



The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

Lausanne Occasional Paper 14 Christian Witness to Hindus

The Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) are historically important documents that have emerged from global consultations involving widely recognized evangelical leaders. The LOPs have been placed in the Lausanne Website to make more accessible and understandable the historical context and development of the various aspects of world evangelization.

Report of the Consultation on World Evangelization

Mini-Consultation on Reaching Hindus

held at Pattaya, Thailand from 16-27 June, 1980

Sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

Prefatory Note

This report, Christian Witness to Hindus, is one of a series of Lausanne Occasional Papers (LOPs) emerging from the historic Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand, in June, 1980. The report was drafted by members of the "Mini-Consultation on Reaching Hindus," under the chairmanship of Mr. Satkheerthi Rao, who also served as International Co-ordinator of the pre-COWE study groups on Hindus.

The major part of this report went through a draft and a revised draft, which involved all members of the mini-consultation. It was also submitted to a wider "sub-plenary" group for comment, but the responsibility for the final text rests with the mini-consultation and its chairman.

The report is released with the prayer and hope that it will stimulate the church and individual members in reaching this large segment of the population.

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Introduction

We give thanks to God Almighty for his gracious act of salvation in Jesus Christ, which has made possible the entrance into the Kingdom of God for over 565 million Hindu people dispersed throughout the world, with the majority in the Indian sub-continent.

We rejoice in the fact that the saving Word of God preached faithfully by God's servants has brought about a Christian population of about 19 million people in India alone. However, we are conscious that God longs for the whole Hindu people to know Jesus Christ and live under his Lordship (Isa. 17:7, 8).

We regret that, after so many years of sincere effort by so many faithful people, the number of Christians in India is still less than 3% of the population. Further, the dispersed Hindus in other parts of the world have been largely neglected by the Christian communities.

We repent of the fact that we have been so pre-occupied with structural concerns of the church that we have neglected to make these structures the medium to facilitate the compassionate concerns of the people of God. We have thus obscured the reason for our existence, which is to be instruments of the King—bringing all peoples, structures, and institutions under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, reflecting his priorities.

We have forgotten that structures should serve the community and are dynamically alterable, and should not merely exist to be maintained by the community as rigid, obsolete entities. We further believe that, according to the New Testament pattern, submission of the structures to the community enhanced the evangelistic concerns.

We repent of our self pre-occupation and failure to see the Hindu as God sees him—a person created in God's own image who has every right to know who his Creator and Saviour is. Because of this failure, we have not whole-heartedly welcomed new converts into our churches. Consequently, many sincere seekers have felt rejected and have thus returned to Hinduism.

We repent of our arrogance which has kept us from following our Lord's example of incarnation. Because of this, we have failed to understand the Hindu and failed to develop an evangelical theology which is true to the biblical revelation, and which meets the needs of the Hindu.

We are ashamed to admit that Christ has attracted so many Hindus, and yet most have not come to love him and serve him as their Lord. The statement attributed to the late Dr. Ambedkar, as reported by Bishop Pickett, is a standing rebuke to us. Reportedly, he said, "When I read the gospels I find there an antidote for the poison Hinduism has injected into our souls. But when I look at the Christians I know, I find they are taken up with seeking their own self-interest and have no concern for their own people."

Unfortunately, we also are aware that the present planning and deploying of resources by our churches reflect the imbalance which we find in the secular world. In the Indian sub-continent most of the resources of manpower and finance are spent on the elite of the church population living in urban areas. However, 80% of India's population consists of rural people. Because of this imbalance, we have failed to realise that most church growth has taken place in rural areas in people movements to Christ.

We, therefore, call upon the churches interested in reaching world-wide to reorganise radically the use of their resources so as to serve the basically rural community. We call upon church leaders to be bold in their decisions regarding institutions and training of pastors and evangelists, so that the rural areas get the priority they rightly deserve.

We, the participants in the COWE Mini-Consultation on "Christian Ministry to Hindus," sincerely repent that we have failed to be a blessing to the Hindus among whom God has placed us. We desire that God should renew his church so that it reflects the love and concern of our Lord for the Hindus.

We rejoice in the activity of God in recent days, brought to light through conferences like COWE, that has led to a growing awareness of our responsibility for evangelization of the peoples of the earth and which calls us to a world-wide prayer commitment for world evangelization. As its first and most important step, we call upon the church world-wide, and especially the church in India, to mobilise intensive and believing prayer for the reaching of the 565.5 million Hindus in this generation. We strongly believe that God is calling his people to active involvement in evangelizing Hindus in every part of the world.

1. Historical Sketch and Contemporary Situation

a. The Hindu Population

The Aryans from Central Asia entered India in the 3rd century B.C. and settled on the banks of the river Indus. Their search for God resulted in the writing of the Vedas. Based on the Vedic scriptures was born the Aryan religion, which evolved into Hinduism. It absorbed everything, covering tribals and Dravidians. Hinduism dominated and built a strong sense of community in the Indian society, stratifying it into different castes. Wherever the Indian was taken, either to serve in plantations or in the British army, Hinduism followed, spreading far and wide.

Generally speaking, a Hindu is born, not made. Except for recent trends of conversion to Hinduism, by and large the growth of Hinduism has been biological. The world population is said to be 4.3 billion, of which Hindus make up over 565 million or 13 per cent of the total population. Of that number, 527 million live in India and 38 million have moved to countries such as the Middle East, United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, East Africa, Malaysia, Fiji, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. In India, 83 per cent of the total population is Hindu (527 million), whereas the Christian population in India is only 2.9 per cent (19 million).

[Website Editors' Note: The Hindu and world population figures were projected for the year 2000 as follows: Total world population 6.1 billion, world Hindu population 795 million (730 in India and 65 elsewhere) or 13% of the world total. In India, 72% (730 million) of the population is Hindu. The foregoing figures are from "The Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission" by D. Barrett and T. Johnson, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 22 No. 1, 1998. The Christian population in India was estimated to be 3% (30 million) by the India Center for Mission based at the U.S. Center for World Mission in Pasadena, California.]

b. The Hindu Religion

There is no one definition which explains Hinduism in its entirety. In fact, it is a conglomeration of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and practices varying from people to people and from region to region. For example, Aryan Hinduism of North India is radically different at many points from Dravidian Hinduism of South India. However, Hinduism can be understood in the following ways:

(i) *Philosophic Hinduism: This form of Hinduism is dominated by the authority of the Vedas and Upanishads (scriptures). Concerning the understanding of the Ultimate Reality, there are three popular schools of thought:*

- Advaita—non-dualism
- Dvaita—dualism
- Visishtadvaita —modified dualism

They teach from the ancient Vedas that there is a spark of divinity in man, and hence to call a man a sinner is blasphemous; there is, then, no need for a saviour.

(ii) *Religious Hinduism: Adherents to this type believe in the Puranas (epics) and in the Mahabharatha, Ramayana, and Bhagavad-Gita, saying these epics are revelations from God. There is a strong belief in avatars (incarnations of gods). Their theology is syncretistic. Man is at liberty to choose his own god from among a pantheon of 33 crores (330 million), and to worship any number of gods. Salvation may be attained in one of three ways:*

- Gnanamarga (way of knowledge)
- Bhaktimarga (way of devotion)
- Karmamarga (way of good deeds)

(iii) *Popular Hinduism: This form of Hinduism is far removed from philosophy and Brahmanism. The followers of this form are influenced by ancestral*

tradition, animal worship, temple cults, magic, exorcism, etc. They are indifferent to the authority of the Vedas and are concerned only about a god who protects them, blesses them, and makes them prosperous. The majority of Hindus adhere to this form.

(iv) *Mystic Hinduism:* Gurus with mysterious personal experiences are drawing many to themselves. The claims of these gurus are sensational, often asserting that they are avatars and that they have supernatural gifts of healing, ability to perform miracles, to read the inner thoughts of people, and to prophesy the future. Prominent among the gurus who have a mass following are Satya Sai Baba, Bal Yogeshwar, and Acharya Rajnesh. The Transcendental Meditation of Mahesh Yogi has drawn many disciples from India and other countries.

(v) *Tribal Hinduism:* This type is very much influenced by animism, spiritism, the occult, necromancy, and animal worship. The fear of the unknown exercises its instinctive dread over followers' minds.

(vi) *Secular Hinduism:* Those who belong to this group are generally nominal in their beliefs and indifferent to religious practices. Even the few religious customs that they follow are motivated by materialistic tendencies.

(vii) *Hindu Sects and Cults*

(a) *Sects:* Saivism, Shaktism, Tantrism, Vaishnavism, Ramaism, and Krishnaism. These have remained within Hinduism. Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, reform movements within Hinduism, became independent religions.

(b) *Cults:* The following have sweeping influence in many parts of India: Swami Ayyapa in Kerala, Murugan in Tamil Nadu, Venkateshwara in Tirupathi (Andhra Pradesh), Kali in Bengal, and Hanuman in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

(viii) *Modern Trends in Hinduism:* Although the Christian faith is claimed to have been brought to India in the first century A.D. by the Apostle Thomas, resulting in the formation of a Christian church, it remained introvert and did not spread. In the 16th century, Catholic missionaries, such as Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili, brought the gospel to the Hindus. After them came the Protestants in a floodstream, with various mission societies establishing churches, as people movements spread mostly into the lower category of Hindu community. The emphasis on higher education by Alexander Duff and succeeding missionaries led to a Hindu renaissance giving birth to Hindu Reform Movements such as Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Prarthana Samej. The formation of Hindu Missionary Movements, such as the Rama Krishna Mission followed.

A concept of mission is not one of the main tenets of Hinduism. But Hindu theologians, such as Vivekananda and Aurobindo, by their interpretation of the main teaching of Hinduism, have added this new missionary dimension. The missionary vision of some Hindus is posing a threat to Christian evangelistic activities. We now hear of cases of nominal Christians, as well as Hindu converts to Christianity, reverting to Hinduism. Further, western converts to Hinduism are being sent as Hindu missionaries to some parts of the world. The Hare Krishna Movement has a notable impact in many western countries. This movement has a big appeal to young people. In some western countries it has established centres for the propagation of this movement.

In conclusion, modern trends in Hinduism find expression in the Harijan Movement *, initiated and propagated by Mahatma Gandhi, in the missionary movement designed by Vivekananda, in a secular socialist ideology advocated by Jawaharlal Nehru, and in the militant communal sectarian groups such as Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS).

*Harijans, often called "untouchables," were called "children of God" by Mahatma Gandhi.

The post-independence Indian society has developed into a secular democracy. The agnostic leadership emphasised industrialisation, resulting in rapid secularisation, modernisation and westernisation. The urban population developed popular nominal Hinduism which leaves it open to new influences. The rural Hindu, oppressed by poverty and corruption, seeks a liberating gospel. The unrest caused by several philosophies and a weak political structure, has softened the Hindus within India for the gospel, even though the above varieties of Hinduism continue to prevail. Overseas Hindus are in a very unsettled, fluid state. In some countries of the world they are undergoing a period of great strain and change, which may influence their receptivity to the gospel.

2. Biblical Framework for Hindu Evangelization

a. Preamble

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became flesh within an Asian context. During the days of his flesh, he lived within a Hebraic cultural framework within this Asian context. He was poor. He walked among the villages and wept over the cities. He accepted social rejections and understood the fluctuating fortunes of leadership within a tangible human society. The Hindu can understand him.

Before such an understanding can be effected, however, Jesus Christ must be made known to the Hindu. In this effort to communicate Jesus Christ to the Hindu, the Indian Christian faces the tension between being faithful to the content of the Bible, and relating this content to the theological, philosophical, and religious context of the Hindu.

The resolution of this problem does not lie in interfering with the content of biblical truth, but in the proper use of the crucible of Hindu categories and needs in the process of communicating that truth.

This is not the first time for such an effort to be attempted because, as early as the 19th century A.D., many Christian congregations existed in South India within a culturally Hindu environment. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is relevant and relates to all human cultures. He can be made known to a Hindu in a traditionally Hindu culture in India, likewise to Hindus living outside of India.

b. Theological Perspective

The gospel is never proclaimed within a vacuum. India provides a particular context which influences the kind of communication we should pursue. Thus we need to examine the Indian context in the light of the scriptures, and see which aspects warrant our careful consideration in Christian communication. The following are some crucial factors which will influence Hindu evangelism:

(i) *Spirituality:* Hindus are a very religious people. An aura of holiness characterises every man who claims to be spiritual. They identify externals to be reflective of holiness. The Bible calls us to live a holy life (1 Peter 1: 16; Rom. 12:1, 2) and to keep our behaviour excellent among unbelievers so that they may glorify God (1 Peter 2:12; Matt. 5:16). The power of God through a transformed holy life will be a powerful influence on the Hindu.

(ii) *Community:* Human dignity stems from man being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27) and is reinforced by Christ's death for all (1 John 2:2). Christians are a human community. However, their equality before God is not affirmed within Indian society. Although people like to become Christians without crossing cultural boundaries, we believe that scripture demands spiritual unity of all believers. It is here that the functioning of the community of Jesus Christ in biblically relevant ways can be a formidable witness to the dignity that is restored in Christ. When true community is practised within the church it will prove to the world (John 13:35) our discipleship. Further, when the church participates in the lives of people through genuine love, our verbal messages will be validated (James 2:4, 26).

(iii) *Poverty:* Perhaps the starkest reality of populous India is her poverty. While we will do everything humanly possible to rectify this situation, in God's eyes a man's worth is not determined by poverty because he is made in the image of God. Christ not only identified with the poor; he was poor (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:7). Elsewhere, it is seen that God has a special heart for the poor (Prov. 14:31). This message has special relevance to the Hindu within the Indian context.

c. Theological Blocks

Four particular theological barriers to effective communication with Hindus should be highlighted:

(i) *Hindus in general are syncretistic* They believe that all religions lead to God, implying thereby that there is therefore no need to change from one religion to another. Indeed, Hindus find the very mention of change of religion by the Christian highly objectionable. Such demands must be presented with clarity and respect.

(ii) *The Hindu understanding of the concept of sin varies* from group to group and even from individual to individual (e.g., to some, sin is just committing bad deeds; to others, it is disobedience to one's conscience; to still others, it is mere selfishness; and to some, sin is just non-existent. Vivekananda said, "It is sin to call anyone a sinner.").

(iii) *The doctrine of Karma* You reap what you sow. Behaviour in the past determines fate in the present, and deeds in the present determine the future. The cycles of rebirths keep recurring till finally "moksha" (salvation) is attained. However, just as karma is a block, it is also a bridge.

(iv) *The doctrine of Salvation* This highlights the difficulty of terminology. Although the concept of salvation exists within Hinduism, its understanding as liberation from the cycle of rebirth is radically different from the Christian viewpoint.

d. Theological Bridges

Introduction: We must recognise that Hinduism revolves around a different centre than does Christianity, asking fundamentally different questions and supplying different answers. The use of any theological bridge, therefore, is fraught with difficulty, particularly if we attempt to use a specific term or concept to demonstrate that Christ is the fulfilment or crown of Hinduism.

No concept of Hinduism can be accepted into Christianity without change. By way of illustration, the following bridges can be grouped into two categories:

Points of Contact: Those concepts which require radical change of content:

(i) *The concept of God:* In evangelism among Hindus we are speaking into a pantheistic world view, and although clarification and re-definition are required, it is not necessary to defend the existence of God.

(ii) *Respect for Scripture:* The Hindu respect for the sacred writings can be developed in the context of the unique authority of the Bible. Unlike any other religious community, Hindus will listen attentively to an exposition of scripture. The sole authority of the Bible must be stressed without any compromise whatsoever.

(iii) *The person of Christ* The quality of Christ's relationship with people, his teachings (particularly the Sermon on the Mount), and his unique vicarious self-giving and suffering have a strong appeal to the Hindu. As the Christian communicator fills this respect for Christ with an understanding of the unique and absolute claim to be "the Word made flesh," a significant bridge may be built.

(iv) *The doctrine of karma:* While this doctrine is a barrier in terms of defining moksha (salvation), it also can serve as a bridge while communicating the gospel to the Hindu. The Hindu seeks to get free from the cycle of rebirth which his sin causes. He must be told of the Saviour Jesus Christ, who by his vicarious suffering and death on the cross triumphed over sin, and has taken upon himself the penalty of the sins of mankind.

Points of Caution and Clarification: Concepts which require a radical conceptual redefinition:

(i) *Christianity and Hinduism differ radically in their understanding of history:* We should use this dissimilarity as a bridge, stressing the purposes of God in time, creation, the historical resurrection, and the coming judgment.

(ii) *Hindu Spirituality:* There is a deep desire in the Hindu for spiritual experience (anubhava). This is noticeable, for example, among the Bhakti Margis. The emphasis on meditation, austerity, and the willingness to accept physical suffering are commendable aspects of the Hindu way of life. At the same time, however, the Christian communicator must stress the degree of personal freedom that comes in Christian worship, and the Christian understanding that spirituality is not an end in itself, nor is it merely by spiritual exercises that one inherits the Kingdom. Essentially, the value of this bridge lies in the importance of the spiritual qualities of the evangelist or communicator of the gospel in gaining credibility.

(iii) *Incarnation:* Hindu beliefs in the intervention of God in human history through avatars must be radically redefined in Christian communication. Avatars enter the world to destroy sinners, and this requires repeated avatars. The incarnation of Christ is unique, historical, sufficient for all time, and is rooted in the love of God, saving sinners.

3. Hindrances to Evangelization of Hindus

a. Socio-Cultural Issues

Western culture has been injected into Indian culture as an acceptable form of Christianity; thus, it appears to non-Christians, this alienates them to a large extent. The following are some of the issues that have alienated Hindus and proved a hindrance to evangelism:

- (i) Food habits among Christians which are totally contrary to Hindu religious sentimentsâ€"i.e., beef eating.
- (ii) The Christian way of worship which is predominantly non-Indian.
- (iii) Excessive social mingling of boys and girls in Christian families and in religious activities.
- (iv) The practice of Christians in forbidding the use of vermilion ** (*tilak, kum kum buttu*).
- (v) Christianity appears as a foreign religionâ€"i.e., western.
- (vi) Christianity is seen as a threat to Indian culture and identity, because of the prevailing thought that "Indian" means Hindu."
- (vii) The wrong notion that Christians are not patriotic.
- (viii) The wrong notion that only "untouchables" (Harijans) embrace Christianity
- (ix) The fact that caste is the Hindu's strongest forte of social security. Conversion to Christianity destroys this, leading to:
 - > Excommunication from the community
 - > Damage to family reputation
 - > Termination of marital prospects
 - > Physical assault and persecution
- (x) Superstition: Many Hindus live under the constant fear of invoking the wrath of the Kula Devata (family god), if they accept the gods of other religions.

**a red spot on the forehead

b. Economic Issues

- (i) The fear of loss of property upon conversion to Christianity.

- (ii) Loss of privileges and position in society, because of the non-recognition of caste distinction in the Christian faith.
- (iii) The misunderstanding that Christians are a middle-class people. Hence low-caste people hesitate to mingle with Christians even socially.
- (iv) The wrong understanding that the Indian church is quite rich, supported by the influx of foreign money. This notion is partly due to the huge, widely publicized gospel crusades conducted by foreign evangelists in our cities.
- (v) The loss of economic privileges e.g., withdrawal of financial aid by the government to Harijan students converted to Christianity.

c. Methodological Issues

- (i) We should enunciate theology in Indian categories so that the Hindu can understand the gospel.
- (ii) We must develop a truly Christian world view consistent with the Indian context.
- (iii) While presenting the gospel, we must be aware of the fact that the Hindu understands the doctrine of God, man, sin, and salvation in a way entirely different from the biblical doctrine.
- (iv) We need to review our communications approaches. In our presentation of the gospel we must:
 - (a) Speak to the context of the listener.
 - (b) Be deeply involved in the life of the listener.
 - (c) Grapple openly with the problems, questions, and needs of our listener.
 - (d) Present our message in such a way that it answers those problems, questions and needs.
 - (e) Speak in such a way that we demonstrate love and a deep respect for the listener, and his questions. There is no room in our evangelism for a condescending attitude.
 - (f) Recognise that the response of a person to the gospel has both intellectual and emotional elements. Much gospel communication in the past has emphasised a rational response and has failed to appeal to the heart. This statement must not be interpreted as an endorsement of emotional gospel appeals, but a recommendation that our message must speak to the whole person, mind and heart.
 - (g) Recognise the fact that our listener lives in a particular social context. The response of an individual is undoubtedly affected by the attitudes of those around him. As we become aware of the specific social environment in which we communicate, principles of evangelism will emerge. Our concern must go beyond the individual response to understand the broader questions related to the acceptance of Christ by the entire society.
 - (h) Communicate the gospel through indigenous methods such as bhajans, drama, dialogue, discourse, Indian music, festival processions, etc.
 - (i) Be loving and compassionate, and adopt a life-style that is contextualised and communicative.
 - (j) Recognise what Hindus consider essential qualities in a spiritual leader (guru) that authenticate a person to be:
 - > willing to wait
 - > willing to mortify his body and desires
 - > willing to suffer pain
 - > willing to fast

Christian leaders with this type of spiritual qualification are a powerful means of communication.

4. Case Studies of God's Action in Christian Ministry to Hindus

a. Family head responds through unusual circumstances

The principle of "in contact family-to-family witnessing" works effectively within high-caste Hindu communities. In Salem District, Tamil Nadu, the Udaiyar Community became responsive to the gospel through a series of unusual happenings. A widespread religious movement was accepted by many in the community, and was led by a man who claimed to be god himself. His teachings and life seemed so attractive that many followed him and surrendered much of their wealth to him. Then one day "the god" died. The scandal resulted in a government investigation and the group disbanded. When a Christian missionary contacted the head of a family, many months after this, he responded to the gospel, because he realised that the irrefutable teachings of "the god who had died," who was the leader of the group, really came from the New Testament. The imposter had used the New Testament without acknowledging it. The new believer remained in the main stream of his family and community. As a result, many of his family members have believed and have been baptised. The nurture of their believers has been organised in terms of creating a believing community of their own, called "Jesus' family," wherein the alien structures of denominations have not been imposed.

Now the Holy Spirit is building a bridge between the Udaiyar and the Lingayath with whom they live in continued community, and as many as 100 monthly baptisms are common happenings.

b. Miraculous healing convinces many

A Hindu lady, Thirupathamma, was hospitalised with a serious heart problem, a few months before her delivery. The doctors expected complications during labour, and even feared she might die. A Christian doctor visited her daily, prayed for her, and explained the gospel. As she opened her heart to the gospel, she had a vision of Jesus giving her a baby girl and assuring her of a safe delivery. Not only did she have a safe delivery and a healthy baby girl, but her faith increased so that she stopped taking medicines, trusting the Lord to heal her of her cardiac problem. A checkup a few months later showed her to be completely healed.

Thirupathamma's husband, upon seeing his wife healed, and listening to the gospel, accepted the Lord a few months later; and both husband and wife were baptised on the same day. Through Thirupathamma's life and witness, all her children and their partners became Christians. Through her faith, prayer life, and consistent witness, she is influencing the whole village for Christ.

c. The Church's social concern softens the community

A certain church in Kuala Lumpur helped a man who had accepted the Lord to build a small house in a squatter area. This man, when approached, was willing to open his home for Christian work.

The evangelism group of the church then invited children for Sunday School in his home. The response was poor. One day a family with three retarded and undernourished children was brought to their attention. The father had left the family. The mother worked, doing menial jobs. The family was treated like outcasts in that community.

The evangelism group became involved in taking care of the children, cleaning the home, providing food, clothing, and medicines. This touched the community. The non-Christians saw the concern of the Christians. Their attitude changed, with the result that the Sunday School attendance increased. When the Christians invited the parents for a fellowship tea, they had the opportunity to communicate the gospel to them. Sewing classes for the women have been started to help

the people, and with the hope that eventually they will be saved, and finally win their whole families to the Lord.

d. Repeated exposure to the Gospel bears fruit

Dehilla was born in Kenya, son of a Brahmin. The family moved to England after 11 years. Being devout Hindus, they followed all the rituals customary to practising Brahmins.

Dehilla first became interested in Jesus Christ through a tract he picked up at a fair. The words, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," printed under a picture of Christ on the cross, impressed him. But he felt that this was the God of the white man and so seemed unfair. "Why should ugly people have such a kind God?" he thought.

Sunday School was Dehilla's second contact. But his father took him out of it the moment he realised his son was learning about Jesus Christ, and not about English grammar.

The next contact was an Indian Christian girl who took him to a Bible study in the home of a missionary. He was amazed to find so many Asian Christians at this Bible study. John 3:3 and 1 John 1:9 convinced him of his need for a Saviour, and he decided to follow Christ. Hungrily he studied the Bible, and Christ began sorting out his wrong attitudes. He ceased to worship the family idols and stopped his visits to the temple.

His parents were both hurt and annoyed. Going to a Christian meeting has become very difficult, and Dehilla studies his Bible in secret. But the Word of God gives him comfort, and he continues to pray for his parents and other Asian people who do not know the Lord.

e. Christian witness and worship crosses social divisions

A village in Dharmapuri district in Tamil Nadu has a population of about 4,500 people. This village is made up of seven different groups, including Udaiyars, Gownders, Kasu, Chettiars, and several low-caste groups.

An indigenous missionary movement has been active in this village for the last 10 years, and many people are coming to the Lord Jesus Christ. They have built a church on the outskirts of the village where converts from all seven groups are worshipping together. This new spiritual community is gradually transcending the existing traditional structured communal system in the village. A new church building holding 1,000 people is under construction. More people are led to the Lord in this village by the converts than by the missionaries.

f. A period of teaching and discussion precedes reaping in high-caste community

The first contact with a small Reddy (high-caste) community living in northern Andhra Pradesh was made three years ago. Regular teaching began through scripture memorisation and songs. Various issues such as family ties, caste, the objections of older members of the community, and marriage prospects for their children, were thoroughly discussed at family and community levels. In December 1979, 16 people were baptised as family units. The first to respond were young couples, followed later by older members; and, a few months after, by the oldest man, who was very much revered in the community.

g. Initial contact through students

The first contact with a rural Neethakani people in Andhra Pradesh was made through boys from that group, studying in a school in a nearby town and living in government-run hostels.

When the boys returned home during the holidays, they shared their faith with their parents. As a result, the people of that community invited missionaries to come and speak about Christ. Discussions, for example, about the power of the Creator God (and a practical example of such a power encounter) bore fruit; and 21 people from that group, mostly as families, were baptised in one village in December 1979.

5. Strategic Planning For Evangelization of Hindus

a. Preamble and Principle

In the context of the Indian society, which is deeply divided and fragmented, the unity of God's people will proclaim God's power to all men. Our strategies for evangelism must therefore contribute to God's purposes for his people—the visible presence of the Body of Christ throughout the world.

There is strong biblical support for viewing all peoples as living in unique social contexts and understanding the plan of God as the establishment, in those contexts, of his church, from among all caste, class, economic, and social groups. Such a united visible presence of the Body of Christ is a major goal of evangelization.

Consequently, our evangelistic strategy must view people in specific societal groups, defined within geographical units, not by social or cultural factors. It is helpful to view India as composed of many hundreds of thousands of such communities in the villages (nagars, purams, varams, giris, etc.). God's purpose is that the church planted in each community be a true demonstration of the power of the gospel to break down all human barriers. We are committed to "the whole gospel to the whole man." The gospel must reach each individual and touch every dimension of community, social, economic, religious, and political life.

Our commitment to evangelism must seek to reach people in community. We must, therefore, be sensitive to the complexity of communal acceptance. Two problems present particular difficulties. In our enthusiasm for individual conversion we may erect barriers to acceptance among the majority. If, as frequently occurs, the first converts are those who are socially isolated for one reason or another from the community, premature reaping may create serious barriers to the establishment of the Body of Christ in that area. We must exercise patience as we sow the seed, create a hunger, and work for the conversion of the opinion leaders in the community.

The acceptance of Christ by a community lies in the life of the converts. The diffusion of the gospel throughout a community inevitably takes time. The initial enthusiasm of the converts may erode. As nominalism grows within the church, the resultant loss of vitality will eat away at the credibility of Christ's Body, the church.

A continually revived church is an essential—if not the supreme need—in our strategy, if the Body of Christ, living as a vital testimony to the power of Christ, is to be planted in every area in each town and city throughout India and the Indian diaspora.

The church, therefore, is both our primary goal, our strategy, and our resource in evangelization.

b. Rural Evangelism

Eighty per cent of India's people live in rural areas. There are about 600,000 villages. There has been great neglect of rural evangelism. Rural Hindus tend to be more religious than the materialistic-minded city dwellers and may be more receptive to the gospel. Evangelists must be trained for rural areas in their own vernacular and should adopt a suitable life-style.

The evangelist working among rural Hindus must have a call and commitment to this work and must depend on the Holy Spirit to guide him to the most appropriate strategy.

(i) As far as possible, churches must encourage converts to continue to relate to their own community and to win it to Christ.

(ii) Use scripture passages which illustrate and state Christ's authority and power over sickness, physical need, and evil spirits.

(iii) Do not hesitate to pray and believe for the demonstration of Christ's supernatural power over disease, and for deliverance from the fear and domination of evil spirits. These power encounters validate the truth of Christ and the power of his Name.

- (iv) Follow a suitable life-style, which helps identification with villagers.
- (v) Use indigenous forms of communication, such as drama, bhajans and katha, sat sang (dialogue), etc.
- (vi) Use audio-visual aids, literature, house-to-house visits, and adult literacy programmes.
- (vii) Challenge local churches to identify receptive communities and become involved in reaching them.
- (viii) Form prayer cells among new converts to keep before them the vision and burden to evangelize their own people.
- (ix) Conduct regional seminars on rural evangelism for laymen.

c. Urban Evangelism

In our attempt to communicate the gospel to the city dwellers, it has been ascertained that the following categories of Hindus have an open response to Christ:

- > Slum dwellers who belong most to the Harijan community.
- > Young people in schools and universities.
- > Unemployed young people desperately in search of jobs.

With regard to the methods of communication, the following have been found fruitful:

- > Open air/street preaching
- > Tract distribution
- > Radio evangelism
- > Public gospel crusades
- > Public healing campaigns
- > Small group retreats/evening meetings.

Regarding strategy, a systematic follow-up programme must be designed for each of the above methods, and especially for public crusades. Hundreds of Hindus respond to the altar call, but few are baptised. Hence the call for a systematic, follow-up programme.

d. Ministry to Women

- (i) High priority should be given to ministry among Hindu women, since they are the custodians of the faith.
 - (a) The God-given gifts, talents, and abilities of women should be recognised by the church, so that the women can be involved in various aspects of the ministry to a much greater measure than occurs at present.
 - (b) The local churches should motivate and encourage Christian women to work chiefly among Hindu women in a holistic ministry using bridges like the following:
 - (1) Christian festivals
 - (2) Sewing and cooking classes
 - (3) Adult literacy classes
 - (4) Hospital visitation
 - (5) Neighbourhood children's work
 - (6) Neighbourhood Bible studies
 - (c) Adequate teaching materials on the biblical teaching on women should be provided by:
 - (1) compiling existing materials
 - (2) writing of additional materials
 - (d) These materials should be used by the churches in a teaching programme, preferably including men and women jointly.
 - (e) Christian conferences, especially pastors' conferences, should include both husband and wife as delegates.
 - (f) Rejected and neglected groups, such as prostitutes and prisoners, should be a vital target for evangelism.

(ii) *Ministry to women students:* When female Hindu college students become Christians, they often receive no nurture after leaving college. Hence, they easily slip back into the religious and cultural customs of their homes.

- a) The church should be made aware of this, and special emphasis should be placed on serious intercessory prayer for them.
- (b) Those who have won them to Christ must consider seriously their responsibility for constant nurture.
- (c) Christian homes in their own community should be sought out for the purpose of spiritual nurture and establishment, including marriage arrangements if necessary.
- (d) Dislocation from their homes should be avoided, unless found absolutely necessary for these girls.

e. Student Evangelism

There are great opportunities among university, as well as high school, students. The Christian church should take advantage of this opening by effective reach out.

- (i) Responsive groups:
 - (a) Students from a traditional Hindu home appear open to the gospel due to the breakdown of their religiosity, while in the secular atmosphere of the college/university.
 - (b) Students coming from a rural background to study in a city, are lonely, and open to Christian influence through friendship.
 - (c) The students from other language areas studying in linguistically strange areas are open for friendship from Christian youth (e.g., a Bengali North Indian studying in an engineering/medical/technical college in Hyderabad).
 - (d) International students are another group open to new influences (e.g., Malaysian, Iranian, and African students in India).
- (ii) Suggested strategy:
 - (a) Keep an open home: adopt international students as your own; take them to church/picnics, etc.
 - (b) Arrange for international student get-togethers.
 - (c) Train Christian students to develop close friendships with Hindu students.

- (d) Conduct special Bible studies for them.
- (e) Conduct competitions and social programmes involving such students with Christian students (e.g., debates, games, slum work, etc.).
- (f) Visit them in their hostels.
- (g) Help them financially when they are genuinely needy.
- (h) Develop a sensitivity to the various dimensions of student needs.

f. Diaspora

The main concern of the recently established Fellowship of South Asian Christians (organised at the Overseas Indians Congress on Evangelism, June 9-15, 1980) is the evangelization of South Asians living abroad. This should become a dynamic force for evangelism of Asians, many of whom are Hindus, scattered in countries other than their homeland.

g. Social Concern

The Bible teaches the Christian's responsibility to meet the need of the total man. Historically, the Christian church has shown great social concern towards the poor and oppressed masses among Hindus. Today some political leaders increasingly charge that Christian social action uses the poverty of the people as a means of exploitation to gain converts. Evangelical relief organisations nevertheless should not hesitate, because of fear of reaction, to present the claims of Christ when they meet human physical need.

Strategy for social concern:

- (i) Recruit social workers who are spiritually motivated and interested in evangelism.
- (ii) Avoid the danger of making "rice converts."
- (iii) Do not give room for suspicion on the part of the government or the public.
- (iv) Practise a servant leadership (John 20:21).
- (v) Whenever possible, relate social service to evangelism:
 - (a) Christian compassion can be rightly expressed only by Christian believers. They alone will seek to express the concerns of Jesus Christ for the salvation of those served.
 - (b) Long-term planning and budgeting of the local church for social service should reflect the priority of the evangelization of the non-Christian community around them.
 - (c) The local church should match the compassionate action of other more remotely located believing communities in social service in their area, by personal participation through the use of their own time, treasure, and talent.
 - (d) Social service should be planned to help increase self-reliance and the ability of those benefitted, to help themselves.

6. Resources and Tools for the Task

a. The Middle-Class Church

India's population of over 600 million divides itself approximately into 10 million wealthy, 90 million middle class, and 500 million below poverty level. Within the last group are 250 million who are hopeless and separated from any contact with any level above the poverty level. Among these 500 million, Jesus Christ is a "natural."

The church is interwoven in all these layers of society. But the 90-million layer is articulate and in contact with the poor in a broadside contact. They also cut right across all of India's divisions—caste, language, region, etc. The church within this section will be most responsive to the call of mission because they are open to change and are change agents themselves.

Small groups brought together for action, transcending India's divisions, produce the quality of integrity without which no authentic communication can take place.

Therefore, small groups of born-again Christians among this middle class can be formed with three main purposes:

- (i) to fight sin at every level
- (ii) to fear no judgement bar except the judgement bar of God
- (iii) to invest time, treasure, and talent as custodial responsibilities and hence accountable to God.

They must then:

- (a) affirm Jesus Christ as the Absolute, and thus transcend all social and cultural limitations
- (b) use the categories of the gospel to address society with radical claims and
- (c) use the insight of born-again sociologists to go to the root-cause of the symptoms of sickness in society and then fight it unitedly. This will not only unite the church into action but will lend credibility with the poor. They must communicate to the Hindu at every level, in all contexts, within the broadside relationship in the society.

Thus the church, without dividing the Body of Jesus Christ, will utilise creatively the sociological diversities within one Indian Christian community (the believing human community) to communicate with the diversities of the non-church human communities around her—without further accentuating the diabolical diversity already existing within it.

b. Mass Media

(i) *Literature:* Literature distribution is one of the most important methods of communication. The political ideologies of the present day are on the march, and their first method of attack is through literature. This is true of communism, religious cults, and heresies. Therefore, Christians should be in the forefront in using literature in order to reach Hindus for Christ. Such literature should be written and printed in India.

"Christian Groups," formed as a result of the distribution of gospels by Every Home Crusade, are proving to be a distinctly fruitful ministry. In many villages, totally without Christians or churches, many Hindus have accepted the Lord. These new converts are formed into small groups in homes for fellowship and Bible study. Periodically IEHC workers visit these groups and give them biblical teaching. Natural leaders from within the group are planned to take on leadership eventually. At present, over 1,500 groups of this kind are the result of this type of literature ministry.

(ii) *Radio Evangelism*: Where the percentage of illiteracy is very high, literature evangelism has very little effect. Therefore, radio evangelism is a real boon in reaching the illiterate. Radio, which earlier was the rich man's luxury, has become a common man's companion. People are eager to listen.

When a particular programme is beamed toward any particular country, the background of the country in terms of the religion and culture must be carefully looked into. Any English programme to India will mostly appeal to people in the cities. Only a programme prepared after careful audience research will produce results. For example, the vernacular programmes prepared by Trans World Radio and broadcast on medium wave have revolutionised the broadcasting scene in India. In most parts of the country, people, as they tune in to medium wave, will invariably stumble on these Christian broadcasts. Since they are powerful, clear, and in the regional language, they arrest attention and retain attention to the very end. The language used, particularly in Telugu and Hindi, is appealing and clear, with the result that people have developed a lasting interest in these programmes. Radio programmes must be adapted to the actual spiritual and cultural needs of the people, in a language and style through which people can readily receive the truth and respond to it.

(iii) *Film Ministry*: India's commercial film industry has ranked highest in the world for years. According to government statistics, 10 million people visit the cinema daily. Christians should take note and meet people where they are, using this viable tool for evangelism. Systematic follow-up is essential.

(iv) *Television*: Television is new and popular with the middle class and upper class in cities. Christian programmers should be keen to take the various opportunities offered by Government, especially on Christian festival days.

(v) *Indigenous Media*: Many folk media are rooted in Indian culture and used extensively for secular purposes, especially in rural areas. Their popularity should be noted, and ways and means explored as to how these can be used, adapted if necessary, for effective evangelism.

c. Weddings, funerals, and festivals

Many Hindus attend Christian weddings and funeral services. These services may be used as opportunities to teach Hindus the biblical doctrines of creation, man, life, life beyond death, etc.

Christian festivals, such as Christmas, Easter, and others should be celebrated in a way that clearly spells out the meaning of the festivals—thus opening the possibility of the presentation of the gospel to Hindu spectators, many of whom would enthusiastically participate.

d. Dialogue

The use of dialogue in reaching people has to be carefully considered. This method paves the way for a sharing of experiences, and provides an opportunity for frank interchange in conversation. It provides an atmosphere in which both parties can understand each other, and creates a mutual bond of friendship and appreciation. However, it must not end there. It must lead to proclaiming Christ as Lord.

This method finds a ready reception among the intelligentsia and in western countries where there is a strong Hindu influence. The purpose of dialogue should be carefully and constantly borne in mind. It should not simply end in dialogue.

e. Seminars

It is natural that we need to know the background of the people among whom God has placed us, and to whom God has commanded us to be his witnesses. It is a matter of common experience that most Christians do not have adequate knowledge of the Hindu religion, thus hindering effective communication. It is, therefore, essential that seminars giving instruction regarding the Hindu religion and culture should be held in order to inform and equip Christians for effective evangelism.

f. Diaspora

The main concern of the recently established Fellowship of South Asian Christians (organised at the Overseas Indians Congress on Evangelism, June 9-15, 1980) is the evangelization of South Asians living abroad. This should become a dynamic force for evangelism of Asians, many of whom are Hindus, scattered in countries other than their homeland.

7. Commitment

a. Co-operation between Church and Para-Church Organisations

There is urgent need for close co-operation between the churches and the para-church organisations involved in the evangelization of Hindus.

- (i) All churches and agencies should emphasise this co-operation in evangelization.
- (ii) The para-church organisation must establish rapport and a relationship for nurture and care with the local churches before beginning its ministry.
- (iii) Personal denominational interest should not influence the choice of the local church to which new converts are referred for follow-up and nurture. The concept of "Christ Groups" may be recognised.
- (iv) Churches and para-church organisations must accept each other. Attitudes of superiority-inferiority on the part of churches and agencies must be dealt with.
- (v) Co-operation between church and agencies must be encouraged in the use of personnel and facilities.
- (vi) Agencies working in the same field should be encouraged to meet together regularly.

b. Mobilisation of the Church World-wide for Prayer for Hindu People

We cannot overemphasise the importance of individual and corporate prayer in reaching Hindus. The church is tempted to depend on strategies and methods alone. This is a real danger. Without prayer, all else will fail.

Therefore, we must mobilise the church world-wide to "stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22:30; Isa. 59:16; 11 Sam. 12:23) through intensive, believing, and corporate prayer for Hindu peoples. We believe that only within the context of such prayer should we develop and carry out any other evangelistic strategies.

We recommend that this prayer thrust be developed community-to-community for a specific Hindu people-group in the following ways:

- (i) We should mobilise churches inside India to form prayer groups which "adopt" specific people groups as their personal focus in prayer. Their primary commitment to the Lord will be to pray for their adopted community until a cluster of evangelizing churches is planted among them. The primary responsibilities of these prayer groups should include:
 - (a) Regular and intensive prayer meetings for the Hindu world generally, and their people group specifically. They should pray for spiritual bondage to be broken (2 Cor. 4:3-4; Acts 26:18), and for many to come to the Lord (Matt. 9:36-38). Further, as soon as evangelistic work begins within the people group, they should pray for the missionaries there (Col. 4:2-3).
 - (b) Regular study and discussion to increase their understanding of the adopted community, fostering informed prayer and leading to evangelistic strategy.

(c) Attempts to impress upon other Christians, churches, and mission structures the need for prayer and evangelism for their people group, and for other groups of the Hindu world. They should continually encourage the formation of other prayer groups.

(d) Faithful outreach to Hindus living in the vicinity of prayer group members.

(e) Teaching on stewardship of resources.

(f) Readiness to respond, should God call out some of their own number in answer to prayer, to become indigenous missionaries to the people group.

(ii) We should mobilise churches outside India to form similar prayer groups, whose commitment and responsibilities are identical to that outlined above. This is critical. Reaching Hindus demands the prayer concern of the church world-wide.

(iii) We should call on some international, evangelical structure to co-ordinate this mobilisation of prayer for Hindu peoples, along the following lines:

(a) To co-ordinate mission research organisations inside and outside India in preparing *portfolios* on Hindu people groups. These portfolios should have sufficient depth to make prayer personal, manageable, and specific. They may also form a basis for discovering new evangelistic strategies in answer to prayer. These portfolios should be updated regularly by additional research, as well as by reports on answers to prayer already made. Every prayer group should have access to the portfolio on its adopted community.

(b) Where possible, prayer groups inside and outside India, which are focused on the same people group, should be linked in communication. This will foster mutual encouragement, the sharing of information, and accountability. It may also release resources to fulfill the evangelistic strategies God reveals.

8. Conclusion

a. *The Hindu Quest*

The Hindu quest for peace (shanti) and bliss is so overwhelming that he is willing to exert extreme effort in a relentless search to find this. Christ, as the author and giver of peace, with the promise of heavenly bliss, provides ample incentive for the Hindu to look into the Christian gospel of peace with God.

b. *Love Dynamic*

Principles of love, to become meaningful, must be personalised within a given context. The incarnation is the model for this (John 3:16). The communicator to the Hindu must first feel and know and respond to this intense love of God for the Hindu. The love of God for the Hindu provides the reason for the relentless search to understand the Hindu and identify with him. The communicator's love for Jesus Christ is the rationale for continued obedience to love, even when it seems unreasonable to do so. You cannot question the intentions behind the demands of Calvary love (John 15:14).

The reaching of the Hindu is one of the greatest challenges to the people of God in this generation. To this end we call for:

(i) Personal and corporate intercession for the evangelization of Hindu people groups all over the world.

(ii) Personal and corporate sacrificial giving to support this evangelization.

(iii) The acceptance of Christ's call to personal involvement at every opportunity for such evangelism.

(iv) The mobilisation of the loving concern, intercession, and financial resources from the world-wide body of Christ.

9. Closing Concern

We have waited on the Lord and have used the best insights among us to produce the preceding statements. They are not in any way exhaustive nor adequate, but they do seek to alert the earnest Christian, seeking to reach unreached Hindu people groups, concerning some points of contact and concern.

Having said that, we know that reaching any "people group" for Christ cannot be merely academic; and we cannot, and must not, place our total confidence in correct words and statements, but upon the living Lord who seeks all Hindus. We must be aware that the Holy Spirit who has gone before us, is alongside us and guides us, and alone can reveal Jesus Christ (I Cor. 12:3). Without him we cannot succeed (John 15:5).

Appendix A

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