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## Mission to Hindus

John Sankara Rao

“You are my witnesses” (Acts 1:8, Isa. 43:12). Three stories should be in line with one another in order for fruitful witness to occur: the story of Jesus Christ, the story of the messenger, and the story of the listener. The Indian story where the majority of Hindus live is a vast complexity of religion, philosophy, mysticism, language, literature, art, architecture, sculpture, dance, music, human institutions, social customs, etc. In a word, it is a perennial flow of a river that absorbs a lot of new elements as it runs through different regions. We need to understand this river in order to be effective witnesses. Paul understood the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and so he was an exemplary leader, teacher and preacher (1 Cor. 11.1, Ezra 7.10). He understood the scriptures and cultures of his audience (Acts 17.16-30). This chapter should enable the reader to understand Hinduism, the major religion of India, and one of the oldest living religions of the world.

Hinduism is “a family of religions” and can be called “Hinduisms,” which do not have a single founder or a single system of salvation but have different goals according to each sect or denomination. About 850 million people practice this religion. Although most Hindus live in India, Hindu literature and philosophy



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have influenced people throughout the world. Hinduism developed gradually over thousands of years, and many cultures and religions helped to shape it. It is believed that “the Aryans from Central Asia entered India in the third century B.C. and settled on the banks of the river Indus.”<sup>1</sup> The word Hindu is derived from the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, the historic local appellation for the Indus River in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent.

## Definitions

There is no single definition of Hinduism, as Hinduism is a confluence of diverse traditions. Some attempts to define it are as follows:

1. 1. According to the Supreme court of India, “unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one god, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more.”<sup>2</sup>
2. S. Radhakrishnan, the first vice President of India, says that there is no uniform, no stationary, no unalterable Hinduism in point of practice or belief. Hinduism is a movement not a position; it is a process not a result; a growing tradition but not a fixed revelation, which cannot be defined, but is only to be experienced.<sup>3</sup>
3. Vivekananda, an apostle of Hinduism, says that Hinduism is a universal religion that taught about the principles but not persons.<sup>4</sup>
4. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, says “all things to all men,”<sup>5</sup> that Hinduism as a faith is vague, amorphous, and many-sided. In the usual sense of word it is hardly to be defined or hardly to say whether it is a religion or not. In its present form and even in the past it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to each other or contradicting each other.
5. Dr. Ambedkar: Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors, the sanctity and the infallibility of *Vedas*, *samhitas* and *sashtras*, and iron law of caste system; the heartless law of *karma*, the senseless law of status by birth, are the various instruments of torture for the untouchables. These very instruments that have mutilated and blasted and blighted the untouchables are intact with the Gandhism.<sup>6</sup>
6. Geographical definition: “Hindu” was the Persian word for “Indian” and was originally used of people living beyond the Indus River, not followers of a particular religion.<sup>7</sup>

7. Socio-religious definition: The nineteenth-century Hindu reformers call themselves as the followers of *sanathana dharma*, which means the eternal religion.<sup>8</sup>

### Characteristics of Hinduism

1. Hinduism has the largest pantheon of living gods and goddess that are being worshipped by millions of people according to their choice. The supreme deity of one Hindu tradition may be a secondary god of another tradition. Each devotee is allowed to worship a god of their own choice. There have been many incarnations or manifestations of God to accomplish specific purposes.
2. Hinduism is a religion, like Judaism, that was able to survive after having contact with Islam and Christianity which have the proselytizing spirit and missionary zeal.
3. There are many contradictions. One person's religious scripture may not be the same as another's. One sect may believe in the incarnation of God and another may not. One may not follow the caste system and another may be strictly following. Every Hindu is born into a certain caste which is the result of his/her past karma. He/she cannot do anything about this.
4. Hinduism is a religion of inclusivism. It includes any type of faith as its own. The religions are only ways to reach the Truth.
5. The soul is eternal in the past as well as in the future, and is subject to the law of *karma* or the law of moral causation.
6. The ultimate end of human life is liberation or deliverance (*moksa*) from the endless cycle of birth and death or transmigration of souls.

### The Teachings of Hinduism

#### Scriptures

The *Vedas* reflect the growth and development of human thought over a span of many centuries. The *Vedas* are considered timeless, divine and eternal. They are without a beginning. The *Vedas* are regarded as divine in origin. They are not produced by a couple of individual poets or authors. The *Vedas* are the sublime knowledge revealed to the saints or monks of the Hindu system, in their meditation, by the Supreme Divinity. The *Vedas* encompass the human life. The word *Veda* originates from the Sanskrit root *Vid* which means "to know." The word *Veda* literally means knowledge.

Hindu scriptures can be classified in two parts: The first part is *sruti*, meaning "heard." The ancient sages, while doing their *tapasya* and *sadhana* (practice of austerities or severe meditations), heard the divine truths. For this reason the *Vedas*

are called as *sruti* literature. There are four *Vedas*—the *Rigveda*, the *Samaveda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Atharvaveda*. Each has four aspects—the *Samhitas* (prayers and hymns), the *Brahmanas* (explanations of *Samhitas* and rituals), the *Aranyakas*, and the *Upanishads* (explanations of mysticism). The second part is *smriti* which is “remembered.” *Puranas*,<sup>9</sup> *Ramayana*,<sup>10</sup> and *Mahabharata*<sup>11</sup> belong to *smriti* literature. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are long epics. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is a part of the *Mahabharata* in which the god Krishna and the *Pandava* warrior *Arjuna* discuss the meaning and nature of existence.

### The Concept of God

Vedic sages say, “*Ekam sad, vipra bahudha vadanti*”<sup>12</sup> (truth is the one but the sages said it in many ways). It is elastic enough to admit or to hold any number of gods into the Hindu pantheon, without offending to the deepest spiritual intuitions of the Aryan race. Early Hindus worshiped gods that represented powers in nature, outside of themselves, such as rain and the sun. Gradually, they began to search and find gods within themselves. Many Hindus believe in polytheism but these forms are part of one Universal Spirit called *Brahman* who is *sat-chit-ananda* (Truth-Consciousness-Bliss). The most important ones are *Brahma*, the creator of the universe; *Vishnu*, its preserver; and *Shiva*, its destroyer. Hindus worship some gods in the form of animals. Cows are sacred, but Hindus also revere monkeys, snakes, and other animals. Hindus worship their *ishta devata* (a chosen tutelary deity or favourite god) both in temples and in their own homes, since they have freedom to choose their own god as they like. Hinduism also believes in many types of theisms<sup>13</sup>.

### The Concept of Soul

*Brihadarayanaka* (one of the *Upanishads*) describes *atman* as *neti neti*, neither this nor this. The *atman* is dependent on God. Most Hindus believe that the spirit or soul—the true self of every person, called the *atman*—is eternal. A human being must acquire self-knowledge (*atma jnana*), which is to realize that one’s true self (*atman*) is identical with the transcendent self *Brahman*. According to the *Advaita Vedanta* School, this *Atman* is ultimately indistinct from *Brahman*, the Supreme Spirit. The goal of life, according to the *Advaita*, is to realize that one’s *atman* is identical to *Brahman*.

### The Concept of Sin

In Hinduism, *Papa* or *Pataka* are words generally used for sin. Every human being is composed of three *gunas* or qualities called *Sattva* (purity), *Rajas* (impurity), and *Tamas* (darkness). It is lust, anger and hatred springing from *rajas and tamas*...the enemies of man in this world.

The generally understood five heinous sins (*pañca mahā pātakas*) are: theft, drinking of liquor, murder (especially of a *Brahmin*, one of the high priestly castes of Hinduism), violation of the teacher's bed, *govadha* or killing of a cow, and associating oneself with the perpetrators of the five sins aforementioned.<sup>14</sup>

### **Caste System**

Hinduism strongly believes that the caste system has divine sanction. For Purusha sukta 10:90 of Rigveda says, "His face became Brahman, His arms were made into the Ksatriya, His thighs became the Vaisya and from His feet the Sudra was born."<sup>15</sup> So the Hindu castes are grouped into four main categories, called *varnas*. They are 1) *Brahmans*, the priests and scholars; 2) *Kshatriyas*, the rulers and warriors; 3) *Vaisyas*, the merchants and professionals; and 4) *Sudras*, the labourers and servants. The caste system includes thousands of sub-castes, each of which having its own rules of behaviour.

### **The Concept of Salvation**

Freedom from *samsara* is salvation. *Samsara* is the cycle of births and deaths through which the soul of every creature passes before it attains *Moksa* or liberation. It depends on love towards God and on God's grace (note similarity to biblical concepts). The law of *karma* is a moral law corresponding to the physical law of causation. As a man sows, he shall reap. The word *Prāyascitta* means purification of sin. The sins can be removed by confession, by repentance, by *pranayama* (calming the mind and senses) by *Tapas* (fasting, truthfulness) by *japa* (repeating the sacred syllable), by charity, and by pilgrimage to the holy places.

### **Reincarnation and Karma**

Hinduism teaches that the soul never dies. When the body dies, the soul is reborn. This continuous process of rebirth is called reincarnation. The law of *karma* states that every action influences how the soul will be born in the next reincarnation. A person's reincarnation continues until he or she achieves spiritual perfection which is called *moksa*. Hinduism also believes that one who is born twice (*dvijaha*- twice born are the Brahmins; the sacred thread is the sign of it) will die once, but the one who is born once will die twice. "*Janmana jayate sudraha; karmana jayate dvijaha.*"<sup>16</sup> (By birth everybody is a *sudra*/low caste but by conduct one becomes *dvijaha*). Note similarities to the twice born (spiritual rebirth) teaching mentioned by Jesus to Nicodemus (John 3:3-5).

### The Concept of Heaven

There are seven levels of *svarg* (heaven): *Bhuvah, Svah, Mahah, Janah, Tapah, Satah* and *Brahmlok*. This is the last place where fortunate souls repair after death and enjoy spiritual communion with the personal God. Along with Buddhism, Hinduism also says: “When all the desires that dwell in the heart fall away, then the mortal becomes immortal and attains *Brahman*.”<sup>17</sup> Heaven is also called *Moksa* (liberation, release, freedom from *samsara*) or *Mukti* which is the last goal of life. It is liberation from the cycle of births and deaths.

### The Concept of Hell

There are seven levels of hell: *Atala, Vitala, Sutala, Rasatala, Talatala, Mahatala*, and *Patala*. Hell (*naraka*) is a place of torment for the people who committed sins. It is not a permanent place. Soon after receiving the punishment due to one’s sins, he / she will be taken into one of the 8.4 million life forms.

### The Concept of Sonship

The son is called in Sanskrit as *kumara* which means the one who “kills evil doings”. So the son is not the one who is born with male organ but the one who kills the evil natures. According to Rigveda 10:90, the Creator who is called *prajapati* will offer himself as a sacrifice to give life to his people.<sup>18</sup> The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, “*aputrasya gatih nasti, svargo nivacha*” which means “no heaven without that son.”<sup>19</sup> (Note the Christian teaching of the son promised in Isaiah 9:6, born of virgin Mary in Luke 1:35, and who destroyed the works of evil in 1 John 3:5, 8).

### The Concept of Judgment

Hinduism does not believe in a judgment day. A person is a victim of his own *karma* (action) and the laws of *dharma*<sup>20</sup> judge him continuously. Judgment in Hinduism is immediate after death. Neither hell nor heaven (not even *moksa*) is eternal. Why? As it is explained in the concept of hell, after the due punishment is over, the soul will migrate into another body till it liberates from the “*samsara*” which is the cycle of births and deaths.

### Kinds of Hindu Devotion

1. Philosophical Hinduism: This group believes in the authority of the Vedas and Upanishads.
2. Religious Hinduism: This group believes in the *Puranas, Mahabharatha, Ramayana*, and *Bhgavad Gita*. Each person is at liberty to choose his/her

own favorite god from among a pantheon of 330 million and salvation may be attained in one of the following four ways: *Gnana marga*, the way of knowledge; *Bhakthi marga*, the way of devotion; *Karma marga*, the way of good action; and *Raja marga*, the way of yoga.

3. Popular Hinduism: This group rejects the authority of *Vedas* but is concerned only about finding and pleasing a god who protects, blesses, and makes them prosperous. A majority of Hindus adhere to this form.
4. Mystic Hinduism: *Gurus and Babas* (wise old men) have numerous followers. They claim to be *avatars* (incarnations), to have supernatural gifts of healing, and the ability to perform miracles.
5. Tribal Hinduism: This group is very much influenced by animism, spiritism and the occult, and animal worship. The fear of the unknown exercises its instinctive dread over followers' minds.



Hindu Pilgrim Places<sup>21</sup>

## **Hindu Social Structure**

Hindu society was divided into four principal classes, and according to Manu's code, later many sub-castes were created. Having understood the background of Hinduism, the church should find ways and means to reach each category.

### **Religious High Castes**

In spite of the differences even among these high castes of Hindus (they differ in their social customs), they all adhere to the five major beliefs mentioned earlier. They are well educated, occupy high places in society and are proud of their social strata. They follow their religious practices and worship different gods and goddess according to their family traditions.

### **Secular High Castes**

This liberal group is more open than the above one but also well educated. These people tend to be more frustrated and disappointed, because in times of trouble they have no god to appeal to.

### **Scheduled Castes**

There are many sub-castes among this group, too. Some are more depressed and destitute than others but all bear the social stigma of being low caste. Educationally and economically this group has made much progress due to the government facilities.

### **Scheduled Tribes**

This group is mostly animistic in its religious approach and maintains strong community cohesion. The leader of the village and his *panchayat* (council of elders) make all the decisions.

## **Stories of Searching for the Truth**

### **The Author's Story**

At the age of 25, when two of my friends met with a road accident and died, the question came to me, "Where will I go if I die in the same way?" Frustrated at the death of my friends, I began visiting religious places and asking the gurus about the meaning of life and about life after death. But no satisfactory answer was found. In that situation, a friend of mine told me about Jesus Christ. In spite of having different opinions about Christianity, thinking of it as foreign as well as of low-caste religion, I decided to give a chance to Christ to answer my question.

I had a vision on November 20, 1979, in which I was walking along with one of my friends. After some time, I looked back and found someone coming to kill me



with a rifle. I informed my friend about that person and both of us began to run to escape him. But the person, who was coming behind, overran us and pointed the rifle to shoot at me. At that very movement, my friend jumped upon him and snatched away the rifle from him. In that struggle the bayonet of the rifle pierced my friend's arms and the blood began to flow.

When I saw the blood, I woke up from my sleep. Then I began to ask two questions, "Who is the person coming to kill me and who is this friend wounded for me?" It took no time to realise that the person who was coming to kill me was my "sins" and the person who was wounded was no other than my "Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ." Then and there I realised my need and asked the Lord to forgive me and as a result a great burden was removed from my heart.

In my first reading of the Bible I could understand the story of a beautiful yet naughty son Absalom, who came to kill his father and was himself killed eventually. After knowing of his death, David lamented, "... O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you!" (2 Sam. 18:33). David wanted to die for his son so that his son may live.

This incident reminded me of the cry of my grandma who gave birth to six children, with my father the eldest. I was just four years when my dad died and I do not have any memory. But when my uncle died, I was ten years of age and I remember my grandma's cry, "Oh God you are taking my sons—instead take me."

The vision I had, the text I read, and the cry of my grandma—all these three were but one truth that made me to understand that Jesus Christ loved me and died for me so that I may live.

### **Chandraiah's Story**

A young man by the name of Chandraiah, who belongs to the Gouda family (one of the castes that makes, drinks and sells the intoxicating palm tree liquor), was worshipping his god Hanuman in a temple. Along with his friends he was singing this devotional song:

*People worship trees but why are they eaten by goats?  
People worship birds, but why do they snatch away chickens?  
People worship stones, but why do they need vermilion?  
The god is in our inner being.*

He was singing and saying that God is in his inner being, but he was sure that he was not experiencing him. He came out of the temple and asked one of the evangelists who was there serving the Lord as an MB church planter. The evangelist sat along

with him and narrated his own testimony and shared the good news of Jesus Christ, his life, death, burial and resurrection. After listening to the story of Jesus in line with the story of the evangelist, Chandraiah decided to give his heart to Jesus, for he heard, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

As Chandraiah confessed his sins and received the forgiveness of Jesus Christ, he began to experience the Lord within his heart and his life began to change. He received baptism and also a new name: “Paul Chandraiah.”

He told his parents from then on he was not going to drink that intoxicating liquor nor make it. “This is our family tradition and source of life; how can we survive without it?” said the parents. He replied, “I will work in the city and take care of our family.” Now because of his faith, all the family has accepted Jesus Christ and there is a brand new church in this village. Praise the Lord for the work of the Holy Spirit in a Hindu temple.

### **The Need of the Hour and Points of Contact**

There are 1,200 million people living in India according to the 2011 census. Of these, 25% of them are living in South India, 20% in West India, 15% in Northeast India, and 40% in North India. However, the spread of Christianity is such that 80% of Christians are living in South India, 5% in West India, 10% in Northeast India, and only 5% in North India. So the need of the hour is twofold. Internally the church should be strengthened, be equipped, be united; and for the external cause they need to be released with prayer, personnel, and financial resources to reach the unreached Hindus in India and beyond.

In order to reach Hindus, the church must have a good knowledge of Hindu philosophical doctrines, caste systems and rituals. We also need to avoid direct arguments regarding their religious beliefs. Christians should be equipped to present the whole Word of God to the whole person. There are many areas where we have points of contact for witness to the Hindus.

### **Spirituality**

Since Hindus are a very religious people, they consider externals to be reflective of holiness. The Bible calls us to live a holy life (1 Pet 1:16; Rom. 12:1-2; Mat. 5:16). The power of God through a transformed holy life will be a powerful influence on the Hindus.

From the ancient times the devoted Hindus used to pray, “Lead us from darkness to light; lead us from untruth to the truth; lead us from mortality to immortality.” There is no one but Jesus who has responded to this human quest by saying, “I am the truth, I am the life, I am the way, I am the light” (John 14:6; 8:12). He is the eternal and true Guru.

### **The Concept of Sin**

The Hindu understanding of the concept of sin varies from person to person and group to group. For some it is just committing bad deed, or it is disobedience, or it is selfishness, or it is non-existence. Vivekananda said, “Each soul is potentially divine.”<sup>22</sup> Further, he invites the children of Immortal Bliss to arise, to awake and not to stop till the goal<sup>23</sup> is reached. So for Vivankanada “it is sin to call any one a sinner.”<sup>24</sup> But the Bible says, “For all have sinned...” (Rom. 3:23), yet believers “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24).

### **The Doctrine of Karma**

Hinduism believes (similar to the Bible) strongly in *karma* which is, “You reap what you sow” (Gal. 6:7). But Bible differs from Hinduism in teaching that salvation cannot be obtained by works, and so we need to communicate that it is the gift of God (Isa. 64:6; Eph. 2:8).

### **The Doctrine of Salvation**

The concept of salvation exists in Hinduism but its understanding is different as it is the liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. We need to communicate that salvation is the gift of God by his grace through faith (Eph. 2:7-9; 2 Cor. 5:21).

### **The Concept of God**

Since Hindus believe in pantheism there is no need of defending the existence of God, but we need to clarify that the transcendent God became immanent (John 1:1-14) for the purpose of destroying the works of evil (1 John 3:5, 8).

### **Respect for Scriptures**

Since Hindus respect “all sacred scriptures” including their own, we need to make use of this opportunity to exposit the Bible in their own context.

### **The Concept of a Messenger**

Hindu spirituality is perceived to be at a very high level, but they need only the Spirit from above that comes only through the blood of Christ. They need a “model” messenger which can only be Jesus.

### The Concept of Incarnation

Since Hindus believe in the incarnation of God, it needs to be stressed that God's nature does not differ from one incarnation to another but that he is forever unchanging. God's nature is shown in the story of Jesus and his own lifestyle. The sound Word of God and the lifestyle of the preacher (word and deed) should go together. Then only like Paul can one courageously invite others, "Follow me as I am following Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

The following precautions may be considered in order to be an effective witness among Hindus:

1. The way of worship should be Indian—allow converts to follow Christ in the Hindu world and within Indian culture.
2. The mingling of boys and girls must be moderate and respectful.
3. External signs, such as the removal of a red dot on the forehead, need not be stressed. To a Hindu woman the red dot on the forehead is the sign that her husband is alive. Traditional widows of Hinduism will not use this red dot (although the modern widows differ with this view and continue using it). The removal of the red dot on the forehead is an unnecessary challenge to the traditional Hindu women.
4. Food habits should be considered (eating beef is a taboo for a Hindu).
5. Cultural issues—discern which of the diverse religious-cultural thoughts, myths, and symbols need to be accepted, which need to be modified, and which should be rejected.
6. The caste system must be dealt with diligently;<sup>25</sup> the concept of a model *guru* (teacher) is accepted.
7. We need Christians to promote the holistic development of their communities and nation, in particular the Christian community.
8. We need to stress that salvation is free but the Christian life is costly—be willing to pay the price of faithfulness and suffer.
9. Make local churches part of decision making processes for sustainable growth.
10. If we are willing to love and lay down our life for the welfare of the listener, it will not go to waste (2 Cor. 12:15).
11. The witness to Hindus must be by *all* laity and clergy of the local and the universal church.

### Conclusion

Witnessing to the Hindus and to the nations at large is the major responsibility of the church both individually and collectively. Our Great Commission is, "All

authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:18-20). We fulfil the Great Commission by following the Golden Rule, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7.12). The Great Commandment is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12.30).

Loving the Lord and witnessing to his people will serve the purpose of the blood of Christ. This blood was shed so we could both experience and share this good news with humanity, including Hindus, both in India and beyond. In turn, we will see this revelation fulfilled: “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9-10).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena: William Cary Library, 1992), 119.
- <sup>2</sup> Klaus K Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism: Second Edition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London: Unwin Books, 1961), 91.
- <sup>4</sup> Chaturvedi Badrinath, *Swami Vivekananda, the Living Vedanta* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2006), 266.
- <sup>5</sup> Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 7.
- <sup>6</sup> Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (Bombay: Thacker, 1946), 307.
- <sup>7</sup> Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 6.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. Also see Swami Siddhināthānanda, *Wealth and Wisdom of India* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1980), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> The chief eighteen Puranas explain the nature and functions of the Hindu triad: Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. See Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960), 635.

- <sup>10</sup> Ramayana, a story of Rama and Sita composed by sage Valmiki, consist of seven books and contains 24,000 verses. This epic exalts the character of Rama, a perfect man who bears suffering and self-denial with superhuman patience. See Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit*, 878.
- <sup>11</sup> Mahabharata is one of the epics consisting of eighteen books in about 215,000 lines composed by sage Vyasa. See Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit*, 798.
- <sup>12</sup> D. S. Sarma, *The Upanishads: An Anthology* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961), 4.
- <sup>13</sup> Monotheism: the belief in one God/divinity and God is the separate Creator of nature; polytheism: the belief in many gods; panentheism: nature is in God, God is part of nature but retains an independent identity; pantheism: the universe itself is divine, God is in everything, and nature is God; monism: God is nature, the belief that there is no difference between the creation and Creator; and atheism: belief in no god/divinity. Among others is henotheism: devotion to a single god while accepting the existence of others.
- <sup>14</sup> Chandogya Upanishad (Hyderabad: Sri Ramakrishna Matam, 2012), 10:9.
- <sup>15</sup> Wendy Doniger, trans., *The Rig Veda: An Anthology* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1981), 31. Also see Robert Antoine, et al., *Religious Hinduism: A Presentation and Appraisal* (Allahabad: St Paul Publications, 1968), 118-119.
- <sup>16</sup> Quoted by Ch. Francis, *Kriste Margam* (Guntur: Logos Printers & Publishers, n.d.), 93.
- <sup>17</sup> Swamy Jnanada Ananda, *Katha Upanishad* (Hyderabad: Sri Ramakrishna Matam, 2012), 1:10
- <sup>18</sup> Doniger, *Rig Veda*, 29-30. Quoted also in Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, 45.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in Bandi Srinivasa Rao, *Aa Kumarudevaru?* (Eluru: Bandi Publishers, 1975), 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Dharma means steadfast decree, statute, ordinance, or prescribed conduct, but not caste. See Monier-Williams, *The Sanskrit*, 510.
- <sup>21</sup> "India Religious Places," Maps of India, accessed February 9, 2015, <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/religious-places.htm>.
- <sup>22</sup> Swami Siddhinathananda, *Wealth and Wisdom*, 233.
- <sup>23</sup> The goal of Vivekananda is one's own liberation and the welfare of the world. For him, liberation, according to Advaita, is from 'avidya' or ignorance of self; *atman* is different than *Brahman*.
- <sup>24</sup> Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), 11.
- <sup>25</sup> The caste system in India is both a delicate and a tough issue. The term caste (*jati* or *Varna*) refers to color, race, family, and lineage. The government of India

says there will be no discrimination based on caste. Yet a child at the time of beginning primary school needs to fill out forms in which he/she must say their caste. The government still gives some reduced or free provisions based on caste. All the members of the church, regardless of caste, sing together, worship together, and share the Lord's Supper together. Yet at the time of marriage, each one prefers to get a mate from their own caste. In order to eradicate this social evil, the government, social agencies, and other enlightened groups of people need to work together beginning from the home, school, workplace, etc.

### Recommended Reading

- Antoine, Robert, et al. *Religious Hinduism: A Presentation and Appraisal*. Allahabad: St Paul Publications, 1968.
- Hedlund, Roger E. *Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: South Asian Perspectives*. Delhi: ISPCK, 2004.
- Samartha, S.J. *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology*. Bangalore: South Asia Theological Research Institute, 1994.
- Saraswati, Chandrasekharendra. *Introduction to Hindu Dharma, Illustrated*. Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2008.
- Singh, Chitrlekha and Prem Nath. *Hinduism*. New Delhi: Crest Publishing House, 2002.
- Viswanathan, Edakkandiyil. *Am I a Hindu The Hinduism Primer*. San Francisco: Halo Books, 1992.

### Study Questions

1. Hinduism is clearly the majority religion of India: however, consider the Indian “diaspora,” the multitudes of Indians in other countries, most of which are Hindus. Are there pockets of Indians near you? What is the population of Indian immigrants in your country? In your city?
2. The author lists numerous “points of contact,” or bridges to Hindus by Christians. Select and review two or three of these, and prepare yourself to “give a reason for the hope that you have” (I Pet. 3:15).
3. In the second sentence, the author refers to the stories of Christ, the messenger and the listener. How do the personal stories shared later in the chapter illustrate this principle? How would you share your story with a Hindu Dalit? Or a younger Hindu? Or a devoted Hindu?

