Christians Ponder Hinduism in USA
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Gujaratis Are Targeted in Strategic, but Scattered, Conversion Programs.

Earlier this year the leading US Christian magazine produced an article, "Hinduism Gains a Foothold in America," detailing of their readers the status of Hindus in America. Hindus are, they said, "a significant minority whose influence extends far beyond their actual numbers." This Hindu influence was of concern. "Whether Hindus will continue to change the increasingly pluralistic American society, or be changed by the evangelical Christians in it, is unclear."

The article's intent was to inform the Christian community about Hindus. But it is equally useful for the Hindus, especially with regard to organized Christian effort to convert US Hindus. For example, Tim and Melanie Schultz of International Missions in New York City have targeted the Gujaratis. Tim has learned the Gujaratis' language, but complains, "They're very open to hearing about the gospel, but to come to the Lord - they're just not interested in that whatsoever." His plans call for starting two Gujarati "house churches" in northern New Jersey.

Another evangelist, Archie for North of the Mission Agencies Network for North American Project, is targeting the 1,00,000 Hindus in his Detroit, Michigan, area. He, too, is frustrated. "I had a 60-year-old multimillionaire who came to me three times to receive Christ as Savior. I told him each time that unless he was willing to empty his 'God shelf' of all other Gods and Goddesses, and to put Jesus alone there, he was not ready to be saved."

A third evangelist, Mahendra Singhal, a 30-year Christian convert from Hinduism heads Hinduism International Ministries of Zion, Illinois. "Singhal says he saw 17 Hindus become Christians through his ministry in home meetings during 1991, which he called a 'tremendous number."

The difficulty of converting Hindus is of concern to Peter Pereira, a native of India ordained in the United Methodist Church. The article reports, "Pereira says witnessing to Hindus is not impossible. 'Friendship evangelism is the best thing." Pereira also notes that many Hindus are looking for opportunities to talk about their beliefs. "They think America is Christianity" he said. 'So they're beginning to [think], 'These guys don't have moral values. Maybe we [Hindus] should offer them [the Americans] something.'"

Among the article's interesting insights into Hinduism were the comments of Harvard University professor Diana Eck on how Hinduism arrived in America, "I think in many [American Christian] churches, there was a certain amount of concern about whether their sons or daughters were becoming Hare Krishnas. And in the meantime, no one noticed that their surgeon was now a Hindu."

The free-lance author of the article, Stan Guthrie, told Hinduism TODAY this his research "made me think a little bit more than I had that Hindus are really not our antagonists or our enemies, but that they are also searching for the truth and care about society."

The strongest impression left by the article is the frustratingly slow progress of Hindu conversion achieved by the Christian evangelical community. One Hindu religious leader explained that is was impossible to convert a Hindu who understands his religion. In the humorous words of India-born poet Rudyard Kipling:

It is not good for the Christian white to hassle the Aryan brown,

For the Christian riles and the Aryan smiles and he weareth the Christian down.

The end of the fight is tombstone white in the name of the dead deceased,

And the epitaph clear: "A fool lies here who tried to hussle the East."

For a copy of the Christianity Today article, write P.O. Box 157, Hanamaulu, Hawaii, 94746, USA.

Christians Counterpoint Hindu Beliefs

Several years ago Hinduism Today developed the following list of nine Hindu beliefs, consolidating a number of similar lists made by various Hindu spiritual leaders:

HINDU BELIEVE:

1 in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

2 that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.

3 that all souls are evolving toward union with God and will ultimately find spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

4 in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.

5 that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved.

6 that divine beings exist in unseen inner worlds and that temple worship, rituals

and sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with the devas and Gods.

7 that a spiritually awakened Master is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, self-inquiry and meditation.

8 that all life is sacred and to be loved and revered, through the practice of nonviolence, ahimsa.

9 that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

The editors of Christianity Today, to supplement their article on Hinduism in America, formulated the following nine Christian counterpoints.

CHRISTIANS BELIEVE

1 in one God in three persons. He is distinct from his creation, yet intimately involved with it as its sustainer and redeemer.

2 that the world was created once by the divine will, was corrupted by sin, yet under God's providence moves toward final perfection.

3 that in Adam's sin, the human race was spiritually alienated from God, that those who are called by God and respond to his grace will have eternal life. Those who persist in rebellion will be lost eternally.

4 that through God's grace and favor, lost sinners are rescued from the guilt, power and eternal consequences of their evil thoughts, words and deeds.

5 that it is appointed for human beings to die once an after that face judgment.

6 some good and some evil; but that our worship is due to God alone.

7 that God has given us a clear revelation of himself in Jesus and the sacred Scriptures. He has empowered by his spirit prophets, apostles, evangelists and pastors who are teachers charged to guide us into faith and holiness in accordance with his word.

8 that life is to be highly esteemed but that it must be subordinated in the service of biblical love and justice.

9 that Jesus is God incarnate, and therefore the only sure path to salvation. Many religions may offer ethical and spiritual insights, but only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

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