Our Sins Exceed Jimmy Swaggart's
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His is not a pretty story, but it is a terribly important one for Hindus to hear. Jimmy Swaggart, America's most vociferous TV moralizer has suddenly become the world's best-known secret sinner. There he was, a wealthy, world-class superpreacher on TV, weeping, confessing and asking forgiveness of his God, his wife and his electronic following. Ironically, the man who had made his millions preaching against lust and pornography, had been caught lusting. Judy Mann, a journalist, noted: "One thing that seems strikingly clear about both Swaggart and Bakker [another Assemblies of God minister who confessed to sexual misconduct] is that both of those Bible-thumping churchmen have serious problems with women and sex. Adultery and promiscuity are right up there alongside communism and Godlessness on their list of deadly sins." In a book published in October Swaggart included "consorting with prostitutes" as one of four definitions of fornication.

Reach*** for analogies, the mind conjured up Sinclair Lewis' "Elmer Gantry." You remember Gantry, the engaging tent preacher and rogue (Burt Lancaster in the movie) who publicly flimflams the faithful to fill his collection plate and privately indulges in pleasures of the flesh. Change the setting from rural canvas big top to urban television pulpit, and Jimmy Swaggart becomes a real-life Elmer Gantry for the '80s. Soap opera it may be; entertainment it is not. At least not for Hindus, for whom this is a serious matter.

Hindus (and Buddhists, Taoists, Hawaiians, animists and a long list of fellow human beings) have long suffered under the righteous moral indictments of our Christian brothers. Their strategies have changed over the centuries from militant to marketing, from inquisition to acquisition - but the message has remained the same: "Come! Accept my Savior. Leave off your evil, non-Christian ways. Be like me and gain Life Eternal." If ever we did, we can no longer hope to be like them.

Jimmy Swaggart is not the first morally flawed man. There are wrongdoers in every culture, in every time. Skilled Hindu libertines make these men look like pikers. But

your average sinner, with his feet on the ground, has so short a fall that others tend to either not hear the noise or to exonerate the poor fellow with exculpatory words he hopes his accusers will have the kindness to recall should he ever lapse, "To err is human. Let's forgive and forget."

Jimmy Swaggart was not standing on the earth when he engaged the services of prostitutes. He had climbed atop a dangerously high moral pedestal. Nor was he one to be shy about telling others what hellish horrors await the "faggot," the forger, the filcher, the fabricator, the fetish maker and the fornicator. When he fell, the noise could be heard in all 82 nations where his foreign missions exist. Mr. Swaggart is the leader of one of the world's richest and most aggressive conversion ministries dedicated to "harvesting souls" like you and me.

Hinduism Today ran a page one story called "Divine Deception Exposed in Mauritius" [Spring, 1984, Vol. 6, No 2] which reported on unethical tactics used by the Mauritius Assemblies of God (called Salut et Guerison in French). One case of outright fraud involved a Hindu electrician who inadvertently found himself behind stage during a faith healing crusade and reported seeing a woman, who had screamed and pretended to be possessed on stage, walking and talking in a normal, albeit conspiratorial, way with the Assemblies of God minister behind the scenes. She later went before the audience to claim Jesus had cured her and to tearfully testify to her spiritual rebirth. No wonder Hindu leaders in that country had become deeply concerned with the means of persuasion used to lure young Hindus into the mission, "to sow discord, cause confusion and break up families." Not a few families. Tens of thousands of Hindu families worldwide have been destabilized by this one group.

Consider a personal encounter. On our own Hawaiian island a few years ago the tiny Assembly of God church invited the staff of Hinduism Today to "Come and visit with us. We have a wonderful movie about India which will interest you." We went, five or six of us joining two dozen Christians seated in simple pews. The reverend greeted us cordially. There followed some sermonizing which introduced a 90-minute color movie about the Assembly of God fieldwork in India. Slick, expensive, well-filmed, the movie proceeded to offend everything precious to Hindus. It showed near-naked savages killing chickens in front of a Hindu temple and putting the blood on their foreheads. It cursed Hinduism for abetting world poverty. It portrayed every Indian Hindu with skin disease or crippled offspring and every Indian Christian with unblemished complexion and flawless children with bright almond eyes. It told the audience that this minister was saving India from Satan, that these lost people were needlessly suffering from fatalistic submission to

life's torments, that with just a little more money he could continue his work for God. It was a horror show, an effective and frightening one to anyone who didn't know the truth. Had you been an uninformed but compassionate Christian, you would have hastily emptied your pockets and counted your blessings.

As the credits rolled, we rose and asked the minister whether he had ever been to India, ever seen these things with his own eyes. He said he had not. We assured him and his congregation that what they had just seen was an unspeakable lie. We said a few words about the soulfulness of India and her people, about the generosity, the gentleness, the strength of the family and the enlightened insights of the Hindu path. Then we left, never to forget the hospitable ways of the Assemblies of God.

Jimmy Swaggart wants every Hindu to leave our cherished, ageless and tolerant dharma and follow his path. It's hard to believe, but he truly wants to destroy Hinduism. Now we learn that he is human. Not satanic, not damned. Just human. Hindus need not follow the hypocritical Jimmy Swaggarts of the world to find spirituality, to know God or even to get decent jobs. Maybe Jimmy's fall will help Hindus realize that Christians, even the leaders, have no special ordination from God. They are subject to the same frailties as everyone else. Knowing this, Hindus may more confidently, and politely, close the door on the next Bible-thumping missionary who comes knocking.

To end, I submit that our sins exceed Jimmy's. His was a personal tragedy; ours is a global one. We Hindus are guilty of avarice - putting our children in Christian schools and thus bartering spiritual values for worldly gain. We are guilty of sloth - lazily ignoring our duty to speak out, to act, to protect our tradition when it is assailed. We are guilty of infidelity - forsaking our forefathers, betraying the Sanatana Dharma and trifling with the Mystical Presence of God (whether Vishnu, Siva, Shakti or another). Jimmy has repented. Now we need to do likewise.

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