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Hindu Front

A Fraudulent Mission

Exposing the false premises and dangerous notions behind Christian missionary activit y

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I was raised as a Catholic. I went to catholic school. My uncle was, and still is, a missionary. He went to South America to save the souls of the Native Americans who, I was told, would suffer eternal damnation unless converted to Christianity. I was taught that Hinduism was a religion of polytheism, idolatry and superstition and that there was no place in heaven for Hindus. This was the Catholicism of my childhood; it remains the Catholicism of today. In 1994, Pope John Paul II issued a statement, "The Coming of the Third Millennium" (Google "Tertio Millenio Adveniente"). He said, "The Asia Synod [meeting of the clergy] will deal with the challenge for evangelization posed by the encounter with ancient religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. While expressing esteem for the elements of truth in these religions, the Church must make it clear that Christ is the one mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of humanity."

This is a statement that neither Buddha, nor Krishna, nor Rama, is equal to Jesus. This is a statement of exclusivism, the position that mine is the only way. If this is my firm belief, how then can I be really tolerant and accepting of you if you follow another way? Such intolerance is going to end up causing conflict, division, disharmony and poor communication.

It's a big business: The global missionary business is huge, perhaps the largest business in the world. Not only the Catholic Church, but also various Protestant organizations have set aside billions of dollars to convert non-Christians to Christianity. They have trained thousands of workers, formed various plans of evangelization and conversion and targeted certain communities for that express purpose. This multi-national conversion business is not like a multinational

economic business. It is not fair and open. It is not a dialogue or a discussion. It is about one religion triumphing over all the other religions. It is about making all the members of humanity follow one religion, persuading them to give up and, usually, to denigrate the religion they previously followed.

The conversion business is especially big in India, because India is the largest non-Christian country in the world where missionaries have the freedom to act and to proselytize. Islamic countries, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, do not allow such missionary activity at all. Saudi Arabia will not allow even a Bible or a picture of Jesus in the country. Nor does China allow such wide-scale missionary activities. India, because of its openness and tolerance, has become the target.

Recent newspapers have reported that one missionary was killed in India [by Hindus], which is unfortunate. But in that same week, fifty Christians were massacred in Indonesia by Muslims. Religious violence is endemic worldwide, and Christians are not always the victims. For centuries, Hindus in India have been routinely killed for their religion. In Kashmir a number of Hindus were recently massacred. But in the Western media, the death of Hindus for their religion has never constituted a story.

Missionary activity has a bloody history of genocide on every continent of the world, as colonial interests used force and persuasion to bring about conversion. We are told that we should forget all about that, even though it has only been a generation or two since the colonial era. But we cannot forget so easily, because the very religious groups that performed these atrocious acts have not yet apologized. Christians in America have made some apologies for what they did to the Native Americans. But, so far, there have been no apologies to Hindus. If the missionaries want us to believe that they have changed their ways and are now purely nonviolent and charitable, then why do they not at least apologize for what they did in the past?

Why should there be conversions at all? What is the motivation? Christians believe that theirs is the only true religion, Christ is the only savior of humanity, Christians gain salvation or heaven and non-Christians are damned to hell. That is not a policy of harmony and tolerance. It is a blueprint for disharmony and conflict. What ultimately happens when someone who has that attitude comes into a community and converts people? People are taught to reject their ancestors and their traditions. Families are broken up. Division and conflict almost inevitably occur

wherever this missionary business goes on.

The old Protestants, the Anglicans and the Lutherans, have reduced their missionary activity, and some Christian groups are not missionary at all, such as the old Greek Orthodox and the Syrian Christians. But the Catholic tradition is promoting its missionary activity all over the world, though more subtly than in the past. They are no longer using the force they used during the colonial era, but they are still aiming at global conversion. And there is a new evangelical force in the world, particularly US fundamentalist Christian groups--the World Vision, the Christian coalition, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Baptists and so on. These groups are actively asking for donations in America in order to convert Hindus in India. Such appeals are routine on Christian television channels. Pat Robertson, one of their main leaders, has said that Hinduism is a demonic religion.

They show Hindu Gods with animal heads and say, "Oh! Look how primitive these people are." They point out the political and social problems of India and say, "These are all owing to Hinduism. Please donate money to our cause so we can go to India and convert these people from this horrible religion."

The missionary threat is not something of the past. Hindus must not be naive. It is a mistake to believe that there is religious harmony all over the world and that the other religions respect Hinduism and are willing to live together quietly with Hindus. Missionaries continue their work, and some are going back to the old hell-fire, damnation, condemnation of Hinduism that the Catholics employed in the Middle Ages and in the colonial era. Some American textbooks teach that Hinduism is not a religion because it does not have only one God, one book and is not a missionary religion seeking to convert or conquer the world.

Conversion and poverty: No country in the world has been raised up economically by religious conversion. The Philippines is the most Catholic and the oldest Christian country in Asia. Yet, it remains one of the poorest countries in Asia and has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor. The most devout Catholics in the world are in Central and South America, which also suffer tremendous social inequality. But the Catholics there are not telling the poor people that they should convert to another religion in order to raise themselves economically. The whole attack on Hindu society that blames poverty on Hindu beliefs and claims to raise the poor on religious grounds is based upon one motivation: conversion.

Then there is the whole issue of hospitals, orphanages and schools. It is all very wonderful to selflessly help other people. But why bring in religious forms? As long as the picture of Jesus is there--particularly given the 2,000-year history of aggressive conversion activities--how can anyone be expected to believe that there is no seeking of conversion, that it is purely selfless service and love of God? The human being is not a property of any church. The human being is not something which is owned by anyone or anything. The soul does not need to be saved. It is the eternal and immortal part of our nature. We need only understand the Divine within us.

Hinduism is based upon respecting each individual and the swadharma of each individual. We should have many paths and many religions. The idea of only one religious faith for all humanity is like having only one set of clothing for all humanity. It is like people having to eat only one kind of food or having only one type of job. There should be diversity, abundance and freedom in the religious realm as well.

There is not one goal: Unfortunately, all religions do not have the same goal. Religions have various goals. Religions are various paths. Not all religions are theistic. In Buddhism and Jainism, there is no creator God. There are religions with a multiplicity of Deities. Monotheism is not the only form of religion in the world, nor is it the best form. All forms of religious worship have their validity, and Hinduism recognizes them, whether they are polytheistic, monotheistic or monistic. Even atheists have their place in Hinduism. People should have complete freedom to reject religion, if that is what they want to do.

It is most unfortunate that there is so much misinformation and disinformation about Hinduism in the world. The fault for this lies not only with Western people. The fault lies also with Hindus themselves, who have historically been poor at expressing what their religion is, and in countering disinformation and propaganda against it. Most Hindus today do not study their religion properly, and so they cannot explain it.

They are also misinformed about other religions; many think that other religions are just Hinduism in another form. But the rich traditions of yoga, meditation, Vedas and Vedanta cannot be found in other religions. Particularly in the Protestant faiths

in the West, those traditions are usually rejected. To Evangelical Christians, they are considered the work of the devil. Some people say all religions teach the same things and they only differ in inessentials. But Hinduism teaches the law of karma and rebirth, which are not accepted by Christianity and Islam. Is the law of karma and the process of rebirth inessential?

Transcending differences: We must move beyond all our narrow, human-centric creeds. True religion is not a matter of name, form or identity. It is a matter of that which is eternal, that which is universal, that which no one owns. It is a matter of consciousness, awareness and truth.

Let there be dialogue. Let there be open, friendly and thoughtfully critical communication in religion, just as there is in science.

Let us expose and put an end to this missionary business, and let us not think that the missionary business is tolerant. The missionary business is not about freedom of religion. It is about the triumph of one religion. It is not about secularism. The missionary business is based on the idea that only one religion is true. It is a religious war aimed at religious control.

The way to challenge this is not through violence or through intolerance. It is through being properly informed. It is through open, friendly dialogue and discussion, so that others understand the Hindu point of view, so that any distortions about Hinduism are removed. For harmony to exist, we must recognize that we are all the same Divine Being, that we all share the same human nature. At the same time, we should not be naive about the forces of the world that are trying to disintegrate Hindu society and Hindu culture in India.

It would be a tremendous loss if India gave up Hinduism and became another Christian or Islamic country. The world has enough of these already. Why do Westerners go to India? They go there for its wealth of spiritual knowledge, for its wealth of spiritual traditions. In fact, India has more than enough of these and should be exporting its religion. The rest of the world desperately needs better access to India's wealth of spiritual resources.

Excerpted from "Debate with Christian Missionaries in India," a talk given by Dr. David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri), noted author on Hinduism, yoga and ayurveda, at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Hyderabad, in September, 2007.