultimately deficient "of the unique Fact in which we adore the vestige and the very Presence of God" (de Lubac 1951, 8). Buddhism is a natural religion and "remains far from the Christian supernatural," that is, the former is a human project while the latter is a response to an initiative of God (de Lubac 1955, 11). And yet, a door was left open. De Lubac begins the concluding paragraph of the final chapter of *Amida* pointing out that even in an objectively inadequate way of salvation, the omnipresent grace of Christ can be effective. "We have no right to think smugly that God has left himself without witnesses

everywhere outside Christianity" (de Lubac 1955, 290). In other words, de Lubac did not exclude the possibility that there existed elements of truth in Buddhism. Here the statement of *Notre Aetate* on "a ray of that Truth which enlightens all human beings" is recognizable.

De Lubac's books on Buddhism are a colossal systematization of the existing Western literature on the subject. De Lubac relies significantly on such a body of literature to formulate his conclusion, while he offers no opportunity to Buddhism to stand on its own account. In these books, Buddhism is situated in a Christian framework and its truth subordinate to Christian faith. De Lubac places his inclusive approach – although not explicitly presented this way – in the context of the Western approaches to Buddhism, as a middle space between the more orthodox Catholic tradition, which denies that there is even the most minute element of truth in Buddhism, and the syncretistic synthesis of Western-Eastern romanticism (de Lubac 1952, Conclusion).

During his early days in Lyon, de Lubac was acquainted with Jules Monchanin (1895-1957), a priest destined for a career of ascetic missionary work in India. De Lubac met Monchanin in 1930 and was surprised to see Monchanin reading Sanskrit at sight (de Lubac 1992, 32). The two priests forged a life-long relationship of intellectual respect and friendship. Monchanin's first encounter with Indian religions was at age 14 through a book by Émile Senart, a French indologist. The book, *Essai sur la Légende du Bouddha*, was a book in which Buddha is portrayed not as a real character but as a myth (Senart 1875). In 1939, Monchanin left France to relocate permanently to India and pursue a project of contemplative mission. The project found concrete realization in 1950, when together with a Breton Catholic monk, Henri le Saux, Monchanin established a Christian ashram in Tamil Nadu, where Christian monks would practice contemplation in Indian traditional

forms. Monchanin believed that the essence of Hinduism could be severed from its manifestation. His dream was to Christianize India not from the outside in, penetrating the invisible spiritual core of the Indian soul starting from its visible religious expressions, but from the inside out. Monchanin envisioned to Christianize India from within, that is, to convert the inner essence of Hinduism in the light of Christian faith, while allowing the visible form of the Church to express herself in a truly Indian way. Since the essence of Indian culture was mysticism, the challenge for Christianity in India was to reframe the Hindu mystical tradition.

Monchanin's approach to Hinduism was primarily philosophical in character, focusing on the relationship of the One and the Many, which he identified as the question of God and the world, and the related question of the two orders of truth. He concluded that Platonic and Neoplatonic Greece as well as medieval Christianity were equipped to reconcile the two orders of truth, while Hinduism has no solution to propose. According to Monchanin, Hinduism offers two options: the doctrine of transformation, the One itself becomes Many; and the doctrine of illusion, only the One exists. In the latter, the Many appears, but it is an illusion; the One exists, but does not appear. Sankara's thesis of the sole One without a second recognizes in distinction the two orders of truth: the phenomenal order is apparent, and the reconciliation happens with the pure identity of creation and God, *Atman* and *Brahman*.¹⁴

Monchanin argued that the problem of the One leads to the "muddled thinking"

of monism (Monchanin 1989, 541-42). If only the One is real, the result is monism. "How is the problem of the One and the Many to be put in this monistic perspective?" he rhetorically asked in a lecture of comparative mysticism in Pondicherry. His intellectual project was to integrate the Hindu philosophical tradition and Christian faith; however, after spending ten years in India, Monchanin was depressed with the lack of interest from Hindus in Christianity and with the sluggishness with which his vision of a Christianized India could be realized. He acknowledged that Hinduism was self-contained and sufficient, and that Indians seem to understand "Christianity, a religion of time," to belong to the phenomenal order and, as such, to be imperfect wisdom (Monchanin 1965, 100).

The difficulties Monchanin consistently encountered when debating with cultivated Indians helped him to rediscover his intellectual roots: "I react in a contrary direction: never have I felt – intellectually – more Christian and I must say more Greek," a term that Monchanin used as shorthand for the logical, structural and formal approach which Christian thinking had inherited from Greek philosophy (Monchanin 1989, 541-42). His Hellenic formation became an obstacle for him in his project of Christianization. Although he was conscious that Christianizing Hinduism is not, as Raimon Pannikar argues, Hellenizing it, Monchanin did not see any other option (Panikkar 2001, 183). He believed that only the Christian notion of the Trinity could bridge the two orders of truth: there is both God and creation. He stated that his task was to only accept those elements of Hinduism which were compatible with Christianity and to reject the rest, including the idea of *Māyā* (or the apparent), an entity that is clearly neither as being nor as nonbeing and which he deemed "an intellectual monster" (Monchanin 1989, 542 and Monchanin 1965, 94-95).

¹⁴ Monchanin addressed this topic in several occasions. See: "Yoga et Hésychasme," "Apophatisme et Apavada," and "La Quête de l'Absolu," three lectures given in 1955 and 1956 in Pondicherry and Madras, and then printed in Jules Monchanin, *Mystique de l'Inde, Mystère Chrétien. Ecrits et Inédits* (Paris: Fayard, 1974), 108-136. See also the previously unpublished Vagneux Yann, *L'un en Grèce et aux Indes. Un inédit de Jules Monchanin, Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 3/2012 (TOME 96), 541-556.

In a letter dated January 1955 to his fellow monk le Saux, Monchanin summarized the state of the art of the project of Christianization on India:

It is creation which must be rethought or rather resituated in the light of the revealed Christian mystery. In this mystery, Hinduism ... must die in order to be resurrected as Christian. Any theory which does not take sufficient account of this necessity involves a lack of fidelity, both towards Christianity – we cannot mutilated it by separating it from its essence – and towards Hinduism – from which we cannot hide its fundamental error and its essential divergence in connection with Christianity. Hinduism must reject its equation of *atman-brahman*, if it is to enter into Christ (Monchanin 1965, 136).

This quotation merits three remarks: first of all, the gulf that separates Christian faith from Hindu tradition is the result of a “fundamental error” on the part of Hinduism. Secondly, the necessity is to rethink Hinduism in terms of Christianity, and not the other way around. Finally, never forget that Hinduism is a natural religion and Christianity an authentic Revelation.

In 1955, Monchanin published his only book, *De l'Esthétique à la Mystique*, a study of comparative mysticism, in which he demonstrated the correspondences between the Hindu notion of inner divinity and the Christian concept of Holy Spirit. In the same book he paid homage to his intellectual roots. He remembered that he belonged ultimately to the Occident, “the only civilization ... that has revealed to other civilizations their history and their essence. No other has done this for any other” (Monchanin 1955, 67).

6. Concluding remarks

Although de Lubac and Monchanin were only two among the intellectuals before and during the Vatican II who maintained that non-Christian religions need not be rejected but integrated in the Church, they are worthy of a respectful investigation due to their profound impact on the Catholic pronouncements on Indian religions. Indeed, they share responsibility with the generation that has produced a major reformulation of Christian thought in the key area of world religions, articulating a representation of the Indian religious Other as highly spiritual, conceptually disappointing and theologically wrong. This representation of Indian religions was not contradictory, but rather sustained a larger vision of the Catholic Church. Catholicism was adopting -- in the period before the Vatican II -- the modern tools of scientific knowledge in missiology and missionary practice while elaborating a universal project of Western civilization based on a faith-reason medieval synthesis. In this context, *Nostra Aetate* was first and foremost an exercise of self-redefinition about how Catholic Christianity understands the relationship with other world religions in the light of the post-colonial reality and the acceptance of modernity. This historical background may explain why, in the very moment when the council was struggling with the decision to define Catholicism in relation with non-Christian religions, the same council went to paint the Indian religious Other as pre-modern.

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Enrico Beltramini teaches History of Christianity at Notre Dame de Namur University in California (United States). He is the author of a book and several academic articles in the history of Roman Catholicism and serves as History of Christianity co-chair at the American Academy of Religion - West. He is currently writing two book projects on the history of Roman Christianity in India.
