Politics and Religion, **1** (2008), 471–502 Printed in the U.S.A.

1755-0483/08 $25.00

Book Reviews

***Hindu Nationalism: A Reader*. Edited by Christophe Jaffrelot. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. xii + 391 pp. $65.00 Cloth, $24.95 Paper**

doi:10.1017/S1755048308000424

Arvind Rajagopal
New York University

The editor, a political scientist with a long record of publications on contemporary Indian politics is well qualified to undertake the task of a reader on Hindu nationalism. The volume sets out to introduce the history and politics of Hindu nationalist organizations before they came to be distinguished as such, and provides a sampling of writings of its key ideologues. Two main sections comprise the book. The first documents the invention of a Hindu nationalist ideology and its reshaping over time, examining the writings of social reformers such as Dayananda Saraswati, who founded the Arya Samaj, and activists such as M.S. Golwalkar, a devout admirer of Hitler who led the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, an organization that became the backbone of Hindu nationalism in India.

The volume treats Hindu nationalism as a distinct strand within Indian politics, identifiable because of philosophies argued and circulated by specific thinkers. Jaffrelot acknowledges that Hindu nationalists were a subdivision within the Congress Party in India, which went on to win independence and to dominate national politics. However, neither the implications of this relationship, nor those of Hindu nationalism representing a fold within the dominant form of Indian nationalism, are well developed in the volume. The assumption here is that ideas have a durable and continuous force, despite being modified over time, somewhat like a life form with a discernible DNA retained across several generations of mutation.

I would suggest that there is another view better suited to the theme at hand, which sees ideas as sociolinguistic formations that are adapted and negotiated according to context. Rather than seeing political ideologies somewhat like party identity cards whose retention can be visibly

traced, such a view understands them to be more subtle and pervasive in their influence, like linguistic accents infusing a range of different dialects. In this view, now widely held Congress nationalists succeeded in negotiating a truce between Hindu social reformers who had dominated the political landscape in the 19th Century, and Hindu orthodoxy. The terms of the truce were roughly as follows: social reform would no longer be waged on the front stage of national politics, and national independence instead would become the shared goal of all groups. Bal Gangadhar Tilak's reversal on the issue of child marriage in the late 1890s epitomized this move. Tilak decided that making social reform a subject of national politics rendered Indians vulnerable to British interference, and weakened the mission of winning freedom from colonial rule.

The weakness of the professedly secular Congress Party (the ruling party for most of India's independence) in dealing with Hindutva's repeated and blatant transgressions of the law can be explained in terms of this compromise in the history of Indian nationalism. The "rise" of Hindu nationalism represents the delayed results of this compromise, and the return of the repressed history of nationalism. Since social reform was postponed, and a coalition of progressives and orthodoxy won independence, each could, and did, equally claim to have won freedom on their merits. Secularists insisted that independence had validated their vision of a united and secular nation. The orthodox argued, by contrast, that it was a Hindu nation whose greatness had been proven before the world at large in 1947, and that an ancient civilization would rise to eminence once more, if only secularists would realize their mistake and cooperate.

It is in the issue of caste that Hindu nationalism's Achilles heel came to be revealed. The Hindu nation was predicated on upholding the caste hierarchy as given, in which upper castes were but a minority. The ethos of nationalism predicated equality, but religious nationalism qualified this by endorsing tradition as sacrosanct. Once reservations for lower castes, specifically for Other Backward Classes, were implemented, in 1990, appeals to Hindu nationalism had to work through rather than around caste interests. It is thus appropriate that Jaffrelot devotes Chapter 14 to caste reservations, although the sequence of quotations provided from the Hindu nationalist party's manifestos professing belief in lower caste empowerment, is misleading.

The trouble with treating many of these Hindu nationalist writings as archival documents, as Jaffrelot does, is that their polemical character tends to be disguised or missed, especially when they are assumed to be texts of a confessional movement. Jaffrelot is, of course, far too well

informed to err on this matter, and his introductions to the excerpts are critical introductions. But the arrangement and selections in his volume, and the absence of opposing views other than that of the editor, leaves open the possibility of misunderstanding, especially for non-specialists. Hindu nationalism is different from say, an Islamic or a Christian nationalist movement. As Golwalkar understood, even in their deities and religious customs, there was little that united Hindus and a great deal that separated them. The modern nation had to make up the deficiency, and essentially create a unity that existed in mythic history, but not in actuality. Thus Hindu nationalism is a deeply political entity, and the texts even of its most committed ideologues tend not to be consistent or coherent; instead they adopt a series of tactical positions that require readers to reckon with the larger political field if they are to understand what is being said.

In conclusion, this reader represents an important initiative, but requires a companion volume for deeper study.

Eric Voegelin and the Problem of Christian Political Order. By Jeffrey C. Herndon. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2007. 208 pp. $39.95 Cloth

doi:10.1017/S1755048308000436

John von Heyking
University of Lethbridge

Christians frequently criticize the "secular" political order. These criticisms have not always succeeded in penetrating the foundational philosophical problems of political order, though their attempts have left secularists shaken. Recent efforts by Charles Taylor and Mark Lilla attempt to address fundamentals in an effort to keep what is good about the "secular" in light of some of these criticisms.

Jeffrey Herndon's account of Eric Voegelin's treatment of the problem of Christian political order sheds considerable light on our situation. Herndon does not situate his book the way I have just outlined, preferring instead to present his book as an extended response to some of Voegelin's Christian critics, who argued that Voegelin's work was hampered by his inability or unwillingness to account for the "person of Jesus as the incarnation of the divine substance on Earth" (15). Herndon shows how and why the problem of Christian political order was central to Voegelin's