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ABSTRACT

ASHRAM: A CONTEXTUALIZED MODEL FOR DISCIPLING

THE HINDUS OF TAMIL NADU

by

Poovelingam R. Solomon

Adviser: Bruce Lee Bauer

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Report

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: ASHRAM: A CONTEXTUALIZED MODEL FOR DISCIPLING THE
HINDUS OF TAMIL NADU

Name of researcher: Poovelingam R. Solomon

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Bruce Lee Bauer, D.Miss.

Date completed: December 1993

Problem

"Make disciples of all nations" is the commission
Christ gave His disciples before His ascension. In
obedience to this command, the gospel has been preached in
India since the arrival of Apostle Thomas in A.D. 51. For
the past four hundred years Christian missionaries have
tried various methods to reach the Hindus, with little
success. According to a recent census, 82.64 percent of the
population of India still remains Hindu, with only 2.43
percent adhering to Christianity. Therefore, discipling
Hindus still remains a great challenge to the Church in
India.

The institutional and social-gospel approaches followed by Christian missions have brought nominal converts, mainly from low caste groups who previously followed animism or popular Hinduism. Consequently, the Church in India is confronted with the problem of finding a suitable approach to disciple the Hindus.

Method

This project approaches discipleship in India from a contextual perspective. Very few missionaries or their paid evangelists have adopted the local cultural and religious forms because of their fear of syncretism. This project, however, has taken a contextual approach with the belief that local forms can be adopted, while still preserving Christian meanings and without falling into the trap of syncretism.

Part One of this paper lays down a theological foundation by presenting arguments in favor of contextualization and developing a contextual theology of discipleship for India on the basis of Scripture, Church history, and Indian cultural traditions. Since this project focuses on the Hindus of Tamil Nadu, the culture and religion of the Tamil people are also examined in Part One.

Part Two of this paper deals with the practical aspect of discipleship followed by Jewish and Christian communities, and also followed in Christian and Hindu ashrams. Part Two also includes an in-depth look at certain key concepts of the ashram model.

Results

An ashram model is developed in Part Two in order to suggest a viable approach to disciple the Hindus of Tamil Nadu. The structure and function of the ashram are explained with an emphasis on spirituality.

Conclusions

The ashram model is more effective than the traditional evangelistic methods in bringing Hindus to Christ because it is an indigenous model which meets the Hindus at their deep level of spiritual need.

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

ASHRAM: A CONTEXTUALIZED MODEL FOR DISCIPLING

THE HINDUS OF TAMIL NADU

A Project Report

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

Adviser,
Bruce L. Bauer

Dean,
SDA Theological Seminary

Jon L. Dybdahl

Steven P. Vitrano

May 25, 1994
Date approved

This project is dedicated to three individuals:

Pastor A. J. Wessel (now deceased)
Who ministered to my spiritual needs at the time of my
conversion

Dr. William G. Johnsson
Who valued my aspirations, innovative thinking, and vision
during my theological training at Spicer Memorial College

Dr. Samuelraj Pakkianathan
Who constantly encouraged me to pursue my
vision of a Christian ashram

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I thank God for His guidance in my life and in my pursuit of discipling the Hindus.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Bruce Bauer, the chairman, for his assistance, advice, and guidance in developing this project. I also express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Jon Dybdahl for advising me to relate the ashram model to Adventist tradition. My appreciation is also extended to the third reader, Dr. Steven P. Vitrano for his participation at the oral defense.

My special thanks to Dr. C. Raymond Holmes, director of the ministry program, for his support. I also want to thank Bonnie Proctor, dissertation secretary, for correcting the manuscript.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

I am a convert from the Saivite Hindu tradition of
Tamil Nadu, India. After accepting Christ in June 1960, I
committed my life to sharing the gospel with Hindus. In
order to accomplish that task, I went to Spicer Memorial
College to receive theological training.

During my college days I started giving serious
thought to finding proper ways of reaching Hindus with the
gospel message. I became more and more interested in
studying new ways of approaching Hindus. The traditional
methods of evangelism that I was learning, such as public
preaching and running schools and hospitals for the purpose
of proselytism, did not seem to be effective ways of
bringing Hindus to Christ. After reading such books as
Christ of the Indian Road and Missionary Methods: St. Paul's
or Ours, I came to realize that I had to take a serious
indigenous approach to discipleship in India. In this
context, the ashram model proposed by Stanley Jones appealed
to me. Ever since I have studied and explored the
possibilities of starting an ashram.

Later on, after becoming a minister, I visited a few

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Christian ashrams in Tamil Nadu and learned more about them. The decision to start a Christian ashram continued to brew in my mind. After coming to the U.S. for continued studies, I read more books and articles on methods of approaching Hindus. I became convinced that Hindus would respond positively to the message of Christ if that message was communicated through ashrams.

Further, my studies at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Calvin Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary helped me to reaffirm my conviction that the local culture needs to be utilized in the communication of the gospel. Books such as <u>Understanding Church Growth</u> by Donald McGavran and <u>Christianity in Culture</u> by Charles Kraft helped me understand more about the value of the hearer's culture. As a result, I planned to develop an ashram model that would be relevant to the Hindus of Tamil Nadu.

I found that ashrams had been used as a way of communicating religious truths and experience for more than three thousand years in India. Moreover, in recent years, ashrams have also become centers for the spreading of Hinduism in the West.

It became clear to me that the Christian Church in India with its Western culture had isolated itself from the stream of Indian culture. Missionaries and church leaders today continue to use and perpetuate the traditional

missionary methods brought from the West, depriving the national Christians of freedom in thinking and innovation. National Christians have been forced to follow the orders and methods which came from the hierarchy of the Church in the West. Any adaptation of local cultural form was viewed with contempt; it was considered that such accommodation might lead to a watering down of Christianity and promote syncretism. As a result, the Church continued with traditional methods and made no attempt to discover and adopt indigenous approaches.

I have adopted the ashram model for the following reasons:

1. According to Indian tradition, the disciples are made in an ashram setting by the religious teachers. All major religions and religious sects have followed the ashram model to spread their religious truths from one generation to the next generation and from one place to another.

2. Communities similar to ashrams are also found in the Judeo-Christian tradition and have been used to make disciples.

3. Community life and discipling in a community setting are part of the SDA tradition.

4. Ashrams and Christian communities follow indigenous forms as they seek to make disciples.

5. The Christian ashram is an indigenous expression of Christian discipleship, as well as an attractive and

meaningful form of spirituality which will minimize Hindu opposition to Christian discipleship in India.

6. Christian ashrams can help the Indian Church to take root in the Indian soil, to renew its spiritual life, and to disciple many Hindus.

Purpose of the Project

This project sought to develop an ashram model as a way of communicating the gospel within the indigenous cultural forms of India.

The purpose of this project was to study first the discipleship model followed in the New Testament, in the Indian Church, and in Hinduism, then to study the culture and religions of the Tamils, and finally to develop an ashram model for discipling the Hindus of Tamil Nadu.

This project is based on the principles of contextualization as demonstrated in the experiments done in Christian ashrams, Jewish and Christian communities, and Hindu ashrams.

Justification for the Project

Developing an ashram model for discipleship can be justified for the following reasons:

1. Discipling among Hindus has been neglected in the Indian church for many years. Most denominations and churches primarily have utilized their resources among the nominal Christian population, doing very little work among

the Hindus.

2. The evangelistic methods inherited from Western churches have not proved to be effective in appealing to Hindus, for Hindus are not attracted by the method of preaching and are angered by Christian proselytism.

3. The Church has not given serious thought to developing new models for discipling the Hindus who constitute over 80 percent of the total population of India.

4. A few indigenous missionaries have done some work among popular Hindus, but the classical Hindus and those who follow Hindu devotionalism have often been neglected by Christian missions. Although many Hindus benefit from Christian institutions such as hospitals and schools, they are not attracted to Christianity.

5. Hindus consider themselves to be very religious and spiritual people; therefore, it is important to develop a Christian model to meet their spiritual longings and aspirations. The ashram, in this respect, appears to be a suitable model.

6. The ashram has been an indigenous religious institution used by Hindu teachers for the past three thousand years for promoting Hindu philosophy and culture. Therefore, it can be a powerful means of discipleship in India.

Limitations of the Project

The model explained in this project report is designed to disciple devotional Hindus of Sudras and upper castes in Tamil Nadu. As a result, the model has certain limitations in its applicability for other groups such as the animists and Hindus living outside of Tamil Nadu.

The model is designed for the lay people of various Christian denominations. Therefore, church organizations cannot adopt this model without making some modifications.

An ashram is not a project that can be started by any individual or committee as we establish institutions like schools or hospitals. Ashrams can be started only by one or two committed individuals with a mission coupled with a vision.

Expectations of the Project

In spite of its limitations, many positive results are expected from this project. They are as listed below:

1. Personally I expect to gain knowledge and expertise in speaking about the value of Christian ashrams with authority and persuasion among Christian leaders and others who are interested in discipleship in India.

2. I expect this project to bring an awareness among Christians concerning the changes that need to be made in discipling Hindus in India, specially in Tamil Nadu.

3. It is hoped that this project will inspire many lay people to start ashram-type supporting ministries in

their respective places.

4. This project report will provide knowledge about ashrams and how they can serve the spiritual needs of the people.

5. It is hoped that this project will help remove prejudices that Christians have toward the ashram concept.

6. I want this project to help my friends and fellow believers understand the type of ashram I plan to develop in Tamil Nadu.

Overview of the Project

Several pre-suppositions, ideas, and definitions were at the back of my mind as I wrote this paper and I would like to explain them briefly one by one:

1. I have written this paper for the Indian Christian audience, many of whom are contemplating new ways of discipling the Hindus in the twenty-first century.

2. In the mental model of Hindus there is a distinction between proselytism and discipleship. In their mind, proselytism is a form of coercion and manipulation which one religious group uses to convert others. In the process of Christian proselytism in India, the Hindus are taught not only to leave their traditional religious beliefs, but also their community, culture, and lifestyle. This kind of proselytism is foreign to India and opposed by the Hindus, especially the higher castes.

On the other hand, Hindus are not opposed to

discipling which brings conversion in the sense of inner transformation, self-purification, surrender to God, and obedience to His teachings. Various Hindu sects and religions such as Buddhism and Jainism in India have followed discipleship and not proselytism.

3. Most of the Hindus view Christianity as a foreign religion, the religion of the colonial rulers, and the religion that they perceive as forcing converts to leave their cultural traditions and communities in favor of Western ways. Further, they see churches as the vestiges of colonialism and symbols of Western imperialism in India. To them, the churches are the proselytizing agencies, and Indian Christian evangelists are paid servants of the foreign missionary agencies used for the propagation of Christianity. Moreover, they perceive Christian institutions such as hospitals, schools, orphanages, and community-development projects as tools for proselytism.

4. Many Hindu thinkers make a distinction between the teachings of Christ and the teachings about Christ, between biblical principles and church doctrines, and between biblical truths and church dogmas. At present, various churches and Christian denominations are trying to proselytize the Hindus by preaching their distinctive doctrines rather than by presenting the messages of God found in the Bible.

In the opinion of Hindus, dogmas are not the

Absolutes, but only symbols which point towards Absolutes and have only instrumental value. Hindus view the organized churches which emphasize the dogmas with contempt and consider the dogmas as causes for religious wars, persecutions, and the burning of people at the stake. However, they do not reject the idea of developing doctrines or dogmas to help people grow spiritually. Hindu sects have always developed doctrines, but they feel that they are not dogmatic.

5. Although Hindus are against Western Christianity, they accept Christ as a great guru, a sanyasin, an avatar, and a divine healer. They gladly accept the teachings of Christ--especially the Sermon on the Mount.

6. Christian missionary work has made positive contributions to Indian society in terms of bringing social reformations, education, and medical services. On the other hand, Christian exclusiveness, Western culture, and proselytism have created bitter feelings toward Christianity in India and stimulated the Hindus to revive their religious traditions by reinterpreting the religious ideals of their ancient Scriptures in order to counter Western missionary activities in India.

7. In this context, I am proposing an ashram model to disciple the Hindus in obedience to the Great Commission of Christ. I strongly believe that the Bible is God's revelation and Jesus Christ is the only way to God. It is

my conviction that I am called to communicate only Jesus Christ and His gospel to the Hindus in terms intelligible to them, not a set of doctrines developed by any particular denomination. I also strongly believe that God used the method of contextualization in communicating His truths to people in every culture.

Contextualization is using local cultural forms and symbols and filling them with biblical meanings in order to make God's message relevant and meaningful to local people. Contextualization is not syncretism, because syncretism is the amalgamation of various pagan beliefs with God's truths revealed in the Bible, whereas, in contextualization, suitable local forms are selected to convey God's truths. I consider Paul Hiebert's critical contextualization model (see p. 44) as the best approach to avoid syncretism.

8. In my discussion of the theology of discipleship, I have included both the principles and methods of discipleship followed in the early church and Christian missions. I also use the term discipleship to refer to the process of discipling, as well as the quality of being a disciple, which includes the principles of modeling, following, teaching, serving, living in Christ, and fellowship.

9. This paper is based on the concept of discipleship found in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). I found discipling to be the main thrust of the Great

Commission, not proselytism. Since discipling has been followed in the religious traditions of India, I found it appropriate to integrate the discipling principles of both the New Testament and the ashrams of India in developing my ashram model.

10. This ashram model is developed mainly to relate to the devotional Hindus who constitute approximately 50 percent of the total population of Tamil Nadu. Devotional Hinduism is a synthesis of elements from classical and popular Hinduism. In the nineties, many popular Hindus are gradually influenced by the devotionalism and have abolished animal sacrifices in their temples. Therefore, the ashram model is adopted to meet the spiritual needs of this particular group and make the Christian message intelligible to them. It will use Indian cultural forms to convey Christian meanings and enrich Christian spiritual life by adding Hindu forms of spirituality.

11. Christ is viewed as the fulfillment of Hindu aspirations, not as the founder of a new religion over and against other religions of the world. Therefore, Christ can be communicated not as the destroyer of Hinduism but as the Crown of Hinduism as stated by J. N. Farquhar.

This project report consists of seven chapters divided into two parts. The first part has four chapters including the introduction. In the first part I develop the theological basis for the project and give information about

the Hindus of Tamil Nadu where the ashram will be located. The second part presents the principles and concepts related to ashrams, the study of several Hindu and Christian ashrams, and the ashram model suitable for Tamil Nadu.

In chapter 2, I argue in favor of contextualization by giving examples of contextualization in the Old and New Testaments. I also emphasize the need for contextualization in missions in spite of the dangers; I then explain how those dangers could be avoided.

In chapter 3, I focus on developing a contextualized theology of discipleship on the basis of the Great Commission and the discipling model followed by Jesus and His apostles. I trace the discipling pattern followed in the history of the Indian Church from the arrival of Catholic missionaries in the sixteenth century to the present time. I have also discussed the discipling methods followed in Christian ashrams, indigenous missionary groups in modern India, and the Hindu ashrams.

Chapter 4 provides information about the culture and religion of the Tamils, and the Hindu response to Christianity. I consider four major philosophical schools of Hinduism (Saiva-siddhanta, Visitadvaita, Dwaita, and Advaita) which are influential in Tamil Nadu and have paid special attention to the devotional aspects of Hindu theism. I explain how the Hindus have responded negatively to Christianity by opposing Christian proselytism through both

legislation and countermovements. I also mention how Hindus have accommodated Christ within their theological system.

Chapter 5 discusses what an ashram is and how a Christian ashram can function in relationship with the Church. I also discuss some ashram principles and key concepts which have been incorporated within Christian ashrams and which are found in both Jewish and Christian communities. These principles are of importance to the development of the ashram model described in chapter 6. In addition, I describe some Hindu and Christian ashrams which are significant.

I describe my own ashram model in chapter 6 on the basis of views presented in the previous chapters, my personal experience, and aspirations. This chapter contains the principles, goals, objectives, and various activities of my ashram model. I have attempted to integrate Hindu ways of knowledge, action, and devotion into a cohesive system of the Christian spiritual life in the ashram.

The final chapter emphasizes the value of Christian ashrams in contemporary India and recommends that Christian leaders adopt the ashram model and use it to bring spiritual renewal to the Church.

Whenever I have used an indigenous term first time in this project, it is typed in bold letters. These terms are explained in the glossary at the end. It should be noted that I have used God with a capital "G" in places

where reference is made to a deity of a monotheistic religion; a small "g" is used in places where reference is made to one of the gods of the Hindu Pantheon.

PART ONE

CONTEXTUALIZATION AND DISCIPLING IN THE

CONTEXT OF TAMIL NADU

CHAPTER II

CONTEXTUALIZATION

The primary task of this project was to develop a contextualized model for discipling the Hindus of Tamil Nadu. This requires a strong theological basis for contextualization to be established. Therefore, the concept of contextualization is discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Mission literature often uses terms such as adaptation, accommodation, enculturation, incarnation, indigenization, and contextualization to describe the nature of the Church's mission in the world. Although these terms appear to convey the same meaning, they differ in their emphases and implications. Since these terms have no standard definitions, missiologists have been debating over the concepts they convey. Lately, indigenization and contextualization have become the most debated concepts among missiologists and theologians in the Third World.

Historical Background

Western churches in the past, as they tried to expand Christendom in various mission fields, were faced

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with certain difficulties in communicating the gospel and establishing relationships with the local people. In order to win converts to Christianity, missionaries adjusted themselves to local cultures in attitude as well as life-style and evangelistic approaches.[1] The Catholic missions called this strategy "accommodation" or "adaptation," while the Protestants referred to it as "indigenization."[2]

The term indigenization has been used since the nineteenth century by such missiologists as Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson to define an autonomous church that was self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. This three-self formula, based on an American Value System,[3] was imposed on the mission churches in order to reach the goal of self-reliance. Later on, in the twentieth century, indigenization assumed the new meaning of the gospel taking root in local soil by being retransplanted, reinterpreted, and communicated in traditional cultural terms and thought patterns. It also referred to churches being established using indigenous forms. Indigenization, used in this sense, remained past-oriented and ignored the context of

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[1]Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977), 341.

[2]David J. Bosch, "A New Paradigm," International Bulletin of Missionary Research (October 1990): 150.

[3]William Smalley, "Cultural Implications of an Indigenous Church," in Reading in Missionary Anthropology II, ed. William Smally (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1978), 366.

modernization and secularization which were emerging in the
Third World countries. As a result, some preferred to use
the term contextualization.

The term "contextualization" was coined in the late
1950s.[1] It first appeared in public debut in the
publication <u>Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Program
on Theological Education Fund (1970-77)</u>.[2] Later on, the
1977 Apostolic Exhortation, Catechize Tradendae, and several
Protestant documents also used this term and emphasized the
need for contextualization.[3] Shoki Coe, the director of
the Theological Education Fund, preferred the term
contextualization instead of indigenization because
indigenization, in his view, tended to suggest a static
response to the gospel in terms of traditional culture[4] and
ignored the concrete local context of the modern world. He
contended that by using the word contextualization, he
wanted "to convey all that is implied in the familiar term
indigenization, yet seek to press beyond a more dynamic
concept which is open to change and which is also future-

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[1]Arthur F. Glasser, "Help from an Unexpected Quarter
or the Old Testament and Contextualizations," <u>Missiology: An
International Review</u> (October 1979): 403.

[2]David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Romman,
<u>Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Models</u> (Grand
Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), 28.

[3]Bosch, 150.

[4]Shoki Coe, "Contextualizing Theology," in <u>Mission
Trends No. 3</u>, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky
(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 20.

oriented."[1] David Bosch thinks contextualization seeks to accommodate the gospel to the total life of a people.[2]

Definition

The term contextualization has no precise definition among missiologists. After it was first introduced in the TEF Document, missiologists began to use contextualization to emphasize certain aspects of gospel communication; however, each missiologist had his own definition. Most conservative evangelicals like Bruce J. Nichols defined contextualization as "the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaning to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations."[3] George W. Peters emphasized proper exegesis of the text.[4] Whereas, Harvie Conn focused on the relationship between the biblical text and the contextualizers' own cultural context. He wanted the contextualizers to allow Scripture to judge their own enculturated interpretations and lifestyles, and to free themselves from the interpretational biases of their own cultures as much as possible before attempting to adapt the

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[1]Ibid., 21.

[2]David J. Bosch, "An Emerging Paradigm for Mission," <u>Missionology: An International Review</u> (October 1983): 495.

[3]Hesselgrave and Romman, 33.

[4]Ibid., 34.

gospel to the understandings and needs of people living in other cultures.[1]

Although there is no commonly accepted definition for the term contextualization, the term conveys the idea that it is an ongoing process in which the biblical message is extricated from its original context and conveyed in the context of the hearer. Further, it is clothed with the appropriate linguistic and cultural frames of reference, remaining free to speak prophetically to a culture from within.[2]

Contextualization Today

It is important to note that today the idea of contextualization is viewed positively by many Catholic and Protestant theologians. In the last twenty years many studies have been made dealing with the contextualizing of theology, theological education, worship, lifestyle and communication. Some experiments are being done in India in adopting indigenous forms of worship and media of communication. However, much needs to be done yet on the practical level. Some Third World theologians have written much about contextualization in the Third World, but little is being done to encourage 'doing theology' at the grass roots level.

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[1]Ibid., 34.

[2]Dean S. Gilliland, ed., <u>The Word among Us</u> (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 33.

In addition, there is still confusion and conflict about the proper methods of contextualization. Theological differences among the orthodox, liberal, neo-orthodox, and neo-liberal theologians have yielded very different types of contextualizations[1] and "divergent contextualized Christologies, Soteriologies, and eschatologies."[2] It seems that contextual theology is still centered around a Western theological mold dealing with the doctrinal issues raised in the West without addressing the specific problems and questions raised in the Third World. For example, the attempt of some theologians to convey the meaning of the Trinity in the thought forms of the Vedantic Hindus may not directly address the issues of superstition, poverty, injustice, casteism, oppression, religious conflicts, and political corruption faced by the majority of Indians.

In this context, contextualizing the gospel in terms of Advita **Vedanta** would be although good, it would be irrelevant to the present issues and situations in India. Therefore, an Indian contextualizer must seriously consider the actual beliefs[3] of the Indian people and the existential situations which dynamically shape their present life.

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[1]Hesselgrave and Romman, 145.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Philip Hughes, "The Use of Actual Beliefs in Contextualizing Theology," East Asia Journal of Theology 2 (February 1984): 252.

The gospel worker has to speak to the Hindus prophetically from within their culture, even to the extent of using their Scripture in addition to Christian Scripture as the Apostle Paul did at Athens. This does not mean one preaches a syncretic "gospel,"[1] but accepts the biblical truths revealed in the writings of the Hindu saints on the assumption that Christ has revealed His light in the Hindu world in the past and He is also actively present now. For example, in India many Hindu religious teachers such as Swami Dayananda Saraswathi and Ramalinga Swami have come from time to time to speak against idolatry and sexual immorality, and to establish reformatory movements within Hinduism. This is in accordance with the belief that the light of God has ever been present within the darkness of heathenism.[2]

The contextual theologians who belonged to various schools of thought such as orthodoxy, liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, and neo-liberalism should, instead of arguing over the proper methods of contextualization or favoring one method against another, recognize the merits of all methods of contextualization presented by these schools of thought and use the one suitable to the local situation in

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[1]Hesselgrave and Romman, 153.

[2]Ellen. G. White, <u>Desire of Ages</u> (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1984), 33.

developing a contextual theology.[1] However, in this
endeavor the essence of the gospel must be carefully
preserved.

Contextual Theology

Contextualization has to do with all aspects of
church life such as theologizing, discipleship, religious
education, lifestyle, Bible translation, church
organization, worship style, art, and architecture. Too
often people use the term contextualization to mean only the
contextualization of theology and do not include the other
aspects of the church. Since much has been written on
contextualization centered around the idea of contextual
theology, it is necessary to make some reference to
contextual theology here.

Contextual theology is not a finished product, but
is "theology in the making, in the process of being
contextualized and inculturated."[2] Therefore, contextual
theology in a sense can be called contextualizing
theology.[3] It is an expression of faith in terms of
contemporary society, history, and culture.[4]

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[1]For further understanding on the methods of
contextualization, read Hesselgrave and Romman, 144-57.

[2]Bosch, "New Paradigm," 150.

[3]Coe, 22.

[4]Stephen Bevans, "Models of Contextual Theology,"
Missiology: An International Review (April 1985): 185.

Contextual theology is not the enterprise of the elite. After Constantine, theology became the enterprise of the elite in the church with the Church Fathers developing a theology by using Scripture, tradition, and philosophy as their main sources. I would like to recommend that a contextual theology can be arrived at by ordinary believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, using Scripture as their basis, and being relevant to local culture and denominational traditions.[1] I believe that the Holy Spirit can lead people from any culture to discover the truths of the Bible and that those truths can be expressed within the context of their culture. God's Word and the truths of historic Christianity can always be expressed within the cultural forms of any culture and are not dependent on Western forms.[2]

Contextual theology is not a contextualization of the Western theologies to the Eastern world, rather it is the 'doing of theology' in the East in its local context. The eternal universal principles of the Bible can be communicated using the authentic thought patterns, values, and religious experiences of the target culture. Very often contextual theologians speak of contextualization only on the conceptual level with the emphasis on the social environment. However, in the East, such a theoretical

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[1]Bosch, "New Paradigm," 150.

[2]Gilliland, 12.

theology has very little appeal to people because of the mystical aspect of the Eastern religions. Simon Chan observed: "Much of the theology done in the Third World has been in reaction to western academic theology."[1] It has not spoken to the context. Only a few theologians like Abhishiktananda have attempted to do theology in the context of Hindu spirituality on a deeper level.[2]

Contextualization in the Bible

Contextualization is not a new phenomenon, in spite of its new vocabulary. Nor is it foreign to the Bible. The Bible itself is an example of contextualization. The prophets, Christ, and the apostles always contextualized the message of God and communicated within the cultural forms of the people.

Old Testament

The Old Testament is a compilation of thirty-nine books written by several authors coming from different historical, geographical, and cultural backgrounds. In spite of these differences and the complexity of the material, there is an essential and organic unity persisting

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[1]Simon Chan, "Second Thoughts on Contextualization," Evangelical Review of Theology (January 1985): 54.

[2]Robin H. S. Boyd, An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1975), 287-97.

throughout the Old Testament.[1] The authors described the disclosure of God throughout the history of Israel. They communicated the eternal truths by using the cultural forms relevant and meaningful to the nation of Israel. Arthur Glasser affirms that "there is considerable solid evidence that on occasion the writers of the Old Testament deliberately contextualized their material."[2]

Worship

The contextualization process was used throughout the Old Testament, and many examples of contextualization can be cited. However, only a few of them are considered here.

The pattern of worship which evolved from the time of the patriarchs to the time of Jesus clearly indicates the contextualization process in the Old Testament. The worship style changed from time to time according to the historical and cultural context of Israel.

During the time of the patriarchs, there were no elaborate rituals practiced by the people. God personally revealed Himself to them and made His promises. In turn, they responded in faith with sacrifices and circumcision. Abraham built altars and worshipped God in places where the

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[1]Gilliland, 34.

[2]Ibid., 39.

Canaanites had their shrines.[1]

After the patriarchal pattern disappeared in Egypt, a loose confederation of tribes came into existence at the Exodus. God then introduced a new pattern of worship in the context of the Canaanite culture at the time of the Judges.[2] The worship forms and meanings were consistent with God's Word and will, yet were at the same time understandable within the Canaanite cultural setting. For example, the liturgy included Confessional Statements, Decalogue, festivals, and rituals of sacrifice. This system continued until the temple was built in Jerusalem by Solomon. Afterwards the worship style was altered to fit the new context with the temple becoming the center for worship. It is speculated by Arthur F. Glasser that "the festal rituals were then transformed and blended into an enthronement festival that dominated the religious year."[3]

The synagogues originated during the exile and flourished until the first century A.D. in order to meet the new need for worship away from Jerusalem. After the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, prayer, fasting, and the study of the Torah became substitutes for sacrifice. Synagogues

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[1]K. V. Matthew, "Indigenisation- An Old Testament Perspective," Indian Journal of Theology (January-June): 2.

[2]D. Preman Niles, "Example of Contextualization in the Old Testament," South East Journal of Theology 22 (1981): 21.

[3]Glasser, 406.

served as centers for communal worship, mutual support, and the observance of Sabbaths and festivals. Judaism thus survived until today by contextualizing the worship style.

Names of God

Another example of contextualization in the Old Testament is the indigenous names used for God. Abraham adopted Canaanite terms and names to enrich the concept of Yahweh as Most High, the Creator of the heaven and earth, and the Lord over Canaan. Abraham identified Melchizedek's "Elohim Most High" with Yahweh (Gen 14:18-22). The term 'El' was the proper name for the Supreme God of the Canaanite Pantheon.[1] The Israelites applied this term for Yahweh, but gave new meaning to it.[2] This did not mean they accepted the reality of other gods or equated Yahweh with them; the term was used within the local cultural context but given new biblical meaning for theological convenience.[3]

Government

The theocratic form of government instituted by Israel under God's guidance was, for example, a contextualized version of the government that operated in Mesopotamia and Egypt. The only difference was God's active

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[1]Gilliland, 36.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Matthew, 3.

role. Whereas the rulers were venerated in the Mesopotamia
and Egypt governments, the ruler of Israel was treated like
any other human being but respected as the adopted Son of
God (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chr 28:6).[1]

Festivals

The religious culture of Israel was closely related
to the religious culture of the neighboring regions. It
seems that most of the Old Testament religious festivals and
institutions were closely related in form to the festivals
and institutions practiced in Egypt and Canaan, but differed
in meaning. When God gave Israel festivals, He gave them in
forms that were not entirely foreign to them.

Passover

For example, the Passover festival was the oldest
Jewish festival celebrated in the spring. The term
"Passover" was commonly used to refer to the Feast of
Unleavened Bread and Passover feast. Both were celebrated
in sequence with the Passover feast on the fourteenth day
and the other from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of the
first month[2] and were fused into one common festival.[3]
Some scholars believe that with God's guidance Israel might

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[1]Ibid.

[2]M. R. Wilson, "Passover," The International
Standard Bible Encyclopedia, (1991), 3:676.

[3]Matthew, 4.

have adopted some aspects of these feasts from the

shepherd's festival of the Semitic nomads and the

agricultural festival of the Canaanites.[1]

Feast of Tabernacles

　　　The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated for a week,

beginning from the fifteenth day of the seventh month

(Lev 23:34). It was a "pilgrim festival, the intent of

which was to emphasize the nomadic character of the

Wilderness Period (Lev 23:34)."[2] There was a similar feast

celebrated in Egypt and Canaan where people "believed that

at the turn of the year evil powers were active and would

attack houses; to cheat them and to escape from these

attacks, the people would pass these days in temporary

shelters."[3] After entering into Canaan, the Israelites

celebrated their Feast of Tabernacles which had some

elements from the Canaanite feast, but did not follow the

pagan meanings connected with those elements; they preserved

the Hebrew religious content.[4] The contextualized

festivals kept Israel from celebrating the idolatrous

ceremonies of the Canaanites and served as an equivalent

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　　　[1]Wilson, 3:676.

　　　[2]R. K. Harrison, "Booths, Feast of" The
International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, (1991), 1:535.

　　　[3]Matthew, 4.

　　　[4]Ibid.

substitute to meet their religious needs.[1]

Covenant

The Hebrew use of covenant[2] is another illustration
of contextualization in the Old Testament. Many of the Old
Testament covenants were parallel to the alliances and
treaties made between city-states, tribal groups, states,
nations, and, in particular, between vassal states and their
overlords.[3] The Semites of Mesopotamia, the non-Semite
peoples of Asia Minor, the Hittites, and the people of Syria
and Assyria all made covenants to settle their disputes.[4]
The pattern, phrases, oaths and bond, ceremonies, and
blessings and curses used in the Old Testament covenants
were similar to the secular treaties made among these
people.[5]

Prophetic Writings

The prophetic writings of the Old Testament clearly
demonstrate the ability of the prophets to contextualize the
message of Yahweh to the Israelites. For example, Amos
displayed remarkable skill in contextualization.

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[1]G. Gispert-Sauch, God's Word among Man (Delhi:
Vidya Jyoti Institute of Religious Studies, 1973), 254-255.

[2]Gilliland, 40.

[3]J. Arthur Thompson, "Covenant," The International
Standard Encyclopedia, (1991), 1:790.

[4]Gilliland, 40.

[5]Thompson, 1:790-791.

> He was especially adept at the employment of forms of speech that appear in the riddles, comparisons, and popular proverbs of folk wisdom. . . . He argued with the logic of proverbs (3:3-6) and used comparisons and riddles to make his point (2:9; 3:12; 5:2,7,19,24; 6:12; 9:9).[1]

Similarly, other prophets also contextualized the message of God in the context of the ancient Near East. They used the language, concepts, and customs of their times without falling into the trap of syncretism, which is defined later. They never introduced any religious elements of Polytheism into their writings. In fact, they spoke against the false prophets who compromised with Baal.

Wisdom Books

The wisdom books of the Old Testament give evidence of the "contextualization process carried to the point where an occasional item of Canaanite poetry was edited and then incorporated into the Old Testament Canon."[2] Some scholars believe that some psalms could have been derived from Canaanite psalmody (e.g., 19 and 104) and parts of Prov 22-24 are likely an abridged edition of the Egyptian "Teaching of Amenemope."[3] But this may not be the case, because wisdom literature found in the various countries only

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[1] James L. Mayes, _Amos: A Commentary_ (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 5-6, quoted in Arthur F. Glasser, "Old Testament Contextualization: Revelation and Its Environment," in _The Word among Us_, ed. Dean. S. Gilliland (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 43.

[2] Gilliland, 47.

[3] Ibid., 48.

reflects the common human experience and answers to some basic issues of life. It is possible that the writers adopted the Near Eastern literary style without borrowing the texts.

New Testament

The New Testament contains many examples of contextualization. In the first century, Christ and the apostles preached the gospel using Jewish, Hellenistic, and Gentile terms and forms to make the gospel meaningful to them. "In the subsequent centuries, however, the Christian community began to lose sight of the intrinsically contextual nature of the Christian faith."[1] It is evident that the early church grew rapidly due to contextualization. The ministry of Christ and Paul provides many evidences of contextualization in the New Testament. The incarnation of Jesus is the best example of contextualization in the New Testament. By coming into this world in human flesh He identified with man in all his weakness and strength. He met the needs of a particular people at a particular time and circumstances by giving sight to the blind, healing the sick, forgiving the sinners, and teaching the people about the kingdom of God.[2]

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[1]Bosch, "New Paradigm," 149.

[2]Charles R. Taber, "Contextualization," in Exploring Church Growth, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 120-21.

Christz

The message of Christ and His method of communication clearly reflect the Jewish context of the first century A.D. He used parables and stories drawn from Jewish culture. The synoptic Gospels record at least one hundred proverbial and aphoristic sayings of Jesus, borrowed from rural Palestine and Hellenistic culture.[1] He contextualized Old Testament texts with meaning relevant to His days. For example, He quoted from Hos 6:6 twice during His ministry (Matt 9:13; 12:7) and asked the Pharisees to discover the true meaning of the verse "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (RSV). The prophet Hosea used the term sacrifice to refer to the animal sacrifice offered in the Jerusalem temple. However, Christ did not use this text in the same sense as Hosea did. He interpreted the word sacrifice to mean the legalism of the Jews and contextualized the verse to defend His fellowship with sinners, justify the eating of grain by the disciples on the Sabbath, and to emphasize the compassionate aspect of God's character.

Gospels

The four Gospels are, in fact, four different attempts at contextualizing the message of Christ to

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[1] R. S. Sugirtharaja, ed., <u>Voices from the Margin</u> (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 362.

different situations and readers:[1] Matthew's Gospel was written to the converts from Judaism, Mark's to the Gentile Christians, Luke's to the Hellenistic Christians, and John's to a Gnostic audience. Moreover, the Gospels also reflect the cultural orientation of the writers. While Matthew and Luke considered the historicity of Jesus as important for their audience, John dealt with the ontological aspect of Christ as an important aspect for his audience.

Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul had great ability to contextualize the gospel in a variety of ways, depending on the particular situation. He used local terms and symbols to speak about Christ without compromising the gospel with heathenism.[2] He contextualized certain expressions that had always been associated with rituals of Gentile cultic practice to convey the love of God for people.[3] He used Greek terms with all their overtones of Greek philosophy and religion, but introduced new meaning to those words.[4] In all his attempts to contextualize the gospel, he depended on the Holy Spirit for guidance. Paul's ministry at Lystra (Acts

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[1]Bosch, "New Paradigm," 149.

[2]Gilliland, 58.

[3]Ibid., 56.

[4]Martin Goldsmith, "Contextualization of Theology," Themelios: An International Journal of Theological Students (September 1983): 20.

14:8-20) and Athens (Acts 17:15-34) demonstrated his ability to contextualize the gospel among the Gentiles. His epistles to various churches also revealed that he was able to give contextual answers to settle various theological issues raised in the churches. While doing this, he always retained the essence of the gospel.

Dr. Jon Dybdahl observed that Paul considered contextualization as his very mission and a fulfillment of the law of Christ. Therefore, he became all things to all people, and he did that to win more people to Christ.[1]

Necessity

Contextualization is a missiological necessity, based on the Great Commission of Christ. The task of discipleship cannot be successfully accomplished unless people living in different cultures understand and experience the meaning of the gospel. To make the gospel meaningful to the hearers, it needs to be contextualized in culturally relevant terms, practices, and thought patterns. This has become a challenging task, not only for the church in the mission field, but also at home. The migration of various racial and ethnic groups to the West has made contextualization a missiological necessity.

Another reason why we must continually contextualize the message is the changing nature of culture

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[1]Jon Dybdahl, "How to Contextualize the Gospel," Ministry, November 1992, 15.

in the modern world. The culture of any society today is no longer static, it is changing due to various sociological, economical, technological, political, and religious factors. Therefore, it has become necessary for the church to continue the task of contextualization.

Missionaries in the past took it for granted that the Church in the Third World needed the Church in the West, but lately they have discovered that the opposite is equally true, and that we all need each other to enrich our Christian experience. The meaning of the gospel grasped by Third World Christians can certainly enrich the Christian thought and life in the Western world. Therefore, along with contextualization, we need to be involved in "interculturation"[1] or "cross-fertilization."[2]

Dangers in Contextualization

Contextualization is not free of dangers. It always contains within itself some inherent dangers. Therefore, it is important to be aware of these dangers that could distort the essential meaning of the gospel to all people.

Improper Contextualization

First, a danger in contextualization is improper contextualization where the messenger might contextualize

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[1]Bosch, "New Paradigm," 150.

[2]Wayne C. Weld, "Contextualization," The Covenant Quarterly (February 1979): 30.

his own understanding of the gospel rather than the gospel itself, because merely contextualizing Western theology in the Eastern philosophical context may not convey the true essence of the gospel.

For example, in India some theologians like Raymond Pannikkar, Swami Abhishiktananda, and Bede Griffith have tried to interpret the doctrine of the Trinity in the context of the **vedanta** system of Hinduism which is explained in detail later. One of the important teachings of this system is its view of the essential nature of the Absolute. According to the **advaita** system, Absolute is **Sat** (existence), **Cit** (consciousness) and **Ananda** (bliss). When the above Indian theologians compare the Trinity with the three aspects of the Absolute, it might appeal to Hindus and help them to recognize Christianity as a valid philosophical system like advaita, but it might not convey the gospel. The essence of the gospel is not the nature of the Trinity, but the salvific acts of God in Jesus Christ. Doctrinal contextualization such as that might appeal to a few intellectuals but may not help the masses to know salvation through Jesus Christ. It might instead become an empty intellectual exercise.[1]

Syncretism

A second danger is over-contextualization resulting

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[1]Dybdahl, 15.

in religious syncretism. Syncretism is the amalgamation of religious beliefs from two or more religions into one coherent system. Syncretism happens when the meaning or the content of the gospel is integrated or compromised with the principles of paganism resulting in "Christo Paganism."[1] Since contextualization appropriates indigenous linguistic and cultural forms, it always risks syncretism.[2]

Syncretism is an apostasy condemned in the Bible. The canonical prophets spoke against it (Amos 5:21-27) on the basis of Mosaic legislation (e.g., Deut 6:14,15; 7:25,26).[3] Proper contextualization takes place when indigenous forms communicate biblical meanings. However, syncretism cannot be avoided by merely preaching against it. The proper approach is to study syncretism, the syncretic beliefs and practices, analyze their functions, and then find ways of filling the corresponding needs with theologically tenable patterns.[4]

Relativism

Relativism is a third danger which lies in the process of contextualization. There are God-given absolutes

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[1]Luzbetak, 239. Luzbetak gives many examples of Christo Paganism found in Africa, South America, Cuba, Haiti, Mexico, and Guatemala.

[2]Hesselgrave and Rommen, 55.

[3]Gilliland, 39.

[4]Luzbetak, 247.

such as truthfulness, chastity, modesty, faith, love, and reverence in the Bible that are also reinforced in other scriptures. They are applicable to all people in all places at all times, but our understanding of them and God is partial,[1] because "now we see through a glass, darkly" (1 Cor 13:12).

However, this does not mean that there are no absolutes, or that our knowledge of absolutes is relative or false. Since absolutes are absolutes they cannot be altered to accommodate cultural norms or compromised with evil social customs such as caste and slavery found in different cultures.

God's absolutes which are revealed in the Bible might be realized in different cultures in different ways. For example, removing of the shoes before entering into a temple or a church is considered to be an act of reverence to God in the Indian culture. Whereas, the same act might be considered as an act of irreverence in Western culture. The cultural forms in which these principles are expressed in the Bible can be contextualized in the cultural forms of the hearer.

Distortion of Meaning

Distortion of meaning is a fourth danger in contextualization and can occur when the forms or symbols of

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[1]Gilliland, 109.

Christianity are radically changed to accommodate local cultural or religious practices. In some cases the form and meaning are inextricably linked so that it is not possible to separate them and contextualize only the form as suggested by contextualization theory.

In other cases the form and the meaning are essentially one in the Bible. Therefore, in contextualization one should carefully understand the nature of a particular form or symbol in Scripture before attempting to contextualize it. For example, the practice of baptism in the church is a symbol which conveys the meaning that a person is born again as a new person in Christ and that his or her sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. It also stands for the experience of transformation in a person's life due to the influence of the gospel. In India the classical Hindus wear sacred threads to convey the same meaning. However, both of these symbols have become so institutionalized that they have lost much of their original meaning in the minds of both Christians and Hindus.

For Hindus, Christian baptism means one's change of allegiance from one community to another, or native culture to a foreign culture, and native religion to a foreign religion. Christians in India, on the other hand, view the sacred thread as a symbol of caste superiority.

In this context many Hindus who accept Christ as the

Lord find it hard to accept baptism in the Westernized church. Therefore, they like to remain as anonymous Christians or Hindu-Christians. On the other hand, the church cannot do away with baptism, or adopt another symbol in its place because its meaning is closely linked with it. Therefore, it is not easy to contextualize baptism even though it appears to be a form. The church possibly might have to add a new form of ceremony in addition to baptism that would be acceptable to the Hindus and at the same time retain the meaning of baptism found in the Scripture. Perhaps the wearing of the sacred thread could be adopted after baptism by Hindu converts as a possible compromise.

Cultural Captivity

A fifth danger is the cultural captivity of the Christian faith. It is possible that the Christian faith could become captive to a local culture so that the people might lose sight of the historic nature of Christianity and its meaning to all of humanity. A particular Third World theology might claim that its theology is the norm for the entire world just as Western theology did in the past. To avoid this danger, we need local theologies and the integration between them to build a truly "catholic" theology, a zone in which we can communicate creatively with each other.[1] In this way, we can avoid distortions of

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[1]Bosch, "Emerging New Paradigm," 501.

faith, heresy, and cultural captivity of the Christian faith. Each Christian group, while preserving its own identity, can link itself with the people of Israel and the people of God in all generations, past and present[1].

Primacy of Culture

A sixth danger in contextualization is that the culture might supersede Scripture as the source of truth if the contextualizer is not well informed of biblical truths. Since culture is relative and always changing, it cannot provide any firm foundation for truth. On the other hand, Scripture is the revelation of God containing truths valid for all people everywhere and for all time. Therefore, it is important for the contextualizer to have a thorough knowledge of biblical truths.

A tendency in contextualization is to ignore social evils. Since contextualization tends to affirm human social organizations and cultures as essentially good, such attitudes could distort the purpose of the gospel to condemn all social evils prevailing in a society.

Accurate Translation

A seventh danger in contextualization could come from a translation of Scripture with its emphasis "on the accurate communication of meaning which might ignore the

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[1]Ibid.

emotive and volitional dimensions of the Gospel."[1] The danger is that the gospel could be reduced to a set of doctrines to be believed rather than acted upon in life.[2] The "dynamic-equivalent" principle suggested by Charles Kraft continues to remind us that the purpose of contextualization is not only to convey the original meaning of the gospel, but also to create a dynamic-equivalent response to the message.[3]

Critical Contextualization

Paul G. Heibert proposes "critical contextualization" rather than "over contextualization," which results in syncretism and relativism. He lists four steps in critical contextualization. The first step is to study the local culture phenomenologically with the help of the local congregation in order to understand the meaning and function of the traditional beliefs and practices. In the second step, the missionary leads the congregation in a study of the Scriptures related to the issues at hand to clearly grasp the original biblical message.

In the third step, the congregation critically evaluates its own past customs in light of the new biblical

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[1]Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," IBMR (July 1987): 108.

[2]Ibid.

[3]For additional reading on dynamic-equivalence, see Charles H. Kraft, Christianity in Culture (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980)

knowledge and makes decisions corporately to reject or modify old customs with new meanings. It may even create new symbols and rituals to communicate Christian beliefs in forms that are indigenous to its own culture. The final step is to help the congregation develop new contextualized practices that express Christian meaning, using forms the congregation understands within its own culture.[1] Critical contextualization respects the authority of the Bible, the leading of the Holy Spirit, the priesthood of all believers, and the Church universal as safeguards in order to keep from falling into syncretism.[2] Critical contextualization seeks also to develop metacultural and metatheological frameworks which can help people in one culture to understand the forms and meanings in another culture, with a minimum of distortion.[3]

Contextualization should not be abandoned in spite of the dangers discussed earlier, because its benefits will outweigh the dangers. When contextualization is practiced, Third-World churches will be freed from ethnocentrism, paternalism, and foreignness. They will find true freedom in Christ to live out their Christian life among their own people as respected citizens and not as foreigners in their own countries. The meaning of the gospel grasped by the

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[1]Hiebert, 109-110.

[2]Ibid., 110-111.

[3]Ibid., 111.

Third-World Christians through contextualization can also
enrich Christian thought and life in the Western world.
Therefore, we cannot avoid contextualization; rather we must
continue with care, caution, and proper methods. A great
challenge for the church has been to stand firm on the
principles revealed in the Word of God, and at the same time
carefully relate those principles to a particular culture to
fulfill the Great Commission.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen examples of
contextualization from both the Old and New Testaments, and
discussed arguments in favor of contextualization in spite
of the risks of syncretism. Sometimes, Christians in the
West and India who are already Westernized in their ways of
thinking and living react negatively to the idea of
contextualization since they fear syncretism.

However, I believe that we can use Indian or Hindu
forms while giving those forms Christian meanings without
falling into syncretism. Christianity can be communicated
within the Hindu context and still remain true to the
universal principles of God's Word. For example, the
lighting of an Indian lamp instead of candles in the church
is contextualization, not syncretism. Speaking about Christ
as the only **Avatar** or incarnation is another example of
contextualization, not syncretism. On the other hand, if I
speak of Christ as one of the avatars, then it is definitely

syncretism. Having the gospel as the fundamental universal truth and making it relevant to peoples living in all cultures does not lead to syncretism, but can help them see the beauty of the gospel in the forms familiar to them.

Moreover, the gospel commission calls for discipleship as set forth by Jesus before His ascension; this needs to continue. Discipleship and the making of disciples need to be contextualized in order for the discipling process to continue effectively across cultures. Chapter 3 discusses in detail the concept of discipleship and the methods of discipleship as followed by both Christians and Hindus. A contextualized theology of discipleship is established at the end. Later, I apply this theology of discipleship in chapter 6 where I develop a contextualized model for discipling the Hindus of Tamil Nadu. I begin chapter 3 by discussing the concept of discipleship as found in the Great Commission.

CHAPTER III

CONTEXTUALIZED THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Discipling in the New Testament

The term discipleship comes from the word disciple (**mathetes**) which means a student or follower. Originally in the Greek world of Jesus' time, the term disciple (**mathetes**) referred to students. Later on during the time of the New Testament, it was used to refer to an adherent who committed his life to a particular master and his way of life.[1] The term **mathetes** also referred to an apprentice who followed a teacher to learn from him, or a follower of a certain school of philosophy.

In Judaism, a disciple was a person who sat at the feet of his teacher or rabbi in a classroom to learn from Scripture and religious tradition. Usually the pupils selected the rabbis they liked. On the other hand, Jesus selected His pupils and taught them directly in open places. He asked His disciples to leave everything to follow Him (Mark 10:28, 29; Luke 9:23, 24; 14:25-27, 33; Matt 16:24). After the resurrection of Jesus, the term disciple referred

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[1]Michael J. Wilkins, <u>Following the Master</u> (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 39.

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to all those who believed in Jesus (Acts 6:1,7; 9:36; 11:26).[1]

Discipling in the Great Commission

Discipleship is the central theme of the Great Commission given by Jesus Christ in Matt 28:19. Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples in the days between His resurrection and ascension to provide a focus for the ministry which His disciples will carry on until His second coming. The focus of the ministry of the disciples was to make disciples of all nations.

Matt 28:16-20 is usually referred to as the Great Commission and is also used as the primary missionary text in many missiological writings. Protestant missionary organizations have used this text as the basis for mission in the world, especially since the time of William Carey. In fact, it is regarded as the Magna Charta of mission in some circles.[2] Vss. 19 and 20 are considered vital to Matthew's view of discipleship.

> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age(RSV).

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[1]R. P. Meye, "Disciple," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1991), 1: 947-948.

[2]David J. Bosch, "The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20," in Exploring Church Growth, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 219.

The four activities--going, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching--summarize the essence of mission in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew selected these words and used them in the Great Commission with the hope that the readers of his time would clearly understand the meaning of the Commission. What these words meant to his readers is the important thing to understand in order to grasp the original meaning of the Commission. The meaning of the four active words mentioned in the commission, are considered separately.

Go

The verb go has received much emphasis among Western missionaries, as if this were the main command in the Great Commission. However, a careful exegesis clearly points out that "go" only serves to reinforce the action of the main verb "make disciples" and underlines the urgency and primacy of **matheteusate**.[1] In this sense, real mission is not merely going to distant lands but making disciples wherever the Christian is.

However, "going" is also one of the aspects of the gospel commission. The task of making disciples cannot be accomplished unless some of the first disciples go to other places to share the gospel. However, it is unnecessary for a disciple to cross the border of his country in order to be

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[1]Bosch, "Structure of Mission," 229. For a complete understanding on the exegesis of Matt 28:10-20, read ibid., 218-248.

recognized as a disciple. Going from one's own place to an unknown territory to spread the gospel is a noble and challenging task for the disciples of Christ. At the same time, bringing people to Jesus in one's own place is equally a great missionary task.

Make Disciples

The second activity is making disciples. First let me explain the meaning of the verb, **matheteuin**, "to make disciples." This verb occurs four times in the New Testament (Matt 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21). The active sense of "making disciples" is found in Matt 28:19 and Acts 14:21,[1] but only in Matt 28:19 is it used in the imperative sense.

The main thrust of the Great Commission is "making disciples." The purpose of going, teaching, and baptizing is to make disciples. In other words, these words describe how disciple-making is done. The command "make disciples" means that "the followers of the early Jesus have to make others into what they themselves are: disciples."[2]

"Following" seems to be the main qualification for being a disciple in Matthew's view (Matt 8:22, 23; 4:19;

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[1]Benjamin J. Hubbard, "The Matthean Redaction of a Primitive Apostolic Commission: An Exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20," (Society of Biblical Literature and Scholars Press. Dissertation Series, No. 19, 1974), 84.

[2]David S. Bosch, Transforming Mission (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 74.

9:9; 19:21; 8:19). Discipleship thus refers to a relationship of the disciples with Jesus, who initiated the relationship by His call and not by their choice. A person "can become a disciple of Jesus only on the basis of a call that leads to discipleship. This is how men were made disciples of Jesus in his day."[1] Moreover, His call is a call for a concrete decision to follow Him all the way,[2] which does not mean merely serving as transmitters of His teaching, but bearing witness and sharing His fate.[3] In the understanding of Matthew, "to be a disciple is not just the same as being a member of a local 'church',"[4] and making disciples does not simply mean the numerical expansion of the church[5] or adding members to the denominational membership lists.

According to Matthew, discipling was to be done among all nations. He used the Greek phrase 'panta ta ethne' for "all nations." New Testament scholars differ in the exact meaning of panta ta ethne. Generally, two views are expressed in regard to the meaning of the term ethne. One view, proposed by the Church Growth School, maintains

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[1]Richard DeRidder, Discipling the Nations (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 185

[2]Bosch, Transforming, 66.

[3]Bosch, "Structure of Mission," 232.

[4]Bosch, Transforming, 82.

[5]Ibid.

that **ethne** means "tongues, tribes, castes, and lineages of men."[1] The other view is that it refers to the entire human race.[2] Most scholars accept that **panta ta ethne** includes both Gentile and Jews, while some maintain that it refers only to the Gentiles.[3] No matter how this term is interpreted, it does not imply the concept that the mission must be carried out "people by people."[4]

The Great Commission neither supports nor rejects the people group approach to evangelism proposed by the Church Growth School, since that was not the issue in the Great Commission. However, neither can the people group approach be discredited as invalid or contrary to Scripture. It is a valid missionary principle grasped by McGavran, the Guru of the Church Growth Movement under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is to be upheld and followed wherever it is applicable because mission is always contextual.[5] Therefore, the church-growth movement is hermeneutically correct in its understanding of ethne, but exegetically unjustified.[6]

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[1]Donald McGavran, <u>Understanding Church Growth</u> (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 56.

[2]Bosch, "Structure of Mission," 236.

[3]Ibid., 237.

[4]Ibid., 236.

[5]Ibid., 241

[6]Ibid.

Baptizing

The third activity--baptizing--is not a separate event; instead, it qualifies and describes the main verb "make disciples."[1] In addition, the occurrence of "baptizing" prior to "teaching" does not mean baptism precedes teaching in the process of discipleship or that the converts should be first baptized and given instruction later.[2] The emphasis does not seem to rest on the ceremony of baptism but on repentance that accompanies baptism. The Lucan parallel to Matthew's Great Commission does not mention baptism, but in its place repentance and forgiveness of sins are mentioned as equivalent to baptism (Luke 24:47).[3] The Apostle Paul also does not seem to give as much priority to the ceremony of baptism (1 Cor 1:17) as to the meaning of baptism (Rom 6:3, 4).

It must be noted that baptism was not something new at the time of Christ. The Jews baptized the proselytes who embraced Judaism as a symbol of ceremonial purification. Some scholars think that baptism was even practiced among the heathen cults for the same reason. John the Baptist adopted this practice from the local context and gave new meaning to it. It symbolized repentance, forgiveness of sins, and the nearness of the kingdom of God. The Jews and

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[1] Ibid., 233.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Gentiles were familiar with baptismal rites as introduced in the early church.[1]

In the New Testament, baptism is a religious ceremony symbolizing the blood of Christ washing away peoples' sins, regeneration, and incorporation into the body of Christ, the Church[2] (Matt 3:1-6; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom 6:3,4).

Teaching

Teaching is the fourth activity included in the Great Commission. The Greek term **didasko** is used "sixty-three times in various ways to describe the teaching activity of Jesus, the disciples and Paul in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Pauline Epistles."[3] This teaching is directed toward both believers and non-believers in the New Testament.

Matthew uses the term "teaching" specifically in reference to the discipling process (Matt 4:33) and the term "preaching" to the proclamation of the gospel. "Teaching" carries with it a sense of personal appeal to the listeners to make a concrete decision to follow Jesus. Mark used the term "gospel" in his version of the Great Commission (Mark

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[1]T. M. Lindsay, "Baptism," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1991), 1:418.

[2]Ibid., 413.

[3]R. C. Worley, Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 32.

16:15); whereas, Matthew omitted this term and used the phrase "observe all that I have commanded" in its place. This indicates that it is not just the gospel but all the teachings of Christ, especially the principles taught in the Sermon of the Mount (Matt 5:3-19), that are included in discipleship.

Discipling in Jesus' Ministry

Jesus provided a discipling model for His disciples and helped them practice the principles of discipleship in His presence and also after His ascension. Above, Jesus' model of discipleship was distinguished from the rabbinical model of that time; the focus here is to discuss some of the principles drawn from Christ's ministry.

Modeling

Jesus Christ, being a model teacher, followed the principle of modeling by setting Himself as an example to His followers. He practiced what He taught theoretically. He was quite different from the rabbis who merely taught about God from the Torah,[1] but never told their pupils to follow them. Christ told His disciples to follow Him (Matt 9:9; 4:19; 8:22; 19:21; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27; 9:59; John 1:43; 12:26; 21:22). He was the model of what a disciple ought to become. He also set Himself as an example of a servant leader as He washed the feet of His disciples (John

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[1]Wilkins, 86.

13:15). The examples of incarnation and suffering were the models He left for His disciples to follow (Phil 2:5-8; 1 Pet 2:21). He was not just a communicator of truth, but a living example of Truth. Therefore, He said: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6).

Participant Learning

The second principle, I believe, that Jesus followed was participant learning. He did not teach His disciples in a classroom during scheduled hours. He involved them in His ministry to the people at the lakeshores (Luke 5:1), at the seaside (Matt 15:29), in the synagogues (Matt 4:23), in private houses (Luke 5:29), in the temple (Luke 19:47), in the corn fields (Matt 12:1), at the cemeteries (Matt 8:28), and social functions (John 2:1). His disciples observed Him as He debated with the Pharisees (Matt 19:3), Sadducees, and Scribes, and watched Him heal the sick and the blind. They accompanied Him on His journeys and shared His trials and hardships.[1]

The disciples also learned the truth through practical experiences. Christ was continuously with them, answering their questions, clearing their doubts, and strengthening their faith in God. They watched Christ practicing the principles He taught in real life situations. Moreover, Christ involved them in various projects to find

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[1] Ellen G. White, _Education_ (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1952), 85.

out if they were able to apply the principles He taught
(Luke 10:1). Jesus expected His disciples to have hands-on
experiences; therefore, He sent them on a short-term mission
among the Jews (Matt 10:1-25).[1] After working with Christ
for nearly three years, they were ready to disciple others.

Following

Jesus asked his disciples to follow Him (John 1:43;
Mark 1:17; 2:14; Luke 9:59; Matt 19:21). "Following"
implies leaving something behind. Following the teacher is
the third principle involved in the discipleship model of
Christ. Discipleship was a direct call from Christ to make
a costly personal commitment to Him and His teachings and
was not meant to be a set of human rules, regulations,
traditions, and a belief system. It was a life-long
commitment which required His disciples to renounce earthly
goods, leave their loved ones and secular professions,
suffer for the sake of the Kingdom of God, and bear fruits
in order to be His followers (Matt 10:28; 19:21; Luke 14:26,
27, 33; 1 Pet 2:21; Matt 16:24; John 15:8).

In this manner Jesus' model of discipleship
superseded other models followed by the Jewish rabbis, John
the Baptist, the Qumran Community, Buddhists, and Vedic
Hindus. Christ did not initiate celibacy or asceticism, or

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[1]Harry R. Baird, "The Concept of Discipling in
Mission," in Unto the Uttermost, ed. Dough Priest
(Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1984), 47.

isolate His disciples from the world, but sent them into the world (John 17:18). He promised them no earthly glory and honor, but tribulation and martyrdom (Matt 5:11; 24;9; 10:17, 22; Luke 10:3; Acts 9:15, 16). He did not want them to seek worldly honors by assuming titles such as rabbi, father, or master. Rather, they were to exercise humility in all situations (Matt 23:8-11; Luke 14:10; 22:25-27). For the disciples, Christ was their only master or guru and they were to consider each other as brothers (Matt 23:8). The differences of honor and position, the separation of clergy and laity found in the church today, are not in accordance with the discipleship model provided by Jesus Christ.

Discipling in the Early Church

After the ascension of Christ, the disciples waited in Jerusalem to receive the power of the Holy Spirit as promised by Jesus. As promised, on the day of Pentecost, they were filled by the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. Then Peter and other disciples began their ministry among the Jews and discipled them to follow Jesus. Thousands of Jews, including the priests, professed faith in Jesus (Acts 2:41, 44, 47; 4:32; 5:14; 6:7). The apostles followed the methods of preaching and teaching in the temple (Acts 5:25, 42). Later on, after the conversion of Paul, the ministry of the apostles extended beyond the borders of Judea as Paul was called to communicate the gospel among the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 26:17, 18).

The situations the disciples faced after the ascension of Christ were different from when they were with Christ. Although Christ was not with them physically, His presence was with them through the Holy Spirit. The proclaimer of the kingdom had now become the proclaimed. The disciples had to enter into a new frontier and break new grounds in the Gentile world, even facing persecution and martyrdom. Further, as new disciples increased in numbers, they had to be cared for and nurtured. All these factors created a new situation calling for a new model of discipleship which consisted of modeling, spiritual life, and adaptation.

Following

The principles of "modeling" and "following" were still in effect in the new situation. The new believers were taught to set themselves as examples to others in Christian conduct, faith, and purity of life (Phil 1:27; 1 Thess 1:8). The disciples set themselves up as models for others and admonished new disciples to become examples to others (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6,7).

Living in Christ

However, the new situation called certain new principles and methods to the forefront. Since the new disciples were not required to leave family, profession, and property, the emphasis was now placed on care for the

family, the poor, and ministering within one's own profession (Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-41; 1 Pet 2:18-3:7; 1 Cor 7:32-35; 1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:6-13).

Furthermore, the principle of "being in Christ" received a new emphasis. For instance, the Apostle Paul, in his letters to different churches, talked about the spiritual experience of living in Christ (Gal 2:20; Rom 6:11; 14:8; 2 Cor 4:11; Gal 4:19). The life of faith leading to a life of communion with the risen Lord through the Holy Spirit was emphasized as the primary factor in discipleship. Paul used the phrases "in Christ," "with Christ," "put on Christ," and "Christ in us" in all his epistles. The phrases "in Christ" and "in the Lord" occur 164 times in the Pauline writings.[1] Paul did not present this as a doctrine to merely believe in but rather as an experience of the believers who could bear witness to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This was in conformity with the following prayer of Jesus:

> That they may all be one; even as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:21 RSV).

The holy life lived by the disciples among the Gentiles spoke more powerfully for Christ than any other strategy in the early church.

It was the living witness of the believers that

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[1]Alfred Wikenhauser, Pauline Mysticism (New York: Herder & Herder, 1960), 22.

became a compelling factor in the conversion of so many people into the church. The disciples did not deliver a set of propositional truths about God, but lived the life of Christ in the context of the hearers with love and humility, which in turn made a great impact on others, resulting in the conversion of the Gentiles.

Adaptation

Another principle followed by the Apostles was the preaching of the Christian message within the context of the Gentile culture. The Apostles did not condemn the Gentile culture as a whole, but adapted to it when it was in agreement with the Scripture (1 Cor 9:18-23). Paul spoke about Christ being worshipped by the Greeks as the Unknown God. He revealed Christ to them as One who was already there in their culture (Acts 17:23). Peter approached Cornelius, the Gentile, with a positive attitude and believed that God had been working among the heathens before the gospel reached them (Acts 10:28, 34, 35).

Thus far we have seen how discipling had occurred at the time of Jesus and in early Church. We have looked at such principles as modeling, following, living in Christ, and adaptation. However, we see that after the time of the Apostles, these principles were slowly given up as the church became highly institutionalized in the second and third centuries. I have not discussed the discipleship that occurred after these periods in Europe, because it is

irrelevant to my project. However, I would like to consider in the next section the discipleship principles and methods followed in India by the Christians from the first century to the contemporary period.

Discipling in the Indian Church

Historically, there is no evidence of a discipleship model being followed in India before the arrival of Francis Xavier in the middle of the sixteenth century A.D. However, according to Indian tradition, the Apostle Thomas came to Malabar, South India, in A.D. 52[1] and established Christian communities known as St. Thomas Christians. Although there is no conclusive evidence to his coming, mission historians like Stephen Neill believe that the tradition concerning St. Thomas could be true.[2] However, there is no information about the discipleship methods Thomas used in his missionary endeavor.

Another tradition in India says that a Syrian merchant by the name of Thomas of Cana (not the Apostle Thomas) brought a group of Syrian settlers to Malabar[3] and established a Christian community known as the Syrian Christians. The Syrian Christians adopted many Hindu

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[1]Boyd, 7.

[2]Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 51-52.

[3]Boyd, 7.

customs[1] and formed themselves into a distinct caste group.[2] Nestorian missionaries and settlers also came to South India, probably at the end of the fourth century[3] and continued their mission until the arrival of the Catholic missionaries. However, their methods of discipleship are also unknown.

Discipling in Early Catholic Missions

Full-scale Catholic missionary work started in India after the arrival of the great Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier. He came to Goa in 1542 with the authority of the Pope and the king of Portugal.[4] The early Catholic missionaries came to India with a crusade mentality and a theology of conquest. They coerced conversion in the regions which came under Portugal power.[5] Xavier carried on his missionary work primarily among a large group of Paravas or fishing community who were earlier baptized en masse. This community of approximately 10,000[6] was baptized without Christian instruction, in order for them to

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[1]A. L. Basham, The Wonder That Was India (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 343.

[2]Ibid., 151.

[3]Boyd, 7.

[4]Neill, 148.

[5]Zacharias P. Thundy, Kuncheria Pathil and Frank Podgorski, eds., Religions in Dialogue (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 31.

[6]Ibid., 149.

secure protection by the King of Portugal against their
enemies, a race of Moors (Arabs) who came to their region
for pearl fishing.[1]

Francis Xavier came to minister to this poor,
illiterate community of Paravas who lived in about twenty
villages "strung out over a narrow strip about a hundred
miles in length, from Cape Comorin to Vembar."[2] He first
translated the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten
Commandments into their Tamil language. He instructed young
boys, who in turn instructed the older people. Xavier made
the people repeat the prayers and the Decalogue during
Sunday service.[4] He baptized people after a short period
of instruction in prayers. After the sermon, he would ask
them if they believed in each article of faith, and baptized
them if he received a positive reply. New converts
continued to receive instruction in prayers twice daily. In
this way, he once baptized more than ten thousand people in
one month.[5]

The discipleship principle, practiced in early
Catholic missionary work, was to baptize the old people en
masse and educate the young in Christian ways so that the

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[1]Stephen Neill, _A History of Christianity in India:
The Beginning to 1707_ (New York: Cambridge University
Press, 1984), 141-42.

[2]Ibid., 141.

[4]Neill, _Christian Missions_, 150.

[5]Neill, _Christianity in India_, 150.

second generation would follow Christianity faithfully. That is how the Parava community was baptized prior to the arrival of Xavier. However, Xavier administered baptism only after instructing the converts. In addition, he and other Jesuit missionaries advocated accommodation and retention of traditional Indian cultural forms.[1] For example, they allowed the Hindu converts to continue to have the sacred thread and tuft, and performed baptism in secret.[2]

Xavier did not develop any strategy to disciple the high caste Hindus. Once he tried to share the gospel with the Saivite Brahmins of Tiruchendure during his pastoral work among the Paravas. Since he had not learned Tamil or studied Hinduism, his efforts were unsuccessful. He tried to encounter them on a doctrinal level, whereas they were concerned with the practical aspects of religion.[3] He also tried to evangelize the ruling classes and used the method of public discussions in evangelism.[4]

After Xavier, Roberto de Nobili came to India as a young missionary on May 20, 1605.[5] He started his work in

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[1]Hiebert, 104.

[2]Neill, Christianity in India, 154.

[3]Harold Coward, Hindu-Christian Dialogue (New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 65.

[4]Ibid., 182.

[5]Neill, Christianity in India, 280.

Madurai on November 15, 1606, among the Christians[1] who were immigrants from the Fisher Coast and elsewhere. After starting his ministry in Madurai, he discovered that his station was not really in India but was an "outpost of Portugal, and the converts who had attached themselves to it had really been lifted out of India and put down inside the Portuguese compound wall, to become imitation Portuguese Christians."[2] There was a cultural barrier between the high caste Hindus and the Christians, hindering the mission of the church among the Hindus.

In order to break the barrier, de Nobili identified himself with the Hindus by adopting the life of a **sannyasi** guru and by cutting himself off entirely from the Christian church. His discipleship model included the principles of adoption and adaptation whereby he claimed himself to be a Kshatriya, one of the three castes, and hired a Brahmin to cook and Brahmin boy to serve his meals according to caste rules.[3] After mastering the Sanskrit and Tamil languages, he adopted the method of public discussions on religious matters to win his converts.[4]

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Lesslie Newbigin, <u>Honest Religion for Secular Man</u> (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 109.

[3]Vincent Cronin, <u>A Pearl to India: The Life of Robert DeNobili</u> (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1959), 56-57.

[4]Neill, <u>Christian Missions</u>, 183-84.

De Nobili taught a course on Christian doctrines for twenty days to his students,[1] including a school teacher who taught him all about India. At the end of the course, the school teacher was baptized and given the name Albert.[2] His idea of discipling the Hindus was to identify with them not only in lifestyle, but also to teach them about the Christian religion in the context of their preconceptions[3] and religious tradition.

Accordingly, de Nobili allowed his upper caste converts to keep their caste rules and maintain their dwellings with their families, but forbade them to participate in idolatrous ceremonies.[4] He treated caste purely as a social institution, and his experiments in regard to caste clearly revealed that discipleship in India can be successful if it is carried out within the caste context of India. In my view this might produce increasing numbers of churches along caste lines. At the same time this practice might cause divisions within denominations unless the caste churches are brought together in mutual love and respect through some other means. De Nobili did

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[1]Cronin, 62.

[2]Ibid., 66.

[3]Ibid., 90. De Nobili, like Paul at Athens, adapted himself to the ideas of the Hindus and told them that he had the knowledge of the unknown law which the Hindus believed to have been lost. He told them to become his disciples to learn about that law, and many did so.

[4]Neill, Christian Missions, 183-84.

not develop any strategy aimed at uniting Christians of different castes during the time he served in Tamil Nadu.

Due to a lack of support from church leaders, the mission of de Nobili was aborted during its infant stage. "The established ecclesiastical authorities bitterly attacked him and in the end his experiment was condemned by Rome."[1] However, de Nobili set himself as the perfect example for contextualizing the gospel in Indian forms. He refuted the Hindu system of thought on the basis of Scripture while accommodating himself to the lifestyle of an Indian sanyasi. "The adventurous spirit in which he pioneered new ways of living and studying and proclaiming the Gospel in Indian terms marks him out as one of the great missionaries of all times."[2]

A hundred years after de Nobili, Joseph Constantius Beschi came to Madurai in 1710 and served in Tamil Nadu for thirty-seven years without returning to Europe until his death on February 4, 1747. He was noted for his mastery of the Tamil language and the writing of a Tamil grammar.[3] His greatest work was Thembavani, the Tamil epic on the life of Joseph, in which he adopted Hindu theological conceptions

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[1]Newbigin, Honest Religion, 110.

[2]Neill, Christianity in India, 300.

[3]Stephen Neill, A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 87-8.

as vehicles to convey Christian teachings.[1] After these pioneers, the contextualization of the gospel was not seriously undertaken in the Catholic church until the arrival of the Ashram movement in the twentieth century.

Discipling in Protestant Missions

Protestant missions began in India after the arrival of Bartholomew Ziegenbalg on July 9, 1706, in Tranquebar.[2] His model of discipleship was to proclaim the gospel through the Bible translated into their native languages and training Indian pastors to care for the local church. Since then, the work of Bible translation and Christian schools has become the major missionary enterprises in India. Ziegenbalg built the first Tamil Protestant church and dedicated it on August 14, 1707. He completed the Tamil translation of the New Testament on May 31, 1711. After his death on March 19, 1720,[3] his friends continued his translation work, translating and printing the entire Bible into Tamil in 1798.[4]

After Ziegenbalg, Frederick Shwartz, a German missionary of the Danish-Halle Mission, came to Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu, on July 17, 1750, and later moved to

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[1]Boyd, 14.

[2]Ibid., 15.

[3]Neill, India 1707-1858, 40.

[4]Ibid., 44.

Tiruchirapalli and Tanjore. He served in Tamil Nadu for forty-eight years and died on February 13, 1798, after working among all classes of people including the royal family at Tanjore.[1] He shared the gospel with the King Rajah Tulaji at Tanjore.[2] He also served as a guardian to young prince Sarafoji and restored him to the throne after the brief rule of Amarsingh. Although his effort to convert the kings was unsuccessful, he was able to gain their support for his missionary activities. He also served as a peacemaker between the British and the kings on several occasions.[3]

A new era in Protestant missions began after the arrival of William Carey to Calcutta on November 11, 1793.[4] Carey focused mainly on Bible translation into the native languages. He proposed six principles of missionary action:

1. Non-Christian people must be approached in their own language.

2. Missionaries must understand the mind and culture of the native people.

3. The primary task is the widespread diffusion of the gospel among the peoples of India.

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[1]Neill, Christian Missions, 233.

[2]M. Justus, "Schwartz: A Missionary in Politics 1750-1798," Indian Church History Review (June 1992): 40.

[3]Ibid., 43-47.

[4]Neill, Christian Missions, 262.

4. The Bibles should be given to the natives in their own language.

5. New converts should repudiate their castes.

6. Native Christians and other Indians should be given a Western education.[1]

Carey helped to open a college in Serampore in 1819 and died on June, 1834, after promoting Marshman as his successor.[2] After that, the educational aspect of the missionary work was spearheaded by another missionary, Alexander Duff.

Alexander Duff of the Church of Scotland came in 1830 with a new approach to Christian discipleship. He tried to present the gospel to the cultured, upper caste Indians through higher education in English.[3] He believed that "secular education in English would prove an effective **praeparatio evangelica** by undermining the religious structure of Hinduism in the light of modern knowledge."[4] He also advocated the preaching of the gospel to the adult population.[5] However, a great emphasis was laid on education, with the hope of converting not just a few

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[1]Neill, India 1707-1858, 191-201.

[2]Neill, Christian Missions, 265.

[3]Ibid., 274.

[4]Boyd, 17.

[5]Alexander Duff, India and India Missions (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, Hunter Square, 1839), 328.

individuals but changing the structure of Hinduism itself.

Charles T. E. Rhenius, who came to Tamil Nadu, followed Duff and established Christian schools in many villages in the Tinnevelly district. He appointed catechists to serve as Christian teachers.[1] He mastered the Tamil language and composed a Tamil grammar.[2] After serving in India for twenty-four years without a break, he died on June 5, 1838.[3]

After 1850, a new kind of discipleship idea evolved: mass movements which encouraged proselytism en masse into Protestant Christianity by denominations such as American Baptists, the Church of England, American United Lutherans, the Western Methodist Mission, the Canadian Baptist Mission, the London Missionary Society, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the American United Presbyterian Mission. Mass movements occurred among the Sudras and Harijans, but the Harijan movement was greater in number than the one among the Sudras. It is estimated that 80 percent of the Protestants of India are products of mass movements.[4] One of the main reasons for the mass movements was the socio-economic injustice people experienced within the structure

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[1]Neill, India 1707-1858, 221.

[2]Ibid., 218.

[3]Ibid., 222.

[4]Jarrell Waskom Pickett, Christian Mass Movement in India (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), 5.

of Hinduism. They began to embrace Christianity en masse to gain better status, human dignity, and material benefits.

This kind of discipleship, although adding numbers to Christendom, affected the quality of the Christian faith and witness at large. The denominational divisions corresponded with caste divisions and the hostility between castes within the church have projected a poor image about Christianity in India. Moreover, the converts who had enriched their lives through Western Christianity lacked knowledge of the Scripture and the inner drive needed to evangelize others. As a result, Christianity was unable to penetrate among the high caste Hindus. In addition, it opened the way for Hindus to resist the spread of Christianity in India.

The Christian discipleship done en masse under the cloak of humanitarian service received severe criticism from many leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, producing anti-Christian sentiments among the Hindus. Gandhi spoke against the mass movement and denied the claims of Dr. Pickett regarding the transformation of the depressed classes.[1] Moreover, the Hindus organized countermovements to prevent the conversions of Hindus to Christianity and reconvert those who had already become Christians by making them to go through the

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[1]Clifford Manshardt, ed., The Mahatma and the Missionary (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1949), 90-91.

purification ceremony called **suddhi.**[1] Since the 1930s the
number of mass movements has been reduced considerably[2] due
to the opposition from the politicians who introduced a bill
into three state assemblies against conversions.[3]

As a result, the mass movements to Christianity
disappeared in India. However, a new model of discipleship
has been introduced in the past two decades, producing new
churches and denominations in India. The following section
discuses this new model.

Discipling in Contemporary Indigenous Missionary Movements in India

The missionary work in India has been greatly
revived in recent years with the arrival of new indigenous
missionary movements such as the Evangelical Church of
India, Indian Evangelical Team, Friends Missionary Band,
India for Christ Ministries, and several others. Most of
these follow the discipleship principles advocated by the
Church Growth School of Dr. Donald McGavran. According to
the book <u>Mission Mandate</u>, 184 indigenous organizations are
strongly engaged in various types of evangelism throughout

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[1]J. F. Seunarine, <u>Reconversion to Hinduism through Suddhi</u> (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1977), 28.

[2]D. B. Forrester, <u>Caste and Christianity</u> (London: Curzon Press, 1980), 92.

[3]Seunarine, 81-82.

India,[1] some of them focusing mainly on reaching unreached people groups through various methods. Native missionaries are trained for this task in about 169 Indian seminaries and bible schools.[2] These organizations have launched a joint program of evangelism in India called Mission India 2000 as a result of a major conference held in Madras from January 13-18, 1992.[3] Mission India 2000's goal is to identify people groups and disciple them by the year A.D. 2000.[4] The key concepts of the Church Growth School are the guiding principles for most of these indigenous missionary movements.

The phrase "church growth" is generally connected with the movement initiated by missiologist Donald McGavran, who served as a missionary in India for thirty-five years. During his service, he studied the growth and lack of growth of mission work and discovered some key concepts that would improve church growth. He expounded his theories of church growth mainly in his books The Bridges of God and Understanding Church Growth. His view of discipleship has been described in terms such as the "homogeneous unit," "receptivity,"or "win the winnable," "multi-individual," and

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[1]M. Ezra Sargunam, Mission Mandate (Madras: Mission India 2000, 1992), 462-89.

[2]Ibid., 494-518.

[3]Ibid., viii.

[4]Ibid., 162.

"discipling and perfecting."

Without going into details of the church-growth school of thought, I focus on McGavran's view of making disciples. His interpretation of the Great Commission conveys his theory of discipleship. As mentioned earlier, in his understanding, the phrase "**Panta ta ethne**" refers to tongues, tribes, castes, and lineages.[1] He uses the term "homogeneous unit" to describe a group of people such as a caste in India or a tribe in West New Guinea, or Chinese in Thailand, who have some characteristics in common. He believes that people from these groups can be brought to Jesus Christ through "people movements" on the basis of group decision. In McGavran's view, discipleship is focused on homogeneous units rather than on the individual, as has traditionally been done in missions. He argues that the churches established among homogeneous units can grow more rapidly than other churches.[2] His view of discipleship consists of two separate stages: discipling first and perfecting later. He seems to describe these as two successive activities in a single continuous motion.[3]

In the first stage, people make changes only in

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[1]McGavran, 56.

[2]For further reading, see Donald A. McGavran, <u>Ethnic Realities and the Church</u> (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979) and idem, <u>Understanding Church Growth</u>, 223-244.

[3]Bosch, "The Structure of Mission," 231.

regard to their allegiance to their former gods and certain religious beliefs. McGavran said, "The removal of distracting divisive sinful gods and spirits and ideas from the corporate life of the people and putting Christ at the center on the Throne, this we call discipling."[1] He did not consider the full understanding of Christ, and the resulting ethical and spiritual changes, as all-important factors in the first stage.[2] These are to be done in the second stage, called "perfecting the people" referred to in the Great Commission as "teaching them all things."[3]

In my opinion, McGavran used the term "discipling" in a limited sense of converting a non-Christian group to change their allegiance from the false gods to Jesus Christ. This appears to be only another version of the mass movement clothed in some theologically convincing ideas. However, I believe he misused the texts Matt 28:18-20 in his attempts to provide practical solutions to the problems confronting mission among non-Christian groups.

I also think that he misinterpreted the Great Commission to merely mean the expansion of Christianity in terms of numerical growth of Christians. In my opinion, the Great Commission conveys the idea of discipleship in terms

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[1]Donald A. McGavran, The Bridges of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1955), 14.

[2]Ibid., 14.

[3]Ibid., 15.

of bringing people to the knowledge of Christ and His teachings. In this context, I believe that Christian ashrams in India seek to realize the true meaning of discipleship found in the Great Commission. This is examined in the following section.

Discipling in the Christian Ashrams

The Christian ashram movement is a lay movement that started in India in the early part of this century to revive Christian mission and to make Christianity meaningful and relevant to Indians in the context of the Indian spiritual tradition.

Regarding the word "ashram," Dr. S. Jesudason of the Christ-Kula Ashram stated:

> The word "ashram" represents a very ancient Hindu ideal of a forest settlement or religious community of those who amidst the beauties of nature and unperturbed by worldly distractions and ambitions, devote themselves to worship, meditation, and philosophical research.[1]

The meaning and the definition of the ashram ideal is discussed in detail in the Part Two of this project report.

The ancient ashram ideal has been revived and adapted to the present conditions and needs of life by modern Hindu leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Following the examples of these men, Christian leaders who were hungering for an Indian mode of Christian life, witness, and service started the Christian ashram

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[1]Savarirayan Jesudason, Ashrams, Ancient and Modern (Vellore: Sri Ramachandra Press, 1937), 44.

movement and established the first Christian ashram at Tiruppatur, Tamil Nadu, in 1921. Since then, more than fifty Christian ashrams have been established in India.[1] They have become a most valuable model of discipleship in India by adapting Christian witness to the spiritual and political climate of India. Christian ashrams offer Indian Christianity a hopeful model for discipleship in India.

The discipleship pattern followed in all the Christian ashrams is not the same. Catholic and Protestant ashrams differ from each other in their idea of discipleship due to their theological differences. However, both types try to follow the Hindu ashram tradition in respect to lifestyle. While the Catholic ashrams emphasize the contemplative ideal as a witness of the absolute, the Protestant ashrams engage themselves in community service and evangelism.

The discipleship model followed in Catholic ashrams is patterned after the Jnana Marga ideal of Hinduism which is mostly followed by the **advaitic** Hindus. For example, the Saccidananda Ashram of J. Monchanin and H. Le Saux, located near Kulithali, Tamil Nadu, illustrates the contemplative nature of Christian discipleship in India. Its present guru Bede Griffiths says that we should see

> how our Christian Ashrams can become authentic centres of Indian spirituality leading people through Indian methods of prayer and meditation and an Indian style of

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[1]See appendix I.

life to the realisation of the mystery of advaita with our Christian faith in the Trinity and the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.[1]

This ashram tries to disciple Hindus of the advaitic experience through a contemplative life and does not engage in public evangelism.

The Protestant ashrams, on the other hand, have realized the importance of active witness in terms of religious and social activities as valid forms of discipleship in India. Here the discipleship takes place at the spiritual and practical levels.[2] The ashram community bears practical witness to Jesus Christ in the neighborhood through social service and preaching. The best illustration of this discipleship model is found in the Christu-Kula Ashram of Tirupattur. This ashram consists of a Christian temple, hospital, and school run by an interdenominational community of four permanent members and about sixteen volunteers.[3]

These and a few other Christian ashrams are discussed in detail in chapter 5. Here I have only pointed out the main difference between the Catholic and Protestant ashrams in regard to their method of

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[1]R. S. Vandana, "The Ashram Movement and the Development of Contemplative Life," Vidya Jyoti (May 1983): 189.

[2]Van Bergen, "Christian Homeless Existence in India," Studia Missionalia 28 (1979): 174.

[3]Ibid., 175.

discipleship. It seems, in my opinion, that the Catholic
ashrams advocate the discipleship method that was followed
by the ashrams of the **Upanishads** period which emphasized
jnana and **yoga** which will be explained later. In the
following section I discuss discipleship in the Hindu
ashrams.

Discipling in Hinduism

Hinduism is not a missionary religion like
Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. It has no creed or agenda
for proselytism. In fact the idea of proselytism is foreign
to the Hindu tradition. However, the idea of discipleship
is strongly present in various Hindu religious sects, but
not in the sense of proselytism as explained in the first
chapter. These sects have developed a form of discipleship
centered around a **guru-sishya** relationship to help religious
seekers attain self-realization and enlightenment. This
idea of discipleship has evolved from ancient Hindu ashrams
which existed in the **vedic** period.

Discipling in Ancient Hindu Ashrams

The ashram might have originated in India during the
vedic period about 1000 B.C.[1] The early **Aryans**, who
settled down in India from a nomadic life, resorted to an

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[1]John S. Thannickal, "Ashram: A Communicating
Community" (D.Miss. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary,
Pasadena, 1975), 18.

ashram at the **Vanaprasad**[1] stage in life. They lived there
with their wives to study religion and to gain a knowledge
of God from the gurus. Here the teacher and his pupils
lived together as a family, and the discipling was
accomplished through study, work, prayer, and fellowship in
the midst of nature. Thus the ashrams began as retreat
centers in the forest.[2]

Later on, ashrams became the centers of learning. The
Vanaprasthas who came to an ashram were mature people
skilled in the arts and the experiences of life. In
addition, young men from princely and noble families came
for their education and training. These ashrams became the
places of reflection, education, and discussion, far removed
from the bustle and noise of the world.[3] These centers of
learning were known as **guru-kula** ashrams. These ashrams
provided the best atmosphere for learning and catering to
the spiritual needs of young people. Further, the ashrams

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[1]According to Hindu philosophy, life is divided into
four stages called asramas: (1) Brahmachari, student
leading a celibate and austere life at the home of his
teacher, (2) Grhastha, life of a householder,
(3) Vanaprastha, forest dweller after completing all duties
of the householder, and (4) Sanyasi, homeless wanderer after
leaving the hermitage and renouncing all attachment to
the world. This is only an ideal pattern of Hindu life
which is followed by only a few in modern India.

[2]Thannickal, 24.

[3]M. Amaladoss, "Ashrams and Social Justice," in The
Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society, ed. D. S.
Amalorpavadoss (Bangalor: National Biblical Catechetical
Liturgical Center, 1981), 373.

did not require the students to commit themselves to celibacy.[1]

Along with these, a new form of Hindu ashrams began to evolve due to the influence of Buddhism. As a result, the ideal of **sanyasa** was no longer attached to the fourth stage. The ashramites were required to observe celibacy. "Young men became **sanyasis** directly after their **brahmacharya**."[2] Here the discipleship method consisted of learning **vedas** and practicing **yoga**.

Discipling in Modern Hindu Ashrams

Ashrams began to disappear after the arrival of Buddhism, Jainism, Bhakti traditions, and Islam.[3] However, the ashrams have been revived again in the modern period by great personalities such as Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Shivananda, Ramana Maharishi, and Mahatma Gandhi. These leaders established ashrams to promote their religious, social, and political ideas, without any intention of converting any non-Hindus to Hinduism.

Modern Hindu ashrams follow no definite model of discipleship. Most of them are not organized with the idea of making many disciples, with the exception of the ashrams

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[1]Ibid., 374.

[2]Ibid., 373-74.

[3]Ibid., 374.

in the Ramakrishna Order. However, all of them generally follow the traditional idea of a guru-sishya relationship in the learning process, and all emphasize a life of simplicity, contemplation, and service.

I discuss some of the modern Hindu ashrams in chapter 5 but explain here only the discipleship model followed in the Ramakrishna Order.

The Ramakrishna Order has established many ashrams in India and abroad. These ashrams are called **maths** and the social service organ of the Order is called mission. Both have the goal of creating a band of Sannyasi teachers of Vedanta and carrying out missionary and philanthropic works in conjunction with lay disciples in the name of their faith, which is a belief in the essential divinity of all humanity. The non-dualistic vadantins of the Ramakrishna Order have integrated the social gospel of Christianity into their contemplative Hindu tradition.[1]

In the Ramakrishna maths, discipleship is open to any person regardless of caste, color, and race. However, certain rules are laid down for those who want to become monks. The prospective disciple or monk must be a bachelor between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five years. He has to complete a one year trial period, followed by four years as a brahmachari before he is initiated as a swami--a full

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[1]Albert W. Sadler, "Three Types of Monastic Temple in Hindu India," Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society 2 (Spring 1975): 21.

monk. Then he is given an orange robe at initiation and considered to be a working guru.[1]

In summary, I have discussed the concept of discipleship as found in the ministry of Christ, the early Church, the Indian Church, and Hindu ashrams. In the following section I present my view of discipleship in the context of India. In presenting my view, I have tried to contextualize the principles of discipleship followed by Christ and the Apostles in relation to the discipleship model of the Hindu ashrams and the attitudes of Hindus toward Christianity in India.

Contextual Theology of Discipleship for India

The discipleship concept, which the Indian church inherited from the Western missionary movement, is faced with many challenges in modern India. The Western missionaries strongly believed that the Great Commission conveyed the idea of discipling the whole world to Western Christianity by (1) displacing other religions in the world on the basis of their faith, (2) that the Bible alone contains the whole truth, and (3) other religious scriptures contain no truth.

However, after working among the people of non-Christian religions for more than four centuries, many Western missionaries have come to realize the positive

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[1]Ibid.

values other cultures and religions have in them. They have also come to understand that their old approaches are unproductive. Therefore, they are trying to find new ways to disciple people in such countries as India.

Personally, I believe that first we need to develop a contextual theology of discipleship for India in the context of the spiritual heritage of India and to develop a model that would meet the spiritual needs of the Indian people.

In my opinion, the conventional missionary concept of converting Hindus to Western Christianity by preaching a social gospel and dogma should be abandoned. Instead, we need to discover how we can bring Hindus to experience Christ and His saving power. We also need to take special efforts to remove the prejudices that Hindus have about Christianity. In addition, we need to develop local churches where Hindus can find the living Christ and feel at home.

With this in mind, I present my view of discipleship, a contextual theology of discipleship for India. I strongly believe that my view is rooted in the discipleship experience of Christ and the Apostles.

The life of Christ and the Apostles clearly indicate that it was only in the context of living the message that

they carried out their oral preaching[1] and thus converted many people into their group or church called **ekklesia**. In addition to a Christian lifestyle, the Apostles also adopted the lifestyle of the hearers of the gospel (1 Cor 9:19-22), accepted the revelation of truth in other scriptures (Acts 17:28), and believed in the spirit of God working in them prior to the arrival of the gospel (John 1:5, 9; Acts 10:34, 35).

On the contrary, I believe that the conventional missionary interpretation of the Great Commission ignored these principles and laid more emphasis on oral preaching and other external ways[2] of evangelism rather than "living"[3] as the key to discipleship. The external ways, such as the establishment of schools, hospitals, orphanages, relief centers, and rural development projects, certainly have made great contributions in uplifting the lives of the Indian people. However, these methods often did not disciple India for Christ as envisioned and hoped for by the missionaries.

Christian discipleship is a spiritual approach which means bringing people to experience Christ by living the life of Christ in the context of India as portrayed by

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[1]A. Pushparajan, <u>From Conversion to Fellowship</u> (Allahabad: St. Paul Press, 19990), 272.

[2]Ibid., 277.

[3]Ibid., 275.

Stanley Jones in his book <u>Christ of the Indian Road</u>.[1] The preaching of doctrines, a social gospel, coercive conversion, and civilization and Westernization are not the principles prescribed in the Great Commission. The primary factor in the discipleship process is not a set of doctrines, but the spiritual life of the disciples.

The Christian spiritual life definitely includes the experience of prayer, love, peace, forgiveness, freedom, joy, sharing, and serving. However, it lacks the experience of solitude, silence, contemplation, devotion, self-surrender, simplicity, renunciation, continence, self-realization, and bliss. Therefore, Christian spirituality does not appeal to religious Hindus who are normally attracted to the Indian gurus who follow the above. At the same time, Hindus are attracted by the spirituality of Christ who lived the life of a true guru. They will be attracted more toward Christianity if they see Christ in the spiritual life of the Indian Christian teachers and ministers.

At present, the Hindus see only a Western Christ in the lives of the Indian Christians who have alienated themselves in India by adopting a Western lifestyle. On the other hand, the disciples of Christ never alienated themselves from their Jewish culture nor did the Gentile

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[1]Stanley Jones, <u>Christ of the Indian Road</u> (New York: Abingdon Press, 1925).

converts adopt the Jewish culture, although Christianity came from the Jewish people. To them, discipleship did not mean leaving one's own culture; however, in India, discipleship has often meant, especially for the missionaries, the Westernization of the converts.

Let me explain how this has happened in India. Missionaries in the past assumed that the converts should be uprooted from their community and traditional lifestyle and become Westernized, in order to prevent them from resorting to their old religion. The low caste converts in India also felt that it was the proper thing to do, because they felt that they had "little of cultural value which they could carry over into the new life. In fact they wanted to forget their cultural past as something best left behind."[1] As a result the converts were denationalized and Westernized, and were made foreigners in their own country.

This has greatly affected the spread of Christianity among high caste communities in India and has created suspicions in the minds of the Hindus about the loyalty of Christians to their country. Hindus fear that foreign influence through native Christians might threaten the unity of India and further split the country on a religious basis,[2] as happened in the past with the partition of

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[1]Paul D. Devanandan, _Preparation for Dialogue_ (Bangalore: CISRS, 1964), 93.

[2]Joachim Wietzke, ed., _Paul D. Devanandan_ (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1987), 2:3.

Pakistan for the Muslims.

Keeping this in mind I suggest that Christians in India should follow the principle of adaptation as Paul did. He adapted himself to the Jews as well as Gentiles (1 Cor 9:20-22). The Christians of India should become true disciples of Christ by not only living the life of Christ but also adapting to the culture of the high caste Hindus of India.

The next discipleship principle is the adopting of Indian terms, symbols, thoughtforms, and even Hindu writings to convey the meaning of the gospel. In adopting these, one should carefully explain the Christian meaning behind these terms or symbols.

For example, if a Christian minister or a teacher uses the term **"sakti"** for the power of the Holy Spirit, he or she should first explain who the Holy Spirit is. Similarly, when quoting from Hindu writings, the Hindu text should be used to support the Christian view which is already found in the Bible, or to add new understanding to the old meaning. For example, we can use the texts that talk about the **nishkama karma** in the Baghavad-Gita to expound the idea of disinterested benevolence found in the New Testament. This kind of adoption cannot be considered syncretism and will not lead to it.

Finally, I would like to explain the meaning of baptism and how it can be adapted to the Indian setting. In

order to do that it is necessary to understand how baptism was perceived in New Testament times. "For in the first century water initiation rites were used to induct people into a number of different groups."[1] I have already mentioned that Judaism and the Greek mystery religions used this rite in the days of Jesus. "The function and the purpose of baptism were well known to those outside as well as to those inside these groups."[2] I believe people in the days of the Apostles clearly perceived baptism as an initiation rite. Therefore, when Christ told His disciples to go and baptize, they understood that He asked them to initiate the new believers.

However, baptism is not perceived as an initiation rite by the Hindus in India. Hindus strongly view baptism as a symbol of the change of religious, cultural and sociological affiliation,[3] a total break with one's own community, repudiation of their ancient cultural heritage,[4] and a show of allegiance to a foreign god and culture. Therefore, the emphasis of baptism and church membership seems to be counterproductive. Since this is the perception, Christian leaders are confronted with the question becomes whether or

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[1]Kraft, 68.

[2]Ibid.

[3]S. Wesley Ariarajah, Hindus and Christians (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1991), 137.

[4]M. M. Thomas, Salvation and Humanization (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1971), 38.

not to continue with the baptismal rite as a mark of one's conversion to Christ.

In my opinion, baptism and church membership are not marks of conversion, because of the reasons stated above. However, in obedience to the gospel commission, we need to perform some form of initiation as a mark of conversion. I would like to suggest the following alternatives, from which the church can adopt one that is suitable to the local situation.

1. Perform Hindu initiation rites in addition to baptism.

2. Synthesize both Christian and Indian initiation forms in order to develop a new form of initiation rite meaningful to the Indians.

3. Adopt a Hindu initiation rite in place of baptism.

4. Continue to perform baptism of true converts only after explaining the meaning of baptism to the public.

5. Do away with baptism completely as the Salvation Army did.

I believe that the second option is most viable to India. It would be good if various Indian Christian denominations would jointly devise an initiation rite that is suitable to the cultural context.

Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to explain various discipleship principles and methods followed by various individuals and groups such as Jesus, apostles, Catholic and Protestant missionaries, national missionary societies, and Christian and Hindu ashrams. I have also discussed my view of discipleship under the title "Contextual Theology of Discipleship for India." In chapter 6, I describe an indigenous model of discipleship. Since this model would focus on discipling the Hindus of Tamil Nadu, one of the southern states of India, I examine the culture and religion of the Tamils as well as the Hindu response to Christianity.

CHAPTER IV

HINDUS OF TAMIL NADU

I have two main goals in writing this chapter.
First, I would like to present a clear picture of the Tamil
people of India. Then I would like to consider the factors
which are crucial to the development of the ashram model
which is discussed in chapter 6.

This discussion covers the main features of the
Tamil culture and religion which are relevant to the topic
of this paper. This includes a brief description of the
land, its antiquity, and its people. I also discuss the
language and literature of the Tamils who are proud of their
language and cultural identity. This is followed by a
discussion on various forms of Hinduism.

At the end of this chapter I discuss the attitudes
and responses of the Hindus to Christianity which I consider
to be the major factors that have influenced my thoughts in
developing the ashram model.

Land

Tamil Nadu is one of the states of India located on
the southeastern part of the peninsula. In the local

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language it is called **Deccan**, meaning "south." It is surrounded by the states of Kerala to the west, Karnataka to the northwest, Andra Pradesh to the north, and the Indian Ocean to the east and south. Its north and west regions are hilly, while the fertile Cauvery Delta covers the central and eastern plains. South of the Cauvery Delta are the dry plains, and in the extreme south, starting from Tinnevelli, is the fertile Tambraparni Delta. The high Western Ghats Range runs along the western border and the lower hills of the Eastern Ghats run through the middle of the state.

People

Tamil Nadu is the traditional home of the Tamils, the descendants of the Dravidians. Many scholars believe that the Dravidians lived in India prior to the arrival of the Aryans[1] around 1500 B.C.[2] and that they were the occupants of the Indus Valley civilization of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. It is believed that they were driven out of North India after the invasion of the Aryans.[3] Father Heras, a Spanish Roman Catholic priest and scholar, claimed that the "Tamils were indeed the purest descendants of the

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[1]T. R. Sesha Iyengar, Dravidian India (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1982), 35.

[2]Charles A. Ryerson, " 'Meaning and Modernization' in Tamil Nadu: Tamil Nationalism and Religious Culture," Religion and Society (December 1970): 237.

[3]Troy O. Organ, Hinduism (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Services, 1974), 40-43.

Indus Valley people and had best preserved their culture."[1]
The similarities between the findings of Harappa and
Mohanjodaro and of Adichanallur, Tamil Nadu, also confirm
that this view could be true.[2]

P. T. Srinivasa Iyangar, Dr. Chatterji, and several
others are of the opinion that human civilization first
began in India, and was probably associated with the
primitive Dravidians who lived in the lands currently
submerged under the Indian Ocean.[3] Sir John Evans in his
address to the British Associations stated that "Southern
India was probably the Cradle of the Human race."[4] All
these opinions give some indication of the richness of
ancient Tamil culture and its origin.

The population of Tamil Nadu, according to the 1991
census, was 55,638,318[5] and might be well over 60,000,000
by 1993. This figure does not include Tamils living in
other countries such as Malagasy Republic, the Malay
Peninsula, Burma, Fiji, Singapore, and Indochina.

Language and Literature

Tamil is the oldest of all Dravidian languages with

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[1]Ryerson, 237.

[2]Iyengar, 42-43.

[3]Ibid., 58-59.

[4]Ibid., 60.

[5]H. Y. S. Prasad, "India," Britannica Book of the
Year (1993), 627.

its literature going back to probably 200 B.C.[1] According to some scholars, Tamil, as a Dravidian language, is related to Elamite, a major language of ancient West Africa. The study of local data has shown that the Elamite language is closely cognate with the Dravidian language, and they both have a number of morphological correspondences in nouns, pronouns, and verbs.[2] Tamil might have evolved from the Elamite language or vice versa. However, all the available evidence clearly points out the antiquity of the Tamil language.

Literature in Early Period

The oldest Tamil literature is the Tamil grammar, Tolkappyam. It is believed it was written by the poets of the second literary academy (**Sangam**)[3] around the fourth century B.C.[4] The second large body of literature comes from the third Sangam (probably from the first century A.D. to the sixth century). Famous among them are the Ten Idylls

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[1]David McAlpin, "Elamite and Dravidian: Further Evidence of Relationship," Current Anthropology (March 1975): 105.

[2]Ibid.

[3]"Sangam" means society or academy to which the authors submitted their writings for approval. According to tradition, there were three Sangams, all of which flourished under the patronage of the Pandya or the Pallava kings between 500 B.C. and A.D. 500. K. M. Munshi and P. P. Diwakar, eds. Indian Inheritance (New Delhi: Bhavan's Book University, 1951), 1:116-17.

[4]Iyengar, 81.

(Patthuppattu),[1] the Eight Collections (Ettuthokai),[2] and
Eighteen Minor Didactic Poems (Padinen Kilkanakku). The
world-famous classic, Thirukural,[3] is one of the Eighteen
Minor Didactic poems called "The Bible of the Tamil Nadu."
Patthupattu and Ettuthokai were written before Aryan ideas
influenced the Tamil Nadu.

It seems that Aryan religious ideas and practices
gradually influenced Tamil culture and language. The
writing of Padinenkilkanakku shows the influence of Jainism,
Buddhism, and Aryan Hinduism.

After the sixth century, Aryan influence greatly
penetrated the whole of Tamil Nadu. Silappadigaram, Kamba

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[1]The Patthuppathu, composed by 8 different authors,
are descriptive poems. They describe shrines, battle
fields, palace life, romance, social customs, manners, city
life, or the glory of the Pandyan Kingdom. Munshi and
Diwakar, 117.

[2]The Ettuthokai contains well over 2000 poems
written by more than 200 authors and classified as 8
anthologies under 8 names: Narrinai, 400 short poems on love
from 9 to 12 lines each; Kuruntogai, 400 love poems from 4
to 8 lines each; Aingurunuru, 500 short erotic poems;
Padirrupatthu, originally 10 poems each with 10 verses sung
in praise on the Cera king; Paripadal, 24 (originally 70)
poems in praise of gods; Kalittogai, 150 love poems;
Agananuru, 400 love lyrics of varying length; and
Purananuru, 400 poems in praise of kings. Basham, 462.

[3]Thirukural means 'Sacred Couplets.' It probably
was written by Tiruvalluvar. His work deals with virtue,
morals, love, happiness, prosperity, and wealth from an
ethical standpoint. It is divided into 113 chapters, each
containing 10 couplets. Munshi and Diwakar, 118.

<u>Ramayanam</u>, <u>Manimegalai</u>,[1] and <u>Sivaga-Sindamani</u>, literature
of that period, clearly reveal the influence of the North
Indian religious ideas. <u>Silappadigaram</u> and <u>Maninmegalai</u> are
considered to be the Iliad and Odyssey of Tamil
literature.[2] <u>Kamba Ramayanam</u> is the contextualized
translation or transculturation[3] of <u>Ramayana</u> originally
written in Sanskrit by Valmiki.

Literature in Medieval Period

The next body of Tamil literature comes from the
writings of the Saivaite and Vaishnavite **bhakti** saints of
the medieval period. These saints, called Nayanmars and
Alvars, produced writings emphasizing the devotional aspect
of the religious life. They expressed their intense
devotion for God in the form of poems. Their poems have
greatly influenced the religious life of the Tamils even in
the nineties. Many Tamils sing their poems at the time of
religious festivals in Tamil Nadu. Their literature

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[1]<u>Manimegalai</u> is the story of Manimegalai, who became
a buddhist nun. The story includes her discussions with
members of various Hindu orthodox and heterodox sects and
her successful refutation of their doctrines. Sivaga-
Sindamani is the story of the hero Sivaga who became a Jaina
monk. Basham, 475.

[2]Munshi and Diwakar, 119.

[3]Charles Kraft explains Transculturation in his
<u>Christianity in Culture</u>, 276-290.

includes the eleven <u>Tirummurais</u>,[1] the <u>Periyapuranam</u>[2] of the Shaivites, and the <u>Nalayira Prabandham</u>[3] of the Vaishnavites, which are considered to be part of the great religious literature of the world.[4]

The Hindus of today still read these religious poems in order to enrich their spiritual life. Christians who live in Tamil Nadu have no knowledge of this body of literature and are ignorant of the impact these poems have upon the religious life of the Tamils. In my opinion, Christians must study and use these poems in communicating the gospel with the Hindus.

Literature in Modern Period

The renaissance of the Tamil language began in 1856 with the publication of <u>A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages</u> by the Anglican Bishop Robert Caldwell of Tirunelveli. Since then the literary renaissance has

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[1]These are 11 Shaiva hymn books. The first 7 are collectively known as <u>Tevaram</u> which contains the works of Sambandar, Appar, and Sundarar. The 8th is the <u>Tiruvachakam</u>, written by famous Manikkavachakar. This occupies in Tamil sacred literature the place <u>Upanishad</u> occupies in Sanskrit literature. The 9th is an anthology and the 10th is a collection of work by Tirumular. The 11th is another collection of poems from Nakkirar to Nambi-Andar-Nambi. Munshi and Diwakar, 122.

[2]The <u>Periyapuranam</u> contains biographical accounts of the 63 Shaiva saints who came from various castes including the untouchables. Ibid.

[3]The <u>Nalayira Prabandham</u> is the collected works of 12 Alvars. This book contains 4000 hymns. Ibid.

[4]Basham, 476.

moved forward, producing literature in prose and poetry culminating in the poetic work of Subramania Bharati (1882-1921). Many of his poems glorify Tamil Nadu and he considers the Tamil language "sweeter" than honey.[1]

After the independence of India, Tamil consciousness was greatly revived by two political parties, **Dravida Kazhagam** (Dravidian Federation) and **Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam** (Progressive Dravidian Federation). These parties advocated atheism, resisted the imposition of the Hindi language in Tamil Nadu, and revived Tamil culture and language. The Tamil language "once again attained its pre-eminent position as a distinct language full of light, life and lustre."[2]

Christians of Tamil Nadu, especially the educated ones, have lost their taste for the Tamil language and culture due to the influence of Western Christianity. This has affected their influence in Tamil society and the effective communication of the gospel in Tamil Nadu.

Social Life

Caste

Tamil society is a caste-oriented society like the rest of India. According to the Hindu theory of caste, society is divided into four major castes: **Brahmins**

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[1]Ryerson, 235-236.

[2]Ibid., 234.

(priests), **Kshatriyas** (warriors), **Vaishyas** (traders), and **Shudras** (laborers). The people who do not come under this classification are called untouchables (scavengers, washermen, barbers, cobblers). The first three castes listed above are called **dwija**, meaning twice born. People in these castes receive a sacred thread as a symbol[1] of their status after their initiation ceremony. They constitute more than 14 percent of the Indian population,[2] while the Shudras are just more than half.[3] The untouchables or the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes constitute more than 22 percent of the total population of India.[4] Altogether India has 4635 sub-castes or communities[5] orpeople groups.

The ancient Tamils did not seem to have the caste system (in its present form) as a hereditary principle. Society was divided into tribal groups with little sense of hierarchy of one over the other.[6] Later, different occupational groups developed, and slowly a strong caste

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[1]J. H. Hutton, Caste in India (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 64.

[2]S. Vasantharaj Albert, A Portrait of India-II (Madras: Church Growth Association India, 1992), 31.

[3]Harold R. Isaac, India's Ex-Untouchables (New York: John Day Company, 1964), 26.

[4]Albert, 31.

[5]Rahul Pathak, "People of India," India Today, 15 April 1993, 50.

[6]Basham, 138.

system was established along hereditary lines which was used to preserve the technical ingenuity and racial purity.[1]

Many attempts have been made since the time of Buddha to change the caste system. However, caste remains a social reality in India. Efforts to eradicate caste have always met with failure. The efforts of Buddhism, devotional Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity to abolish caste have proved unsuccessful. Although "untouchability" has been declared unconstitutional, caste prejudices still persist in the hearts of the people. Ninety percent of the people still practice caste customs.[2] However, the rigidity of caste is slowly disappearing in modern India, but caste differences may never disappear. Because caste has given everyone a sense of identity, fellowship, and loyalty, it may be impossible to eradicate caste from India.

Caste consciousness is still alive in the Christian churches in India, including Tamil Nadu. Caste is one of the major socio-religious issues that the Indian Church has struggled with for several centuries. There are about forty million Christians in India of which 82 percent[3] are from the low caste which includes scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and backward classes **(Shudras)**. There are 6,591,000

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[1]Gilbert Slater, The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture (Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1982), 140.

[2]Pathak, 54.

[3]Sargunam, 611.

Tamil Christians[1] with most of them from **Parava, Nadar,** and **Harijan** castes. The majority of these Christians came to Christ as the result of mass movements.

In the nineties, Christians, in the life of the church in general, do not discriminate against fellow Christians on the basis of caste, but they continue to maintain their caste identity and solidarity with their caste group.

In this context the Church has to be adaptive to time and circumstances, while at the same time constantly fighting against the injustice done to people on the basis of caste and by helping to develop a sense of brotherhood among its members. In addition, the Church should encourage its members to adopt a highly cultured lifestyle which is not contrary to the Bible but still related to Indian culture. Thus far, the churches have voiced their views against social injustice, but have not done much to bring a sense of brotherhood among the Christians as well as Hindus.

Family Life

Family life is another aspect of the Tamil culture which has much to do with the development of the Church in Tamil Nadu. Missionaries in the past were not aware of the family dynamics in India and followed an individualistic approach in converting the Hindus, with very little success.

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[1]Albert, 26.

Therefore, it is important to understand the family life of Tamils and integrate their family values when developing an indigenous model to disciple Hindus.

Family life in Tamil Nadu is different from family to family, due to various factors such as caste, religion, place, and economic conditions. However, some characteristics are common in the family life of all people. These are discussed in the following section.

Joint Family

The joint family is a basic unit of Tamil society and plays a vital role in Tamil culture. B. V. Subbamma describes the joint family as follows:

> Sons of a given pair of parents together with their wives and children and aged dependents live together in one household. The leader of the joint family is usually the older brother or the father of the family if he is still active. The leader is responsible for managing all economic affairs. He arranges marriages, controls discipline of the family, delegates work, and is looked to for leadership and moral example by the rest of the family.[1]

One advantage of the joint family is that it provides a greater measure of security and a greater sense of well-being to its members than do nuclear families. The property of the family is held together and used commonly by all members until the death of parents and until all children in the family are properly settled down. In this kind of communal setting, everyone feels safe and supported.

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[1]B. V. Subbamma, Christ Confronts India (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1973), 4.

Moreover, the children are properly cared for and nurtured in the family tradition, the family tie is kept strong, and everyone lives in close proximity to each other. Although the joint-family system is slowly disappearing in cities, people in the villages still follow it.

Family Unity

Modernization has affected the joint-family system and family unity to some extent in some parts of Tamil Nadu, especially in the cities. With industrialization, members of the extended families have often left their native villages and settled down in the cities because of the jobs available there. In doing this, they have lost their traditional family experience. Thus great effort is made now to come together often during native festivals and family functions to renew their solidarity with each other. Although separated, members continue to consult each other when they make such major decisions as schooling, jobs, marriage, and financial investments. In this way, the family bond is still kept strong in the society.

Individuals who are converted to Christianity miss this kind of family life after becoming Christians, since most churches do not have anything functionally equivalent to the joint-family experience with which to meet the various needs of the converts. Because of this, converts are left alone, their social needs are not met, and many become discouraged, and return to their own community and

former religious life. This is one of the reasons for the lack of conversions to Christianity in India. It is hoped that the discipling model developed in chapter 6 will remedy this situation by providing new converts with a much stronger community life.

I have discussed so far some important areas of Tamil culture which are relevant to the topic of this paper. In the next section I discuss the religions of the Tamils. Although Tamils are generally called Hindus, they do not hold the same beliefs or philosophical ideas. As the majority of them follow a mixture of popular Hinduism and theistic devotionalism, it is important to understand their religious ideas and practices in order to develop a suitable discipling model.

Hinduism of Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu is like the spiritual home of India. Even before the influence of the Aryans from the north, the Tamils followed various religious practices in which the elements of animism, monotheism, and polytheism were present. Similarly, in the nineties, all Tamils do not follow a single religious cult. Rather all kinds of religious cults and systems of philosophy are practiced, some of which are popular and some historically significant and influential in Tamil Nadu. The religious phenomenon discussed here focuses on Tamil regional Hinduism that is radically different from Aryan Hinduism of North India.

Most of the books written about Hinduism present only the Aryanized version of Hinduism because they are written mostly by the Brahmins of classical Hinduism or Vedantic Hinduism, which is probably followed by only 15 percent of Indians. Additionally, many of the Western writers on Hinduism mainly have used the writings of classical Hindus to present Hinduism to Westerners. In addition, only the Ramakrishna mission of the advaita system and the Hare Krishna Movement from North India have come to the West to spread the teachings of Hinduism. Therefore, the religious philosophy and practices of Tamil regional Hinduism, which is theistic in nature, is not well known outside of India.

Hinduism in general is not defined as a single religion like Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, which all have a definite time of origin, definite founders, creeds, sacred scriptures, mission, and organizational structure. According to D.S. Sarma,

> Hinduism consists in fact of several religions or cults having their own conceptions of the Deity, traditions, and practices, but endowed with a unity like that of a bouquet of flowers, brought about by the winding strings of certain Philosophical ideas and a world view common to them all.[1]

Further he said:

> Hinduism is not a simple homogeneous religion. Hinduism is rather a name given to League of Religions. In its comprehensive and tolerant fold we find all

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[1]D. S. Sarma, A Primer of Hinduism (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981), ii.

types of religions from the highest to the lowest.[1]
However, he places Vedantism[2] as the highest type of
Hinduism. In reality the name Hinduism is also used for
animism, popular polytheism, devotional theism, and Tantric
Mysticism. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan defined Hinduism on the
practical side, as follows:

> Hinduism is more a way of life than a form of thought.
> While it gives absolute liberty in the world of thought
> it enjoins a strict code of practice. The theist and
> the atheist, the skeptic and agnostic may all be Hindus
> if they accept the Hindu system of culture and life.
> Hinduism insists not on religious conformity but on
> spiritual and ethical outlook in life.[3]

In this sense, Hinduism appears to be a cultural canopy
under which many religious and anti-religious people can co-
exist and relate to each other. Thus, India has remained a
pluralistic society for many centuries.

India has been religiously pluralistic for thousands
of years, and it most likely will remain so in the future.
Hindus generally like to promote what is called a
"Federation of Religions." Accordingly, individuals can
worship their favorite god and practice any religion they
like, but at the same time they are an integral part of
their neighbor's religion as well.[4] Moreover, Hinduism

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[1]Ibid., 20-21.

[2]Ibid., ii.

[3]S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life (Bombay:
George Allen & Unwin (India), 1976), 55.

[4]Roger E. Hedlund, ed., Many Other Ways (Delhi:
ISPCK, 1992), 45.

recognizes that all religions are valid and partially true; therefore, the sum total of partial truths will certainly be more than the partial truth affirmed by any one religion. **Advaitic** Hindus try to accommodate all religious notions within their philosophical frame of reference and arrange them in an order of importance on the basis of their pre-suppositions, conveying the idea that their religion is higher than any other religion in the world. Tamil Hinduism, Saiva-siddhanta, also makes similar claims.

The Tamils loosely follow various forms of Hinduism such as animism, popular Hinduism, devotional theism, and philosophical monism. However, the majority of them follow regional Hinduism, which is, in my opinion, a mixture of popular Hinduism and devotional theism.

Animism

Animism is the religion of the tribal Hindus and some scheduled castes. It is characterized by its belief in the spirits, mana, demons, and dead ancestors. People propitiate the spirits by offering fowl and animals as sacrifices. Moreover, they regard some animals and trees as sacred. In India there are about 350 tribes and sub-tribes which are specified as scheduled tribes speaking more than one hundred languages. The tribal population in 1981 was approximately 53.8 million.[1] There are twenty-three

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[1]Albert, 34-35.

scheduled tribes in Tamil Nadu with a population of about 1,391,878[1] which constitute approximately 2.58 percent of the total tribal population of India.

Popular Hinduism

Popular Hinduism or rural Hinduism is practiced by the majority of the people in Tamil Nadu. The low-caste Shudras and some scheduled castes generally follow this type of Hinduism. They worship many gods and goddesses in shrines, temples, and under the trees. Most of these gods are dead ancestors. Some deities are also worshipped as **kula daivam**, i.e., family gods. Every clan or sub-caste may have a **kula daivam** and every family may have a **ishta daivam**, which is a favorite god or goddess. In some villages, each caste may have its own deity and a temple where other castes would not be permitted to enter.

In addition, festivals, animal sacrifices, magic, witchcraft, exorcism, various feasts, bathing in sacred rivers, pilgrimages, penance, and fasting are some of the major elements of popular Hinduism. The deities are worshipped for worldly reasons such as rain, good harvest, health, healing, release from devil possession, progeny, and prosperity.

Traditionally, Tamils worshipped three prominent deities: **Kumaran** (son), **Amman** (mother), and **Appan** (father).

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[1]Sargunam, 686-691.

They are worshipped in different places under different names. For example, Kumaran has other names such as, Murugan, Kanthan, Subramaniyan, and Palaniyandavan; Amman's other names are Kaliamman, Mariamman, Mukami Amman, and Muthumari Amman; and Appan has such names as Aiyyappan, Kaliappan, Mariappan, Muniappan, and Muthappan. These deities are in fact personifications of **sakti** or power. These gods and goddesses have also been integrated into the Neo-Hindu pantheon coming from the Sanskrit religion of the North.[1]

Murugan

According to some scholars, the primitive Tamils first worshipped trees as gods and later considered the trees as dwelling places of gods and spirits. Archaeological evidence shows that tree worship was very ancient, dating back to Harappan times.[2] Tree worship continued in Tamil Nadu even after the organized temple worship of the Hindu cults had developed.[3] Early Tamils had no idea of god as a separate entity apart from nature.[4]

Later on, Tamils began to worship several gods which

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[1]Ellis O. Shaw, Rural Hinduism (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1986), 58.

[2]K. R. Srinivasan, Temples of South India (New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 1991), 8.

[3]Ibid., 10.

[4]Kathir Mahadevan, Cultural Heritage of the Ancient Tamils (Madurai: Lakshmi Publications, 1981), 152-53.

they conceived of being under the influence of the natural environment in which they were living. For example, the people living near the seashore offered prayers to the sea-god by offering the flesh of fish on full-moon days. They also adorned the vertebra of the shark with flower garlands which was kept in the center of their house.[1]

Gradually, the beauty of nature also was personified and Murugan, meaning "divine beauty,"[2] came to be worshipped as the chief deity of the Tamils, as well as being considered a fertility god. Initially, Murugan was the regional deity of the **kurinchi** land, and later he became the popular deity of the whole of Tamil Nadu. He is described in Tamil literature as one who "aroused passion and erotic frenzy in girls and women, and the dances of Murugan were evidently orgiastic."[3] He also became the great warrior who fought many battles as a protector of humanity from evil and the custodian of Tamil culture.[4]

Later on, Murugan was considered to be the son of Siva. The name Siva does not occur in early literature as a regional deity. However, Sangam literature makes reference

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[1]Ibid., 163.

[2]Ibid., 154.

[3]Basham, 314.

[4]K. K. Murthy, The Temples of Tamil Nadu (Tirupathi: Message Publications, 1991), 91.

to Siva and conveys the idea that he was the supreme god.[1]

As the Aryans influenced Tamil Nadu, they made Murugan an Aryan god. He was made to appear with six heads and twelve hands and appointed as the guardian of the Brahmins.[2] Aryans gradually replaced Murugan with other names of their Aryan gods such as Karthikeya, Skanta, and Subramanian and characterized him as another form of these gods through their stories.[3]

However, in Tamil mythologies, Murugan appeared in different forms such as in the form of a child, warrior, householder, teacher, and an ascetic on six hill temples that once marked the boundaries of Tamil Nadu.[4] Although Murugan is popularly worshipped today in these places by the Tamils, the worship is conducted mostly by Brahmin priests with **Agamic** rituals.

Amman

The ancient Tamils who lived in **palai** worshipped the goddess Korravai as their regional deity.[5] She was considered to be the mother of Murugan. After the influence

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[1]K. Mahadevan, 154.

[2]K. Mahadevan, 155.

[3]Ibid., 156.

[4]J. P. Waghorne and N. Cutler, eds., Gods of Flesh and Gods of Stone (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Publications, 1985), 113.

[5]K. Mahadevan, 157.

of Aryan Hinduism, she was identified with Durga or Turkai and Kali,[1] the wife of Siva. At the same time, most of the local goddesses were also identified with Durga, the famous being Mariyammai, the goddess of small pox.[2]

Tamils perceived Amman as the embodiment of the all-pervading universal power (sakti) and also called her Parasakti (Great Power). She is not only worshipped as sakti, which is a very dominant belief among the Tamils, but also worshipped in many forms and given many names like Parvati,[3] Mahadevi, Uma Devi, Durga, Kali, Badra Kali, Mari Amman, Meenakshi, and Mahadevi.

Popular Hinduism still worships Amman (mother) under many different names in the villages throughout Tamil Nadu, offering the blood of fowl and animals as sacrifices. In some areas, worshipers have annual festivals where people walk on fire, pierce their bodies with needles, carry fire pots, and pull pick-up trucks and vans with hooks piercing through the skin on their backs.

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[1]Ibid., 158; Basham, 312.

[2]Basham, 316.

[3]Ibid., 311.

Siva of Popular Hinduism

As mentioned above, Siva was not a regional deity of Tamil Nadu, but is considered as the supreme God according to Sangam literature. On the other hand, Murugan was described as the son of Lord Siva in the latter half of the Sangam period and renamed Kanta.[1] The origin of Siva worship in Tamil Nadu is not clearly known. However, it is believed by most scholars that Siva was worshipped by the Tamils from ancient times. The phallic worship which was an important element of Harappan religion clearly indicates that Siva worship was probably practiced by the Harrapan people, the Dravidians.[2]

It also appears that Siva might have evolved from the fierce Vedic god Rudra.[3] Rudra was described in the Vedas as the god of ruthlessness in nature, the one who spreads diseases among men and cattle, but also as the one who could heal them. He also was portrayed as one who desires blood, including human blood. At one time he was appeased by nothing less than human sacrifices.[4] Siva, as worshipped by the Tamils today, is a syncretic god of both the Dravidians and Aryans and more popular in Tamil Nadu

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[1]K. Mahadevan, 153.

[2]Basham, 24-25.

[3]Ibid., 307.

[4]Organ, 171, 172.

than Rama and Krishna, which are considered to be northern gods. He is also worshipped in popular Hinduism in the form of local deities with non-Brahmanincal rites.

Devotional Theism

Generally, Hindus can be divided into two major groups: the Saivites, worshipping Siva as their supreme God, and the Vaishnavites, having Vishnu as their supreme God. These groups are further divided into various sects depending on their philosophical positions such as Monism (Advaita), Qualified Monism (**Visishtadvaita**), and Dualism (**Dvaita**). For example, one Saivite might adhere to a monistic philosophy while another follows the monotheistic philosophy of Saiva-siddhanta. Moreover, one Saivite might follow the path of knowledge, while another adheres to the path of devotion to attain salvation.

I am using the term devotional theism to describe the religion of those who believe in a personal God and who follow the path of devotion (bhakti). I use the term God with a capital G for one who is considered to be the supreme God among various Hindu sects. Like Christianity, devotional theism teaches that God is a personal being. However, there is a big difference between the God of Christianity and personal theism. In Christianity, God is the only God who revealed Himself in the historical events of the world. However, in devotional theism, he is only a philosophical concept or a mythological figure.

The key element in devotional theism is bhakti, i.e., devotional faith. The element of fear which dominates popular Hinduism has been replaced by the feeling of devotion to God, dependance on God's grace, and longing to be in the presence of God. Instead of Vedic rituals, Agamic rituals are performed by the Brahmin and non-Brahmin priests to Siva or Vishnu.

Tamil devotional theism arose after A.D. 600. The Tamil poet devotees journeyed from temple to temple, singing of their personal experiences of Siva and Vishnu. Sixty-three Nayanars (Saivite poets) are considered to be responsible for the revival of Saivism in Tamil Nadu. They inspired the masses to enter into mystical communion with Siva, the terrifying and compassionate God.[1] Tamil Vaishnavite poets (Alvars), twelve in number, revived the Vaishnavism in the same manner. These Nayanars and Alvars also enjoy the status of demi-gods in Tamil Nadu.[2]

Saivism of Saiva-siddhanta

The philosophy of Tamil Nadu Saivism is known as Saiva-siddhanta. It has emerged from the bhakti movement and is less known outside of Tamil Nadu, but more influential within. It is a syncretism of Sanskritic and

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[1]Rohan A. Dunuwila, _Saiva Siddhanta Theology_ (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 57.

[2]Basham, 319.

Tamil ideas.[1] Saiva-siddhanta is nearly a monotheistic religion having Siva as the supreme God, as well as the bestower of grace and justice. Its theology is adapted to the devotional literature of the Nayanars and Siddhars.

The Nayanars came from various caste groups including **Pariah** caste. The most prominent Nayanars were Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar, and Manikkvacagar. Their works have been mentioned earlier. Besides these four prominent saints, the philosopher-saint Tirmular occupied an unique place in the golden age of Saiva-siddhanta. He wrote Periyapuranam which described the lives of sixty-three Nayanars.[2]

Apart from the Nayanars, there were eighteen Siddhars who are believed to have had considerable powers as healers and magicians. They were iconoclasts, who emphasized character and morals as opposed to temple worship, casteism, and Brahminic priesthood. They believed in one God and one mankind, emphasizing love (**anbu**) as God.[3]

Siva appeared to be the most ancient of all the gods worshipped in the whole of India as a non-Aryan deity. In Vedas the word Siva, meaning "auspicious," was used only as

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[1]Charles A. Ryerson, Regionalism and Religion (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1988), 39.

[2]Dunuwila, 57.

[3]Ryerson, Regionalism, 40-42.

an epithet of Rudra. Later on it replaced the name of

Rudra[1] "meaning 'he who drives away sin and suffering.'

The expression 'Siva' also means 'he who attenuates sin'."[2]

The image of Siva has been portrayed and worshipped

in various forms such as the destroyer, ascetic yogi,

teacher, dancer, Lord of the Beasts, and Lingam.[3] Siva is

popularly worshipped in Tamil Nadu in the form of the dancer

(Nataraja). This is because religious dancing was part of

the earliest known Tamil tradition.[4] The temple at

Cidambaram is known for its Siva dances.[5] Siva is also

chiefly worshipped in Tamil Nadu in the phallic form

(**linga**).[6]

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[1]Alain Danielou, Hindu Polytheism (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1964), 188.

[2]T. M. P. Mahadevan, Outlines of Hinduism (Bombay: Chetana, 1971), 199.

[3]Basham, 307-08.

[4]Ibid., 308.

[5]Ibid. Siva has invented no less than 108 different dances, some calm and gentle, others fierce, orgiastic and terrible. Of the latter the most famous is the tandava, in which the angry god, surrounded by his drunken attendants (ganas), beats out a wild rhythm which destroys the world at the end of the cosmic cycle. Ibid.

[6]Linga infused with Yoni (the female organ) is the form in which Siva is worshipped in most of the Siva temples in Tamil Nadu. Yoni is the symbol of universal energy (Sakti). When the Hindus worship the linga they do not deify the human phallus but recognize the power of the divinity needed for procreation and continuity of life. It is in the union of the Linga and Yoni that the power of divinity to create is most directly apparent in man. Danielou, 244.

The chief sources of the Saiva-siddhanta Philosophy are such writings as Tirummarai, Siva-Jnana-bodham, Siva-Jnana-Siddhiyar, Sivaprakkasam Tiru-varut-payan, and Vedanta-Sutra of NilaKantha. These include the Saiva **agamas**, hymns, and philosophical treaties. Saiva-siddhanta literature is classified under four categories: systematic exposition of doctrines, refutation of other teachings, exposition of particular tenets, and commentaries on the Agamas.[1]

The chief doctrine of Saiva-siddhanta is the triad of categories God: (**Pati**), Soul (**Pasu**), and the bonds (**pasa**), or fetters of matter. Siva is God, the Ultimate Reality. He is considered uncaused, omnipotent, omniscient, gracious, pure, and eternally free from bonds.[2] Siva is **nirguna**, without characteristics and formless. However, he is a personal being who assumes different forms as he appears before his devotees.[3] His body is not like ours, made of flesh and bones, but made of conscious force and energy called sakti through which he created the world.[4]

Soul (Pasu) is of the same essence as Siva but not

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[1]Dunuwila, 71.

[2]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 169.

[3]J. M. Nallaswami Pillai, Studies in Saiva Siddhanta (Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1984), 297-99.

[4]Kenneth W. Morgan, ed., Religion of the Hindus (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1953), 234.

identical to. It is by nature infinite, all-pervading, and all-knowing, but due to bonds it thinks that it is finite, limited, and little-knowing.[1] Pasa is unconscious and eternal matter which is temporarily connected to the soul and keeps the soul in bondage.[2] In salvation, the soul is released from the **karma-samsara** cycle and united, but is not identified with Siva.[3]

Salvation in Saiva-siddhanta is achieved by bhakti through grace (**Arul**). The term bhakti is derived from the Sanskrit root **bhaj** meaning "to partake of," "to be attached to," or "to resort to."[4] As a religious technical term, bhakti is the most difficult word to translate. It has been translated into English as faith or devotion. But faith and devotion do not convey the warm and intimate character of bhakti.[5] The best representative word in English might be faith in the sense of "devotional faith," and not a mere "belief."[6]

Bhakti has been defined and used in different senses by different religious sects and scholars. S. Radhakrishnan

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[1]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 170.

[2]Morgan, 235.

[3]Basham, 334.

[4]Organ, 175.

[5]A. J. Appasamy, <u>Christianity as Bhakti Marga</u> (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1926), 22-23.

[6]R. Garbe, "Bhagavad-Gita," <u>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</u> (1919), 2:539.

defined it as a "relationship of trust and love to a personal God."[1] Troy Organ defined bhakti as an emotion with a complex mixture of fear, awe, fascination, love and dependance.[2] In Saiva-siddhanta, bhakti includes knowledge of reality, performance of religious duties, practice of **yoga**, and righteous conduct.[3] Although these are performed by the devotees, the grace of Siva leads people to liberation, according to Saiva-siddhanta philosophy.[4]

In the pre-Gita period, devotees worshipped Siva with awe, fear, and dread, surrendering themselves to his majesty and strength. But after the arrival of the Tamil Nayanars, the intense sense of personal guilt became an unique feature of Saivism. They felt that man was evil and horribly corrupt and was a slave of his **anava**, i.e., egotism.[5] The features of the bhakti religion and the relationship between bhakti and grace are discussed later.

Siva-siddhanta is closer to Christian theology than the advaita system of Sankara. Regarding Saiva-siddhanta, W. F. Goudie writes in the <u>Christian College Magazine</u> as follows:

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[1]S. Radhakrishnan, <u>The Bhagavad-Gita</u> (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), 58.

[2]Organ, 175.

[3]Morgan, 235.

[4]Ibid.

[5]R. C. Zaehner, <u>Hinduism</u> (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 173.

This system possesses the merits of a great antiquity. In the religious world, the Saiva system is heir to all that is most ancient in South India, it is the Religion of the Tamil people by the side of which every other form is of comparatively foreign origin.[1]

G. V. Pope observed that "the Saiva Siddhanta is the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most intrinsically valuable of all the religions of India."[2] The deep longing of the Saiva devotees to obtain grace from Siva, their efforts to follow a high moral life, and the act of Siva drinking the poison Halahala to save mankind can serve as a preparation for Christianity.[3] The devotees of Siva draw three lines ($=$) across their foreheads and other places using ashes, sandals paste, or vermillion as a mark of their religious affiliation.[4]

Vaishnavism

Vaishanavism is another form of devotional Hinduism which teaches that Vishnu is the supreme God. All over India Vaishnavites worship Vishnu and his incarnations with many names and forms. In Tamil Nadu, he is worshipped as Ranganatha at Srirangam. This sect appears to have been

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[1]W. F. Goudie, Christian College Magazine, quoted in Pillai, 314.

[2]Ibid., 313.

[3]Hugald Grafe, History of Christianity in India Part 2 (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1990), 4:144-45.

[4]P. V. Jagadisa Ayyar, South Indian Customs (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1985), 4.

active at least a century before Christ.[1] However, it was
greatly revived in Tamil Nadu during the Middle Ages through
Alvars and great teachers like Ramanuja and Madhva, who
developed a system of theism based on Vedanta to strengthen
the beliefs and the devotion of Vaishnavites.

The Vaishnavites in Tamil Nadu, like believers
throughout the rest of India, follow the path of bhakti to
attain salvation. They have developed their concept of
bhakti from Bhagavad-gita and Agama literature. Gita
teaches that God bestows his grace upon the devotees and
grants them peace and joy. The devotees reach the eternal
and undying abode through his grace. In addition, the
devotees and God develop intimate relationships with each
other as expressed by Lord Krishna: "But those who worship
me with devotion they are in me and I also in them."[2] The
idea of bhakti is well expressed by Krishna in Gita, chap.
18, vss. 65 and 66.

> Always think of me, become my devotee, worship me and
> offer your homage unto Me. Thus you will come to Me
> without fail. I promise you this because you are my
> very dear friend. Give up all varieties of religion
> and just surrender unto Me. I shall protect you from
> all sinful reactions. Therefore you have nothing to
> fear.[3]

In the bhakti literature of _Peria Tirumoli_, the intensity of

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[1]Basham, 328.

[2]Radhakrishnan, _Bhagavad-Gita_, 29.

[3]A. C. B. S. Prabhupada, _Bhagavad-Gita_, abridged ed.
(New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1972), 270-71,

bhakti is expressed in poetic form.

> No kinship with world have I
>   which takes for true life that is not true.
> For thee alone passion, burns, I cry,
>   'Rangan, my Lord!'
> No kinship with this world have I
>   with throngs of maidens slim of waist:
> With joy and love I rise for one alone, and cry
>   'Rangan, my Lord!'[1]

The concept of bhakti has gone through several modifications in the hands of great bhakti philosophers and saints after the time of Gita. Ramanuja and Madhva, the two important Vaishnavite philosophers, developed the concept of bhakti into their theological systems.

Ramanuja (A.D. 1017-1137) taught in the great temple of Srirangam, Tamil Nadu.[2] He wrote commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the Bhagavad-gita, and the Upanishads, and advocated bhakti-yoga as the means of salvation. He used the term **prapatti**, meaning "self-surrender" for the kind of bhakti he followed. The ingredients of prapatti are willingness to do things agreeable to God, refraining from what is disagreeable to God, having faith in God that he will save, seeking after his protection, committing oneself to his service, and a feeling of littleness.[3] Ramanuja emphasized meditation as an integral part of bhakti and

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[1]Tirumangai Alvar, Peria Tirumoli, trans. J. S. M. Hooper in Hymns of the Alvars, quoted in A. J. Appasamy, Theology of Hindu Bhakti (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970), 35.

[2]Basham, 332.

[3]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 195-96.

interpreted the bhakti of Gita to mean that God loves the devotee beyond measure. God cannot maintain himself without the devotee because he is his very soul, and is unable to endure separation from him.[1]

Regarding God, Ramanuja taught that he was a personal being, full of grace and love.[2] He is embodied in the souls and the world. He is the only absolute and independent reality which includes in itself the souls and matter as its integral parts. Souls and matter are organically related to the Absolute and form the body of the Absolute, which is the Supreme Being.[3] "The Absolute One thus contains the many and is qualified by the many."[4] Therefore, Ramanuja's philosophy is called Qualified Monism (visishtadvita).

The individual soul, according to Ramanuja, is distinct from God, but made out of God's essence. It is eternal, self-conscious, and one with God, but yet separate.[5] Even after liberation from the body , a soul is conscious of itself as "I am"[6] which means that a soul does

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[1]Geoffrey Parrinder, Upanishads, Gita and Bible (New York: Association Press, 1963), 40.

[2]Basham, 332.

[3]Morgan, 229.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Basham, 332.

[6]Morgan, 231.

not lose its individuality in the state of release.

Liberation of the soul is achieved by prapatti or self-surrender to God, coupled with complete faith in his mercy and power.[1] In the state of release the soul enjoys the bliss of complete communion with God[2] in **Vaikuntha**, i.e., the Highlands of the blessed.[3]

Two theological schools, **Vadakalai** (northern school) and **Thankalai** (southern school), sprang from the teaching of Ramanuja analogous to the Arminians and Calvinists of early Protestantism. Their controversy was about the causal relationship between the grace of God and the bhakti of the devotee. The northern school held the view that the bhakti and prapatti are **upayas** or methods adopted by individuals toward the **upeya** or end, which is God.[4] They maintained the theory of the gratia cooperative[5] where grace operates when humans makes strenuous effort.

To explain this, the northern school used the analogy of the monkey. As the young monkey clings fast to the mother when she carries her young one to safety, in the

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[1]Ibid., 233.

[2]Ibid.

[3]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 154.

[4]S. Kulandran, <u>Grace in Christianity and Hinduism</u> (London: Butterworth Press, 1964), 176.

[5]Max Weber, <u>The Religions of India</u> (New York: Free Press, 1958), 309.

same manner humanity clings to God for salvation.[1] Otto

uses the term synergist to define the co-operative effort of

man and God in this process where[2] the grace of God is

evoked by bhakti or prapatti.[3] In other words, the process

of salvation begins with an act of the person desiring it.[4]

However, such an act is also caused by God's grace,

according to Kulkarni. He observed:

> In fact self-effort and grace are related by reciprocal
> causation, each being the cause of the other. Unless
> there is effort, Grace will not come to us; and unless
> grace is there, no genuine effort can even be begun.[5]

On the whole, the northern school accepts the value of human

effort in the process of salvation.

On the other hand, the southern school denied the

value of methods in regard to salvation. According to them,

individuals cannot earn salvation by upayas. "Man's

function is to acquiesce in or accept the salvation offered

by God. The Lord is Himself both the upaya and the upeya,

the means and the end."[6] In their view, grace is

spontaneous, irresistible, and unconditioned. Therefore,

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[1]Basham, 333.

[2]Matthew P. John, "The Idea of Grace in Christianity and Hinduism," _Indian Journal of Theology_ (April–June 1970): 67.

[3]Organ, 262.

[4]Appasamy, _Theology of Hindu Bhakti_, 108.

[5]B. R. Kulkarni, _The Bhagavad Gita and the Bible_ (Delhi: Unity Books, 1972), 34.

[6]Kulandran, 176.

humans do not need to take any effort to obtain salvation. They presented the analogy of a cat carrying its kitten to explain their view. Like a cat, God takes complete hold of man without his cooperation. The initiative lies with God himself.[1] The Saivites, like Pattinathar in Tamil Nadu, also believed in the cat theory of grace.[2] Recently, Dr. Devasenapathy, a Saivite, points out that "in response to God's grace the soul has to show willingness to receive grace. Though the Lord is ready to bestow His grace he will not force it on the soul."[3] The followers of the southern school have a Y-shaped mark on their foreheads, while the followers of the other school have a U-shaped mark.[4]

Madhva (A.D. 1199-1278) was a Vaishnava thinker from the Karnataka state of South India. He taught complete dualism as opposed to the monism of Sankara. He accepted a personal God and identified him with Vishnu. He also believed in the reality of the world and individuality of the souls. However, he taught that God is the only independent reality and that the other realms (matter and souls) are dependant on him. His basic doctrines are: the

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[1]Appasamy, Theology of Hindu Bhakti, 108.

[2]John, 68.

[3]A. J. Appasamy, Temple Bells (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, n.d.), 54.

[4]Ayyar, 4.

plurality of Reality and the concept of difference.[1]
According to him, there is a difference between God and the
soul, soul and soul, God and matter, soul and matter, and
one material thing and another.[2] God is the efficient
cause of the world, but not its material cause. He believed
that Vishnu incarnates himself from time to time and also is
present in the sacred images.[3]

Like Ramanuja, Madhva also taught salvation by
bhakti. However, the knowledge of the nature of God and
souls is important for liberation. In his view, correct
knowledge can only come from bhakti and God's grace.[4] To
receive this grace, a man must be devoted to God by
constantly engaging in the service and worship of God. God
gives his grace to such a man who pleases him and liberates
his soul from all bonds. After leaving the body, the
liberated soul is believed to live forever in the presence
of God.[5]

Madhava's theology is much closer to Christianity
than Ramanuja's. His view of soul, hell, grace, wind-god
Vayu as mediator, and bhakti show many similarities to
Christianity. Some stories of miracles found in the legends

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[1]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 155.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., 156.

[4]Ibid., 157-59.

[5]Morgan, 228.

of Madhva seem to have been borrowed from the Gospels:

> As a boy he successfully disputed with learned brahmans in a temple; when he undertook asceticism a voice from heaven proclaimed his greatness; he fed multitudes with handfuls of food; he walked on the water; and he stilled the raging ocean with a glance.[1]

It seems that Madhva might have come under the influence of the Syrian Christians of Malabar.[2] The followers of Madhva distinguish themselves from other Vaishnavites by having a U-shaped mark on their foreheads.[3] The majority of the Tamils follow the bhakti religion of Saivism due to its roots in their native land. It has a large number of followers from the Shudra caste. Vaishnavism is not very popular in Tamil Nadu, because its God, Vishnu, is of Aryan origin. In addition, the story of Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu, depicts the Dravidians as **ashuras**, evil people, and the incarnation of Vishnu was meant to destroy them. Though Vaishnavism is unpopular among the masses, it is strongly supported among the Brahmins. The Vaishnavite Brahmins are known as **Ayyangar**, while the Saivite Brahmins are called **Ayyar** in Tamil Nadu.

Advaitism

The advaita system of Hinduism is the most popular and powerful system in India and is well known in the West.

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[1] Basham, 333.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ayyar, 4.

It initially was strongly advocated in the United States by Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago in 1893. Since then, it has spread all over the U.S. and also to other Western countries. However, this system is not popular in Tamil Nadu, and it is mainly followed by the well-educated Hindus of the upper castes in Tamil Nadu.

The term advaita means "not two." The fundamental teaching of Advita is that the ultimate reality is not two. Advita uses the term Brahman for the Absolute and **atman** for the soul. The entire philosophy of Advita can be summarized in three main concepts: the non-duality of Brahman, the non-reality of the world, and the non-difference of the atman from Brahman.[1]

Sankara (A.D. 788-820) was the first great exponent of advaita and the greatest of all intellectuals India ever produced. He developed his system of thought on the basis of **Upanishads** or Vedanta. He reduced all the apparently self-contradictory passages of Upanishads into a coherent system of thought by logical argument and figurative interpretation.[2] He traveled from Tamil Nadu to other parts of India, established four monasteries, and wrote commentaries on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-gita, and the Vedanta-sutra. The followers of Sankara's teaching are

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[1]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 141.

[2]Basham, 328.

called Smartas.

Sankara, being a brilliant metaphysician, divided epistemology and theology into two levels. He taught that there are two kinds of knowledge, **para** (higher) and **apara** (lower)[1] and two kinds of God, Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman.[2] He classified all empirical knowledge as lower knowledge, because its content is of the world which is an illusion, **Maya**. True knowledge is the knowledge of Brahman, which is neither personal nor impersonal and is called Nirguna Brahman (Brahman without characteristics). This means that Nirguna Brahman cannot be described in terms of love, justice, mercy, etc., rather it is described in only three positive terms: **sat** (existence), **cit** (consciousness), and **ananda** (bliss).[3] There is another Brahman belonging to the level of lower knowledge called Saguna Brahman (Brahman endowed with attributes such as love and justice). He is only relative. He appears to be God from our standpoint, which is empirical. He is our own creation only, due to superimposition (**adhyasa**) or a product of Maya.[4]

According to Sankara, such the theological concepts as love, justice, incarnation, creation, transmigration of

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[1]Organ, 245.

[2]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 147.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Sydney Cave, <u>Hinduism or Christianity</u> (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1939), 101.

the soul, and karma are only relative. Therefore, he gives
only relative value to all theistic religions of the world,
including Hindu theism, because according to him they are
not based on true knowledge.

The true knowledge for Sankara is **anubhava**,
intuitional consciousness, or mystical experience (or direct
awareness).[1] Here the functioning of the mind is not
required.[2] It occurs in **turiya**[3] a state of mind, and it
cannot be explained in empirical terms. Liberation is
attained through this experience in which the identity of
the Atman with Brahman is realized. The means used to
attain such anubhava is the study of Vedanta (Upanishads)
under the guidance of a Guru and the cultivation of the mind
for this experience.

In Sankara's system, the role of a guru and the
method of discipling are essential to liberation.
Therefore, Sankara and his followers have continued to
establish ashrams in various places till the present time.
Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekenanda, and Ramana
Maharishi are some of the followers of Sankara in modern
India who have established ashrams for discipleship. Their
writings have greatly influenced the thinking of educated
Hindus throughout India and abroad.

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[1]Organ, 249.

[2]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 145.

[3]See the Glossary.

Hindu Rituals

Hindu life is very much centered around various religious rituals throughout the year. All Hindus participate in the rituals regardless of their philosophic orientation. Even the secular Hindus participate in some rituals to show their solidarity with the community. Although Hinduism observes numerous religious rituals, only the major ones such as rituals of worship, festivals, pilgrimages, and rites of passage are discussed here.

<u>Rituals of Worship</u>

The Hindu rituals of worship are of two kinds: worship of vegetarian gods and non-vegetarian gods. The prominent gods of Hinduism such as Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, and Siva are vegetarian gods, worshipped with the offerings of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Most of these are worshipped in the form of idols or pictures in homes or temples. However, idol worship is not the only form of worship in Hinduism. There are other forms of worship such as the offering of prayers and contemplation.

The non-vegetarian gods are mostly regional deities such as Karuppan, Kali, etc. They are probably the ancestors of certain clans or heroes killed in the wars. In remembrance of them, people have erected pillars, kept spears and shields, and worshipped them with animal

sacrifices, rice, and alcohol (**paddy** and **toddy**).[1] Most of these deities are found only in the villages.

The vegetarian gods are worshipped with **puja** rituals in which the deity is treated like a beloved guest or an honored king[2] with the offering of sandlewood paste, fruits, flowers, incense, food, and waving of the lamps. At the end of puja, the priest distributes the flowers, water, and food that were offered to the deity. The role of the worshipper in the puja is minimal. He brings the flowers, food, and money as gifts to the deity. He watches the order of puja and waits for the **dharson** (auspicious sight)[3] of the diety that takes place at the time of **arathi**. He sips the **tirtha** (holy water) or sprinkles it over his head and takes home the remnants of the food, flowers, and tirtha (holy water) for those who could not attend the puja.[4]

In addition to puja, **mantras** and **bhajans** are also part of Hindu worship. Although Hindus do not follow corporate worship weekly like Christians, worship is conducted throughout the week in many forms and directed towards many gods. However, what matters to a Hindu is not the deity worshipped but the worship itself. Hinduism

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[1]K. Mahadevan, 162-63.

[2]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 49.

[3]D. J. Fleming, "The Ministry in Hinduism," International Review of Mission (1937): 224.

[4]Thomas J. Hipkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition (Encino, CA: Dickinson Publishing Company, 1971), 111.

stresses the spirit of worship more than the form itself.
In all its forms it emphasizes purity, devotion, and
reverence. Even worship done in a barbarian fashion to any
god is acceptable to God if it is done with true devotion.[1]
The Lord Krishna said: "Even those who worship other
deities, and sacrifice to them with faith in their hearts,
are really worshipping me, though with a mistaken
approach."[2]

Along with the emphasis on the spirit of worship,
the worship of idols is well accepted among both the
classical and popular Hindus. Educated Hindus argue that
"the idol is only a token for the supreme, a symbol of the
divine."[3] Most Hindus do not consider idols to be actual
living entities endowed with powers. However, they respect
them, because they are the representations of their gods.

Another important factor in Hindu worship is the
result. Many Hindus use worship as the instrument for the
attainment of special gain. The worship of a particular
deity and the technique of worship is decided by the kind of
gain one wants to achieve.[4] For example, the goddess
Lakshmi is worshipped for wealth and Saraswathi for

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[1]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 93.

[2]Swami Prabhvananda and C. Isherwood, *Bagavad-Gita*
(New York: Mentor Book, 1954), 83.

[3]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 46.

[4]Danielou, 370.

learning.[1] Uma, the consort of Siva, is worshipped to gain a happy married life.[2] Such gods are often worshipped at home daily. In conservative Hindu houses, a family shrine is filled with pictures of deities, images, and symbols. Here members of the family worship the deities daily.

Festivals

Religious festivals are the most complex and colorful forms of rituals celebrated in many religions. Hindus also celebrate many festivals to commemorate the birthdays of gods[3] and saints and to remember important redemptive events in the stories of the gods.[4] Every temple has at least one annual festival in honor of its principal deity.[5] The festival provides an occasion for people to remember and relive the past. The time of the festivals is the occasion for prayer, fasting, meditation, reading scripture, and thanksgiving.[6] During festivals the religious life of the community is revitalized, and faith in

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[1]Morgan, 62.

[2]Danielou, 370.

[3]Morgan, 191.

[4]Parrinder, 53.

[5]Ibid., 52.

[6]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 50.

gods and the important religious truths are reaffirmed.[1]
The festivals also serve as great social occasions.
Separated family members get together for family reunions.
As a result, social ties are strengthened and solidarity of
individuals with their group is reconfirmed.

Hinduism is rich in its numerous festivals. Some
are celebrated country-wide, while others are celebrated
only in local states or regions. For example, **deepavali**
(Feast of Lights) and **dasara** are national festivals, while
pongal (harvest festival) is a state festival celebrated in
Tamil Nadu in January. Holi is a north Indian festival
celebrated in the states of North India.

The festivals of deepavali and dasara are symbols of
fundamental truths and events. They symbolize the victory
of truth over falsehood, good over evil, and light over
darkness. The basic principle of Pongal is giving thanks to
God for the rich harvest.[2] These and other festivals have
kept Hinduism alive through many centuries in spite of the
influences of other foreign religions and secularism.
Festivals also continue to create a spiritual climate for
the people to renew their religious experience. In Tamil
Nadu, Hindus have revived the celebration of many festivals
pertaining to the gods of popular Hinduism.

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[1]A. P. Nirmal, "Celebration of Indian Festivals," in
<u>Primar World Views</u>, ed. John B. Taylor (Ibadan, Nigeria:
Daystar Press, 1976), 79.

[2]Ibid., 81.

Pilgrimages

The pilgrimage has always been an essential part of Hinduism. A pilgrimage provides an opportunity for people to get away from their routine life and engage in a spiritual journey to places where they can feel the presence of God. The occasion stirs up devotional emotions in people and renews their religious spirit. Fred Clothey observed: "The experience of pilgrimage reflects a fundamental human need for remembering and renewal, for self-affirmation and recreation."[1]

Pilgrimages to holy places such as temples, ashrams, holy rivers, shrines, some hilltops, and seashores are undertaken by Hindus for the "completion of vows, for the appeasing of the deity in times of misfortunes, to gain property and good fortune, and as simple acts of devotion to the Lord."[2] The places visited are normally associated with some religious figure or event. Millions of Hindus go on pilgrimages every year.

Traditionally, people walked to the holy places; now most of them use modern transportation. However, many still walk as part of a vow. Tamil Nadu has several pilgrim centers such as Mahabali puram, Kanjeevaram, Palani, Cape Comorin, Rameswaram, Madurai, Sri Rangam, Sidambaram, and

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[1] Fred W. Clothey, Rhythm and Intent (Madras: Blackie and Sons Publishers, 1983), 92.

[2] Morgan, 188-89.

Tanjore. Additionally, Pilgrims from Tamil Nadu go to places in other states like Tirupathi in Andra Pradesh and Ayyapa temple in Kerala.

Rites of Passage

Certain rituals in Hinduism can be classified under the phrase "rites of passage." They are called **samskaras** in Sanskrit. These rituals are treated differently from the rituals discussed earlier because these are domestic rites associated with the pre-natal period, childhood, education, marriage, and death. The ways these rites are performed are not the same for all Hindus. They differ from caste to caste and place to place. Therefore, it is difficult to explain them in general terms. Most of the books written about Hindu rituals talk mainly about the Sanskrit rites observed among the upper-caste Hindus.

The rites which are generally performed by the upper-caste Hindus are performed at the time of birth, initiation, marriage, and death. Lower-caste Hindus do not have any initiation ceremony. This paper briefly discusses only the initiation ceremony since it is relevant to the main theme of this project.

The Sanskrit word used for the initiation rite is **upanayana** meaning "taking charge of a student."[1] During the Vedic period, it was a simple rite through which a child

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[1]Rajbali Pandey, <u>Hindu Samskaras</u> (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1991), 115.

was taken to the teacher. The central point of upanayana was the acceptance of a student by a teacher for instruction.[1] During the Upanishad period, upanayana was performed when a person approached a guru for religious instruction[2] with this still being practiced for this purpose in Hindu ashrams today. The initiation rite was similar to Christian baptism[3] in that it symbolized the spiritual regeneration of a person. However, at present, upanayana has become a mere ceremony performed exclusively among the three upper castes to invest boys with the sacred thread before marriage.[4] The other castes are not permitted to celebrate this rite of upanayana until they follow the process of **sanskritization** in order to be accepted among the upper castes.

Sanskritization

The term sanskritization is used by many sociologists and anthropologists in India to refer to the general process of status improvement for backward communities through adopting the Sanskrit rites and way of life. M. N. Srinivas, an Indian sociologist, offers the following definition for sanskritization.

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Ibid., 116.

[3]Ibid., 112.

[4]Ibid., 116.

> Sanskritization is the process by which a "low" Hindu
> caste or tribal group changes its customs, ritual, and
> ideology and the way of life in the direction of a high
> and frequently "twice born" caste. Generally such
> changes are followed by a claim to higher position in
> the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to
> the claimant caste by the local community. The claim
> is usually made over a period of time in fact a
> generation or two before the "arrival" is conceded.[1]

A typical example of such an occurrence is the rise of the

Nadars of Tamil Nadu.

The Nadars of Tamil Nadu began to adopt the

sanskritized lifestyle of the high castes in order to raise

their caste status after some of their members became

Christians and changed their lifestyle in accordance with

Scripture. The Hindu Nadars imitated Brahmaninical customs

such as the cremation of the dead, the dowry, the wearing of

the sacred thread, naming children after the Sanskrit gods,

and having their women wear clothes above their waists.

They gave up their traditional profession of climbing

Palmyra trees for making "toddy" by which they were

classified as low caste according to Sanskrit religious

laws.[2] Today, Nadars enjoy a higher status of Kshatriyas

among the others in Tamil Nadu due to the process of

sanskritization as well as Christianization.

True Christianization is, in a way, sanskritization

without the acceptance of Sanskrit gods and rituals.

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[1]M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 6.

[2]Robert L. Hardgrave, The Nadars of Tamil Nadu
(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 106-8.

Sanskritization requires people to adopt new names, occupations, dietary regulations (vegetarianism, abstaining form alcohol) and high moral standards (monogamy, virginity) and spirituality. These are not contrary to Christian values. Sanscritization is in fact a discipling process or a process of social change which is mentioned in the Hindu laws but not systematically promoted by the "twice born" Hindus.

However, in recent years, numerous Hindu ashrams have been established to" Hinduise" the Adivasis, Harijans,[1] and Christians. India Today has reported that the ashram of Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati in Bihar's Singbum district is engaged in the reconversion of Christian tribals to Hinduism.[2] In this context it seems that Christianization combined with sanskritization might strengthen the cause of the Christian mission in India among the non-**dwija** Hindus and might not antagonize Hindus against Christianity.

Hindu Response to Christianity

The attitude of the Hindus in Tamil Nadu toward Christianity is generally neutral, but could vary according to caste and regions. Historically speaking, Tamil Nadu has

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[1]Augustine Kanjamala, "Christianization as Legitimate Alternative to Sanskritization," Missiology: An International Review (January 1986): 32.

[2]N. K. Singh and Soutik Biswas, "Preaching a Gospel Tinged with Politics," India Today, 31 July 1993, 69.

been fertile soil for Christianity ever since the arrival of Francis Xavier.

Although the majority of the Tamils have not become Christians, Christianity has greatly influenced the life of all Tamils through Christian schools, hospitals, orphanages, and community development projects. Tamil Hindus are grateful for the services missionaries have rendered both to the Tamil language and to its people through the Christian institutions. However, Tamil Hindus, especially the upper castes, are not in favor of Christian evangelistic work. Their attitude towards the proclamation of the gospel and the conversion of Hindus to Christianity is very negative. In recent years, Hindu militant movements have promoted anti-Christian feelings among the Hindus, and they have begun to resist Christian missionary work in some parts of Tamil Nadu.

The Christian population in Tamil Nadu is approximately 6,760,000 which is about 10.2 percent of the total population of Tamil Nadu.[1] In addition, there are hundreds of secret Christians who love Christ, attend Christian public meetings, read Christian literature, and worship Him in their hearts and homes but never openly join any church. They do not view church membership in theological terms but in cultural terms. They see the Church only as a foreign institution which consists of

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[1]Albert, 26.

people mainly from the low caste. Therefore, membership in the church to them means leaving their traditional community and culture and identifying themselves with communities which are low in the social hierarchy. Therefore, they remain as anonymous Christians, but support the Christian cause indirectly. Their positive attitude toward Christianity helps to reduce the resistance to Christian conversion by Hindus in some areas of Tamil Nadu.

Hindu View of Christian Conversion

Hindus, in general, view Christian conversion as proselytism, a coercive method followed by the missionaries under the cloak of humanitarian service. They strongly believe that the mass conversion of the low caste to Christianity occurred only due to socio-economic reasons and not for any spiritual purposes. They feel that the people who joined Christianity no longer identify themselves with Indian culture and question whether Indian Christians fully pledge their allegiance to their country. Many Hindus fear that an increase in the Christian population will become a threat to national unity and that India might be further divided along religious lines in the future. Therefore, great Indian leaders like Mahatma Gandhi opposed mass conversion. He once said, "If I had power and could legislate, I should stop all proselytizing."[1]

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[1]Manshardt, 69.

Although Hindus are against proselytism, they are

not against true conversion and the use of proper methods of

conversion. Gandhi, who opposed mass conversion, clearly

stated: "Cases of real conversion are quite possible. If

some people for their inward satisfaction and growth change

their religion, let them do so."[1] Again he said:

> I am, then, not against conversion, But I am against
> the modern methods of it. Conversion now a days has
> become a matter of business, like any other. I
> remember having read a missionary report saying how
> much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a
> budget for 'the next harvest.'[2]

The method Gandhi suggests for true conversion is not

preaching, but living the gospel of Christ. He said:

> There is a proper evangelization. When you feel that
> you have received peace from your particular
> interpretation of the Bible, you share it with others.
> But you do not need to give vocal expression to it.
> Your whole life is more eloquent than your lips. . . .
> Language is a limitation of the truth which can only be
> represented by life. . . . There is thus no truer or
> other evangelism than life.[3]

In Gandhi's view, conversion is not a change of

religion as such, but a change of life. He thinks of

conversion in the sense of a greater dedication to one's own

country, greater surrender to God, and greater self-

purification.[4] However, if individuals wants to change

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[1]Ibid., 73.

[2]M. K. Gandhi, <u>What Jesus Means to Me</u> (Ahamedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959), 23.

[3]Manshardt, 129-131.

[4]Gandhi, 26.

their religion out of deep religious conviction, Gandhi does not oppose it, because he believes in genuine conversion. Gandhi's view generally reflects the opinions of most Hindus in India, including Tamil Nadu.

Hindu Countermovements

Several Hindu movements have arisen in India and Tamil Nadu since the establishment of several Protestant missionary societies. Some of these Hindu movements are militant, while others are moderate and reformatory.

Some militant communalist organizations include Hindu Mahasaba, Jan Sangh, Arya Samaj, Rashtriya Swayam SevaSangh, and Vishva Hindu Parishad. These movements have created fear among the ordinary Hindu masses that Christianity might take over, causing Hindus to be suppressed by the Christians. The solution to this fear, and the only way to safeguard the interests of the Hindus, is to create a Hindu India where the proselytism of Christians and Moslems is prohibited. They also want to impose Hinduism on other religious groups and grant citizenship only to the Hindus, with the others remaining only as guests.[1]

Reformatory Hindu organizations include Brahma Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, and the Theosophical Society.

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[1]Brojendra N. Banerjee, "A Hindu Attitude to Conversion," International Review of Mission 72 (July 1983): 395-96.

The Ramakrishna Mission was started by Swami Vivekananda to counter the activities of the Christian missions. At present, the Ramakrishna Mission is strongly involved in all kinds of social activities such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, and relief work.

The Theosophical Society came to India in 1882. Its international headquarters is at present in Madras. It was established to promote wisdom, especially Hindu wisdom. Brahma Samaj was established by a Bengali Brahman Raj Ram Mohan Roy to reform Hinduism of its social and religious evils. He and his Western-educated followers rejected the corrupted nature of Hinduism and tried to reform Hinduism through the inspiration they received from Upanishads and the moral teachings of Christ.[1]

Theological Response

Many educated Hindus like Gandhi have presented a theological response to Christ and His teachings. They basically distinguish between Christ and Christianity, His teachings, and teachings of the Church. They love Christ and adore Him. Many of them desire to draw inspiration from His teachings and example.[2] Some, like Gandhi, think that Jesus did not preach a new religion but a new life of

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[1]Boyd, 19.

[2]K. L. Seshagiri Rao, "Mission and Evangelism in the Nineties: A Hindu View," International Review of Mission (January 1990): 29.

repentance and good actions.[1] Swami Abhedananda of the
Ramakrishna Mission distinguished between the religion of
Christ and the religion of the Church. According to him,
the religion of Christ is the religion of the heart without
any dogmas, rituals, and priest craft, but it became the
religion of the church after Constantine changed the Sabbath
to Sunday by a decree in A.D. 321.[2]

Those Hindus who reject the dogmas of the Christian
church have interpreted Christ and His teachings in terms of
their own religious categories. For example, many Hindus
interpret Christ as one of the Avatars[3] but not as the only
Avatar, as Christians believe. Swami Vivekananda defined
Christ on the basis of the advaita frame of reference and
spoke of Him as God. "Jesus Christ was God--the personal
God became man. He has manifested himself many times in
different forms and these alone are what you can worship."[4]
But the personal God according to advaita is only an
illusion. Therefore, Christ for Vivekananda is not God in
the absolute sense.

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[1]Manshardt, 128.

[2]Swami Abhedananda, Why a Hindu Accepts Christ and Rejects Christianity (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, 1983), 1.

[3]F. Max Muller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 109.

[4]Swamy Vidyatmananda, ed., What Religion Is in the Words of Swami Vivekananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), 291.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, an Advita philosopher of the twentieth century, interpreted Christ as a man who became God or reached Christhood. He stated: "Jesus is the example of a man who has become God, and who can say where his manhood ends and divinity begins."[1] His interpretation of Christ is based on the mysticism of the Advaita system according to which everyone can become Christ or Christ can be formed in each one of us.[2]

Although Gandhi admired Christ, he did not attribute divinity to Christ. He interpreted Christ only as a historical person, one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever had, but not as the most perfect man ever born.[3] Although Ghandhi did not accept the divinity of Christ, he exercised the spirit of Christ in his personal and political life. In him we see the fulfillment of the Sermon on the Mount. In addition, Gandhi was the first Indian who introduced Christ to the Indian masses.

Hindu intellectuals definitely do not accept Christ as God and Savior, but many ordinary Hindus have accepted and worship Him as one of the saviours who can heal them from sickness. Thousands of Hindus attend Christian

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[1]S. Radhakrishnan, The Heart of Hindustan, (n.p.: n.p., 1931), 93, quoted in Balwant A. M. Paradkar, "Hindu Interpretation of Christ from Vivekananda to Radhakrishnan," The Indian Journal of Theology (January-March 1969): 78.

[2]S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1974), 220.

[3]Paradkar, 8-10.

meetings for healing and many have accepted the teachings of Christ, especially the Sermon on the Mount. At present, Christianity is in the process of being accommodated within Hinduism. Many Hindus, like Seshagiri Rao, feel that Jesus has become an ineradicable part of modern Hinduism.[1] This has presented a new challenge to the Church in India, including Tamil Nadu.

Conclusion and Summary

The church in Tamil Nadu is faced with a great challenge of discipling the Hindus by contextualizing the message of Christ and communicating it effectively by living the gospel in their midst. The churches have followed different methods to bring the Hindus into the membership of the various denominational churches, but they have not succeeded as they expected.

Since the majority of Christians in India are nominal, about 95 percent of the Christian resources such as men, money, talent, and time is being spent only on the Christian community to meet its needs.[2] As a result, discipling among the Hindus is greatly neglected. It is estimated that there are more than 2900 castes and tribes in India which have no Christians in their groups.[3]

On the other hand, Hinduism has been greatly revived

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[1]Rao, 34.

[2]Albert, 20.

[3]McGavran, Ethnic Realities and the Church, 28.

and is converting Christians to Hinduism in India and
abroad. The Hindu ashrams and gurus are increasing in
numbers every year, and people from all parts of India and
abroad are flocking to the ashrams to find spiritual
fulfillment and peace. Hindu ashrams are flourishing in
India in spite of the modernity and secularism that are
spreading across the land.

The Church in India has not adequately responded to
the challenge of discipling Hindus. Many Christian
theologians speak and write more about social justice,
religious pluralism, ecumenism, **Dalit** theology, and nation
building than discipling Hindus. However, some thoughtful
Christians have adopted the ashram model to communicate
Christ to the Hindus. Alas, their efforts have not been
greatly encouraged by the institutionalized churches due to
lack of insight and vision. Great Christian leaders like
Paul D. Devanandan have advised that future evangelists
follow the ashram model:

> The future rests with the Ashram approach. At any
> rate, in the immediate years to come, the Christian
> evangelist to Hindu India should more and more adopt
> the underlying principles of the ashram strategy in
> planning his campaign.[1]

In response to Devanandan, I present my ashram approach in
chapter 6. In it I try to integrate some of the religious
and cultural practices discussed in this chapter.

So far in this chapter, I have covered only some

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[1]Wietzke, 1:215.

major religio-cultural ideas and practices which are relevant to my ashram approach. I have explained the major theological ideas of religious systems such as Saiva-siddhanta, Advaita, Visishtadvita, and Dvaita in order to give some understanding about the Tamil worldview. Personally the study of these religious systems helps me to focus on certain theological issues which I must address while developing a contextual theology for Tamil Nadu.

The Tamil literature, family life, bhakti, rituals, and Hindu view of Christianity which I have discussed in this chapter are also contributing factors to my ashram model for discipling the Hindus of Tamil Nadu.

In chapter 5 I discuss several other factors which are closely related to the idea of ashram. I also describe some significant Hindu and Christian ashrams. I then build my ashram model by bringing together various Hindu forms and Christian principles on the basis of contextualization and discipleship discussed in previous chapters.

PART TWO

FACTORS RELATED TO ASHRAMS AND AN

ASHRAM MODEL FOR TAMIL NADU

FACTORS CONSIDERED IN THE DEVELOPMENT

OF THE MODEL

Inasmuch as I also believe like Devanandan that the future of discipling India rests with the ashram approach, I consider the following important factors in developing the ashram model in Tamil Nadu.

1. The relationship between Church and Christian ashrams

2. The underlying principles of an ashram

3. The key concepts relevant to the ashram ideal

4. The experiments of significant Hindu and Christian ashrams in modern India

5. The experiences of Jewish and Christian communities

6. The supporting ministries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Although the ashram ideal belongs to Indian tradition, it is not totally foreign Christian traditions. Therefore, I have described some Jewish and Christian communities in order to show that an ashram model is in accordance with Christian tradition, especially the Seventh-

day Adventist tradition to which I belong.

Ashram and Church

A correct understanding of what an ashram is and how it differs from the church is essential for developing an ashram model suitable for Tamil Nadu. Christians in the West and even in India have no proper understanding of an ashram. In fact, many Christians believe that the ashram model belongs only to Hinduism or Hindu cults. Therefore, Christians in India did not respond positively to the idea of starting Christian ashrams when they were first proposed seventy years ago.

However, after Vatican II (1962-65) the ashram ideal gained ground in India. Catholic ashrams began to increase in number after the 1969 seminar on "The Church in India Today" which emphasized the need for ashrams for the renewal of spirituality in the church.[1] Yet, in spite of these encouraging beginnings, there is still only uncommitted interest in Christian ashrams on the part of the Church, religious orders, and individual Christians.[2] This is partly due to lack of understanding about the nature of the ashram, its relationship with Hinduism, its function in the society, and its role in the mission of the Church.

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[1]Sara Grant, "Ashrams and Ecumenism," Word and Worship (July 1984): 171.

[2]D. S. Amalorpavadass, "Ashram Aikya: Whence and Whither--II," Word and Worship (December 1984): 344.

Ashram

The Sanskrit word "ashram" means (A = from, shram = work)[1] withdrawal from the world of work. It refers to a place or community which is engaged in spiritual pursuit. Ashram is sometimes defined as a place of peace in the forest, or a community of disciples with a guru, as well as a way of life. The ashram is an open concept with fluid boundaries and definitions; therefore, I would like to present some descriptions in order to illustrate the essential qualities of ashrams.

In ancient India, during the Vedic period between 800-500 B.C., ashrams were located in forests, or in secluded areas on the banks of rivers surrounded by beautiful scenery. Here, the **rishis** lived with their disciples for spiritual pursuit and medical research. These ashrams were described as "laboratories for religious experiment" and "spiritual power-houses."[2]

Traditionally, ashrams were the centers for disciple making as discussed earlier. People came to the ashrams in search of gurus who could guide them in attaining salvation, or enlightenment through various **sadhanas**. Even today, gurus and ashrams are increasing in number in order to meet the spiritual needs of Indians as well as others coming from

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[1]V. Paranjothi, <u>As Evangelist on the Indian Scene Dr. E. Stanley Jones</u> (Bombay: Bombay Tract and Book Society, 1970), 72.

[2]Jesudason, 2-3.

the West in search of meaning and purpose in life.

Ashrams were also centers of learning and training. In the Vedic period, the ashrams served as schools similar to the schools of the prophets found in the Old Testament. Young men from noble families came to the ashrams for education and training[1] concerning the duties of life, then returned to society to live as responsible citizens. The **Vanaprasathis**, who retired from society after obtaining a wealth of experience, prepared the **brahmacharies** for a life of responsibility in the society.[2] Presently, ashrams are not religious schools as such; some of them, especially the Ramakrishna order, operate schools as part of their service to the community and do follow the government curriculum.

Traditionally, ashrams were not formally organized institutions with a rigid structure; they were not dependent on other institutions.[3] They had no formal constitution, power structure, laws, or written contracts. However, they had certain operating principles and goals. A guru was the center and the heart of the ashram. He directed all the activities of the ashram and the ashramites responded to him with obedience and humility. By his simple and pious life, the guru was able to exert a great influence on those under

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[1]Amaladoss, 372.

[2]Ignatius Viyagappa, ed., In Spirit and in Truth (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1985), 39.

[3]Ibid., 42.

his discipleship.

The ashrams in modern India are established by the gurus and now have a simple structure due to government regulations. Since the ashrams own property, the government requires a board of trustees to handle the financial affairs. Although the guru is still the sole head of the ashram, he acts through the board of trustees[1] regarding secular matters relating to the ashram. The succession of leadership is left to the guru who often names one of his disciples as head of the ashram before he dies. If he dies before naming his successor, it would become necessary for the trustees to appoint one of the disciples as guru, in which case a power struggle for leadership could develop between the disciples.[2]

An ashram is an open community and does not recruit members like other organizations. It is open to rich and poor, and people of all castes and colors. People come to an ashram of their own freewill to learn about God and live a spiritual life. Some might stay there for a few years and then return to their native places with new spiritual energy to serve others. Visitors might visit for few days and share in the life of the ashramites.[3]

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[1]D. M. Miller and D. C. Wertz, <u>Hindu Monastic Life</u> (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 150.

[2]Ibid., 153.

[3]Vandana, 183.

Modern Hindu ashrams, while preserving the old ashram ideals, have adapted to the present conditions and needs of life. For instance, some of them are located within cities or in urban areas. In addition to their spiritual goals, they also promote social, cultural, and educational services as well.

Christian Ashram

What is a Christian ashram? The leaders of the Christian ashram movement have defined Christian ashrams in terms of the objectives they had in mind. Therefore, there is no single definition for Christian ashrams. R. Pierce Beaver, Professor of Missions at the University of Chicago Divinity School, found it difficult to explain what a Christian ashram was even after visiting several of them for a three-month period. However, he defined Christian ashrams as follows:

> An ashram is an ascetic community characterized by fellowship, mutual bearing of burdens, common worship, silent meditation, intercession and study, living a close family life under a rule of discipline to the glory of God, to the service of the most needy and to the communication of the gospel. It is one form of the Indian holy life baptized into the service of Jesus Christ and his Church.[1]

This definition seems to contain all the major principles of a Christian ashram and presents a fair description of it.

Christian ashrams are similar in many ways to Hindu

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[1]R. Pierce Beaver, "Christian Ashrams in India," National Christian Council Review (January 1966): 21.

ashrams, but in certain aspects they are different.
Christian ashrams are well-organized institutions. Some of
them depend on local churches, mission organizations, and
individual Christians for financial support. This section
of the paper summarizes only their major differences.

Unlike Hindu ashrams, Christian ashrams, in general,
are not centered around a visible guru. They believe Christ
is the **sadguru** (true guru). However, each Christian ashram
has a leader known as **acharya** who is looked upon for
spiritual guidance. He operates the ashram with the
consensus from the ashramites and is respected by his
disciples as their spiritual leader, but not revered as
guru.

Social service is another essential part of
Christian ashrams; traditional Hindu ashrams do not engage
in social service, since their major emphasis is on the
spiritual life. However, recently some modern Hindu ashrams
have begun some social work in the community. Among
Christian ashrams, Protestant ashrams do more social
services than do Catholic ashrams.

Another major difference between Hindu and Christian
ashrams is the communication of the gospel. A Christian
ashram is a communicating community, not just a community
living for itself. It has the task of communicating the
gospel and discipling others to follow Jesus. Christian
ashramites want to tell the world not only who God is, but

also what He has done in Christ. They do it by word and deed, living separate as a Christian community while still being related to the Church.

Relationship of Christian Ashrams with the Church and Mission

Christian ashrams are para-church communities existing independent of the institutionalized churches, yet related to certain denominational church traditions and orders. For example, the Saccidhananda Ashram of Bede Griffith is "affiliated to the Camadolese branch of the Benedictine order with full freedom to follow its own path in fidelity to Indian tradition."[1] The Christu-Kula Ashram was established under the guidance of the National Missionary Society.[2] Even now, the founders of Christian ashrams continue to remain faithful members of their respective denominational traditions, while carrying out the activities of the ashrams.

Christian ashrams are not anti-church institutions, but independent, indigenous communities which spontaneously emerged in response to the missiological challenges in India. Since many churches in India appeared to be Western cultural colonies, they lost their power to influence the Hindu society or to disciple the Hindus with the gospel. In response to this problem, Christian ashrams were established

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[1]Grant, 171.

[2]Thannickal, 170.

and began to witness to the power of the gospel by living the gospel in the context of the cultural traditions of India. Ashrams also contextualized the gospel in terms and forms intelligible to the Hindus.

Christian ashrams are a great asset to the Church and the cause of Christ in India. The Christian spirituality manifested in Christian ashrams is a great source of inspiration to many Hindus who are not attracted by the religious life as modeled and directed by the churches. The Christian life of prayer, contemplation, and service demonstrates to the Hindus what it means to be the Church, the Body of Christ, in the context of India. Arnulf Camps calls Christian ashrams "a new way of being a Church or a new form of Christian togetherness"[1] which often draws people to Christ. In addition, Christian ashrams bring renewal in the life of the church in India. As the ashramites who are trained in various spiritual vocations return to their local churches, they help these churches to grow also in spirituality. Another benefit is that both ministers and lay persons can make use of the ashram facilities for their spiritual pursuits.

The word ashram still has great attraction to Indian people because of its connection with the ancient hermitages of the rishis who lived a holy life of prayer and meditation

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[1]Arnulf Camps, "New Dialogue with Hinduism in India," in New Religious Movements, ed. John Coleman and Gregory Baum (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 66.

in the community with their disciples. Therefore, the name ashram should not be carelessly used for just any Christian institution as is often the case presently in referring to orphanages, hospitals, or other social service units of the Church. Hindus are offended when the word ashram is misused or when ashrams are established with a purpose of proselytism. Instead, Hindus would be more favorably impressed if the Christian ashrams would preserve the principles of Hindu ashrams.

Ashram Principles

All Hindu and Christian ashrams are not the same in their objectives even though they are more or less using many of the same broad principles. For example, while both may differ from each other on their emphasis of certain principles and forms of expression, most share common principles such as spirituality, simplicity, non-violence, fellowship, and selfless service.

Spirituality

"Spirituality" refers to the spiritual aspect of life which is focused on knowing, realizing, or experiencing God. It is basically a life that is lived in devotion to God, or lived in awareness of the indwelling God. In Hinduism, this spirituality is expressed in such forms as contemplation, prayer, devotion, silence, the **guru-shishya** relationship, an ascetic life, chanting of God's names,

worship, **bhajan**, and pilgrimage. All these activities are done with the aim of liberating the soul from the cycle of **karma-samsara**, or attaining self-realization.

On the other hand, Christian spirituality is centered around Jesus Christ, and one's duty to God and society. It consists of seeking God through prayer, study of Scripture, worship, witness, and service. Christian spirituality is based on one's response to the redeeming love revealed in the historical person of Jesus Christ. The aim is not to attain salvation, but to express the salvation they have already experienced through the saving power of Christ.

Christian spirituality also has prophetic or eschatological elements because it is centered around faith in the soon-coming of Christ. This faith motivates and shapes a Christian's life in the world, causing a person to express love for God by living a holy life of renunciation, prayer, martyrdom, persecution, and witness on account of **parousia** and the Kingdom of God. Thus, Christian spirituality is different from Hindu spirituality for the latter is based on a pessimistic view of life, history, the world, and the inner reality of self and its identity with God.

The purpose of Christian ashrams is to express Christian spirituality using Indian or Hindu forms, and also to adopt Hindu spiritual methods in order to enrich the

Christian experience of God. A Christian ashram with its emphasis on simplicity, devotion, contemplation, service, and community life will not only enrich one's spiritual life, but also will provide a strong foundation for Christian witness among the Hindus. If Hindu spiritual methods such as silence, contemplation, chanting, bhajan, and Scripture reading are followed in Christian ashrams in addition to promoting Christian values such as service, fellowship, and witness, then Hindus will be attracted to know and experience this God.

Amalorpavadass, an Indian Catholic theologian, observed that a Christian ashram is "one of the best means for promoting authentic and meaningful spiritual life which is fully Indian and fully Christian."[1] The Christian ashram can provide Hindus with the deepest spiritual experience of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ. It can also provide an opportunity for them to know Jesus who lived a simple life and identified Himself with the common people. Hindus will be greatly attracted toward the Christ of an ashram than a church.

Simplicity

According to Indian tradition, simplicity is an expression of one's spirituality. In Hindu ashrams, simplicity is demonstrated by a life of renunciation and

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[1]D. S. Amalorpavadass, "Ashram Aikya: Whence and Whither," Word and Worship (November 1984): 305.

asceticism aimed toward personal holiness and salvation. Hinduism believes that attachment to material things is evil and a hindrance to the service of God. Further, in the context of India's cultural perspective, simplicity has a deeper meaning of expressing one's identity with the poor and spiritual people of India. Therefore, a life of simplicity is essential to an ashram community.

The principle of simplicity is expressed in various forms in Hindu ashrams. Indians consider simple dress as the most important mark of simplicity and spirituality. The ashramites wear simple Indian dress suitable for work and in accordance with the climate and weather. The color of their dress depends on the type of the ashrams to which the ashramites belong. Generally, the gurus and disciples wear **kavi**[1] in Hindu ashrams. Some Christian ashrams such as the Saccidhananda Ashram of Bede Griffiths also follow this practice. The Protestant ashramites, such as of the Christukula Ashram, wear white **khadi**[2] dress.

Other forms of simplicity include the food eaten and the places where ashramites live. Ashramites eat simple vegetarian food consisting of rice, **dhal**, salad, and fruits. Their dwellings are simple huts constructed with mud or

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[1]Kavi is ochre-colored cloth which is the symbol of renunciation and of **sanyasa**.

[2]Khadi is homespun cloth which is a symbol of Gandhian nationalism. The founders of early Protestant Christian ashrams wore khadi in order to identify themselves with the mainstream of Indian nationalism.

bricks. They sleep on the floor and walk barefooted. Some modern Hindu ashrams have adopted some new facilities; however, they retain the basic simplicity of an Indian lifestyle[1] which would also include the principle of non-violence.

Non-violence

The Indian term used for non-violence is **ahimsa.** The aspects of ahimsa are compassion, reverence for life, respect for nature, forbearance, self-suffering, and non-retaliation. Hindu sages and Buddhists in the past laid great emphasis on this principle. Gandhi advocated this principle in his ashram and practiced it at the cost of his personal life.

The active part of non-violence is love, forgiveness, doing good to one's enemies, and resisting evil with good. At the same time, non-violence does not mean submission to evil, wrongdoing, or injustice. It is resistance to evil by **satyagraha** which is the force of truth or the force of love.[2] Non-violence, in this sense, is the same as the Christian principle of love taught by Jesus Christ. M. K. Gandhi practiced non-violent methods such as non-cooperation and passive resistance in his political life

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[1]Bede Griffiths, "Christian Ashrams," <u>Word and Worship</u> (May-June 1984): 151.

[2]T. M. P. Mahadevan and G. V. Saroja, <u>Contemporary Indian Philosophy</u> (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1985), 140.

to obtain freedom for India from the British.[1]

Fellowship

The idea of fellowship in the Hindu ashram is different from the concept of fellowship described in the Bible. The Bible explains fellowship in terms of relationship between believers within the Church. In Hinduism, fellowship is viewed in the context of the relationship between the guru and his disciple known as **guru-bhakti.**

Guru-Bhakti

The **Guru-shishya** relationship is the basic prerequisite of any Hindu ashram. Guru-Bhakti is the term used for the relationship a disciple has toward his guru. It is the highest virtue and an essential prerequisite for a **shishya** to become a future guru. This relationship between the guru and the shishya is also vital to the spiritual enlightenment of the disciple.

The relationship begins when individuals are drawn closer to a religious teacher and accept him as guru by completely surrendering themselves to his authority. This relationship with the guru is not like a relationship between a seminary teacher and his student. It is a kind of mystical relationship in which the disciple is born in the heart of his guru. The guru becomes the spiritual father,

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[1]Ibid., 141.

with the disciples serving their guru with love, devotion, and complete obedience. At the end, they are transformed into his character and led to the higher levels of spiritual understanding[1] or enlightenment. This type of guru-bhakti is absent in Christian ashrams, because Christians do not recognize anyone as guru except Christ. Therefore, the concept of **koinonia** or fellowship is prevalent in Christian ashrams.

Koinonia

Koinonia is the Greek term used for fellowship in the Bible. It means "sharing in."[2] Although the early believers still maintained their contact with Judaism, they identified themselves as a distinct group by their unique fellowship.[3] Fellowship was expressed by the visible activities of breaking bread, prayer, and the sharing of goods in the early Church (Acts 2:42, 44f; 4:32). The early Christians were inspired to have this kind of fellowship because of their spiritual experience with God through the Holy Spirit. The Christian ashram is an attempt to realize the same fellowship in the context of India.

Christian ashrams emphasize the ideals of

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[1]Mervyn C. D'Sousa, "Krishna and Arjuna: A Model of Guru-Sishya Relationship," <u>Journal of Dharma</u> (January-March 1986): 11.

[2]Wilkins, 275.

[3]Ibid.

fraternity, equality, justice, and unity in faith and experience. They advocate these principles in order to develop fellowship among the ashramites. These ideals are also expressed in terms of social service in the society.

Service

The idea of service in Hindu ashrams is different from the concept of service prevalent in Christian ashrams. The disciples in traditional Hindu ashrams think service in terms of the duty to the guru and the work in the ashram. According to **Manu Smrithi**, serving the guru was one of the prerequisites for attaining supreme bliss.[1] In ancient Hindu ashrams, disciples collected firewood, attended livestock, and gathered roots, fruits, and vegetables. However, the idea of serving the larger community was absent in the traditional Hindu ashrams. Lately some modern Hindu ashrams have adopted this aspect of service from Christian missions.

On the other hand, service in Christian ashrams is mainly directed toward the community as an expression of the love the believers have found in Christ. It is based on the belief that Jesus came to serve and save the lost, so His disciples need to do the same. The Greek word **diakonas** is used in the New Testament to refer to the service rendered to the people within the church. However, the concept of

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[1]Joel D. Mlecko, "The Guru in Hindu Tradition," Numen (July 82): 40.

diakonas is applied in the larger context of the community
in Christian ashrams. Christian ashrams, in addition to
contemplation, encourage the ashramites to participate in
community service. Christian ashrams also operate clinics,
orphanages, schools, and community development services to
express their Christian love.

Thus far, I have discussed some of the principles
related to an ashram's life and its services. Now I would
like to explain some of the key concepts related to Hindu
ashrams and values in Hindu society.

Key Concepts

It is necessary to understand some of the Hindu
concepts and their significance in order to understand the
power of the Hindu ashram. These key concepts are also
important to the development of a Christian ashram model.
Therefore, in the following section I identify these
concepts and their relevance to the establishment of
Christian ashrams in India.

Guru

The idea of a **guru** in an ashram is an important
concept. The term guru has become a familiar term in the
vocabulary of Westerners and also is listed in many English
dictionaries. According to Webster's dictionary, the
meaning of guru is a personal religious teacher or a

spiritual guide.[1] However, the Sanskrit term "guru" has several meaning in Hinduism. Etymologically "**Gu**" means ignorance and "**ru**" means dispeller. Therefore, guru means dispeller of ignorance. It also means heavy or weighty.[2] In Hindu tradition, guru refers to a spiritual person and has no exact counterpart in Western culture.

According to Hinduism, a guru is a religious teacher with exceptional qualities and is endowed with the power of furnishing arguments in favor of his ideas. He is considered to be pure, kind, compassionate, forgiving, helpful, temperate, and honest. Further, he is free from partiality, malice, pride, deceit, cunning, manipulation, jealousy, falsehood, egotism, and attachment. He lives only with the aim of imparting the knowledge of God to others.[3]

Moreover, a guru is viewed by Hindus as the embodiment of truth and an incarnation of God. He is reverently addressed by people as "His Holiness," "His Divine Grace," "Lord," "**Jagad Guru**," "**Maharishi**," "**Mahayogi**," and "**Mahatma**." He is described as a friend to a friend, lover to the beloved, father, mother, master, Lord, King, the mighty one and the beloved in Saiva-siddhanta

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[1]*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1986), s.v. "guru."

[2]Mlecko, 33.

[3]Bettina Baumer, "The Guru in the Hindu Tradition," *Studies in Formative Spirituality* 11, no. 3 (November 1990): 345.

tradition.[1] He is the main spiritual figure in a Hindu
ashram.

A Hindu ashram is centered around a guru and cannot
exist without one. He holds complete authority over the
ashram and does not receive his authority from an
organization or a committee. First of all, an individual
does not claim to be a guru, but emerges as a guru
spontaneously when others recognize one's spiritual powers
and ability to lead people to God. A guru in the making
lives as a disciple under a guru for a long time, living in
austerity and undergoing discipline in a lengthy
apprenticeship. He also practices asceticism, yoga,
meditation, and a life of sexual continence before he is
recognized as a guru by the people.[2]

Further, in Hinduism one cannot obtain religious
knowledge or salvation without the help of a guru. Gandhi
said,

> I believe in the Hindu theory of Guru and his
> importance in spiritual realization. I think there is
> a great deal of truth in the doctrine that true
> knowledge is impossible without a guru.[3]

God is not a notion but an experience for many Hindus, and

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[1]Xavier Irudayaraj, "Discipleship and Spiritual
Directions in the Light of the Tamil Saivaite Tradition,"
Journal of Dharma (September 1980): 284-85.

[2]Purusottama Bilimoria, "The Spiritual Guide (Guru)
and the Disciple (Sisya) in Indian Tradition," Journal of
Dharma (July-September 1980): 275.

[3]J. Gonda, Change and Continuity in Indian Religion
(London: Mouton & Co., 1965), 282-283.

the religious knowledge taught by a guru is experiential
knowledge. The guru leads his disciples to experience God
through his presence and personal guidance.

The guru is the center of attraction in the ashram.
People are attracted to an ashram not by the programs run by
the ashram but by the presence of a charismatic guru. They
come to the ashram in search of a guru who will dispel
darkness from their minds and help them in their religious
striving (i.e., **sadhanas**).

Sadhanas

The word "sadhana" means method or way. It refers
to the method of achieving salvation in Hinduism. The goal
of sadhana is God-realization or union with one's personal
God. The number of sadhanas followed by the disciples
depend on the sect to which the guru adheres to. Some
Hindus use other names such as yoga and **marga** for sadhanas.
Yoga, which is a cognate with the English word "yoke," means
union with God.[1] Marga means path, and indicates the way
of salvation. Hinduism, in general, advocates four
important sadhanas or margas, **Jnana marga, Karma marga,
Bhakti marga** and **Yoga marga.**

Jnana Marga

Jnana marga is the way of knowledge. Jnana does not
mean intellectual knowledge, but spiritual insight,

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[1]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 83.

experiential knowledge, or transcendent knowledge.
According to advaita vedanta, there are two kinds of
knowledge: lower knowledge which is the knowledge of all
sciences and arts, and higher knowledge which is the
intuitive knowledge of God or Ultimate Reality.[1] The term
vidya is used by Hindu philosophers for intellectual
knowledge. The term Jnana is used for liberating knowledge
or enlightenment.[2]

Enlightenment is reached in two stages. The first
stage is a preparatory stage which consists of four
qualities in the aspirant: (1) discrimination between the
eternal and the non-eternal, (2) detachment from all selfish
pursuits, (3) development of the virtues of calmness,
restraint, renunciation, resignation, concentration, and
faith, and (4) an intense longing for liberation. The next
stage consists of three steps: (1) **Sravana**, the study of the
scripture, (2) **Manana**, reflection on the texts studied to
understand the truth revealed in the scripture, and
(3) **Nididhyasana**, deep contemplation which gives intuitive
experience of the Absolute or God.[3] Advaita philosophers
like Sankara consider Jnana as the principal means to attain
salvation, which is self-realization.

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[1]Ibid., 95.

[2]Organ, 122.

[3]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 95-96.

Karma Marga

Karma marga is the way of action to attain salvation. In other words, it is salvation by works which is done without desire over the results of the work. This idea of karma marga is called nishkama karma in Bhagavad-Gita. It teaches that one should not desist from work, but should do it without attachment to the result.[1] If good action is done for honor, promotion, credit, praise, and prestige, salvation is not possible. According to the doctrine of karma marga, one should do his/her duty for the sake of duty and do good because it is good. People cannot follow nishkama karma unless they are spiritually mature.

The concept of nishkama karma is also taught by Jesus Christ on the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Let not the left hand know what the right hand doeth" (Matt 6:3). Christians call this disinterested benevolence. The basic idea is the same in Gita and in the teachings of Jesus Christ. However, in Hinduism it is considered to be a marga. In Christianity it is not a marga, but a **dharma**, a moral principle by which one is called to live in order to bring glory to God. The nishkama karma for a Christian is also an expression of his bhakti or faith in God.

Bhakti Marga

Bhakti marga is the way of devotional faith or

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[1]Ibid., 85.

salvation by faith. Since the meaning of bhakti was discussed in the previous chapter, only brief reference is made here.

Bhakti is the attitude of a devotee toward his God. It begins with an attitude of a servant to his master. Later on, it develops into the love of a friend to friend, parent to child, child to parent, wife to husband, and finally the love of the lover toward his/her beloved. The devotee views himself as a bride and God as the bridegroom[1] with the devotee expressing his devotion by singing, dancing, and offering gifts to God.

According to the doctrine of devotional Hinduism, these actions are only in response to God's grace. However, many Hindus follow devotional practices in order to attain salvation. Therefore, bhakti becomes a means rather than a response. In essence, bhakti marga teaches salvation by grace through bhakti; it appears to be salvation by works consisting of singing, dancing, chanting mantras, worshipping idols with gifts, fasting, feasting, and pilgrimages. While the majority of Hindus follow bhakti to attain salvation, only a few follow yoga.

Yoga Marga

Yoga marga is the way of mind-control. The word yoga comes from the root **Yug** which means unite, join, or

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[1]Ibid., 91-2.

yoke. It refers to a way of uniting oneself with God.[1] It is a mind-training method used to achieve salvation and can only be practiced with the help of a guru.

The classical form of yoga comes from Patanjali who did not create yoga, but who systematized the techniques of yoga in their present form in his text <u>Yoga Sutras</u>.

Yoga has eight steps: **yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharna, dhyana**, and **samadhi**. The first step yama (self-control) consists of five moral principles: non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, chastity, and non-possession. The second step niyama (observance) has five regulations: purity, contentment, austerity, study, and faith in God. The first two steps constitute the ethical basis for following further steps. The five yamas and five niyamas are the ten commandments of yoga.[2]

The next three steps are related to the disciplining of body, breathing, and senses. Step 3 is asana (posture), keeping the body in certain postures. Patanjali did not suggest a particular posture but advised that the posture be steady and easy. Since his time, **yogis** have devised over eighty-four asanas and quarrelled over the relative merits of these postures.[3] The fourth step is pranayama (control

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[1]Organ, 226.

[2]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 127.

[3]Organ, 229.

over breathing). Breathing is regulated and slowed to help in mind-control. The fifth step is pratyahara (restraint of senses), a discipline related to the senses where the sense organs are trained to withdraw from and cease their perception of respective objects.

The last three steps involve different stages of concentration. Together they are called **samyama**, inner-discipline. The sixth step is dharna, developing ability to fix the mind on one idea or object. Next is dhyana (meditation), the continuous and complete flow of thought with reference to the object of concentration.[1] The last step is **samadhi** (deep meditation). Here, the true nature of the object is revealed and the mind temporarily becomes abstract. At this stage, the soul is believed to enjoy aloneness.

Yoga is practiced by several Hindu sects in India. Other religions like Sikhism, Jainism, and Buddhism have also adopted the techniques of yoga to realize their religious goals. Swami Nikhilananda says that the techniques of yoga can be followed in varying degrees by all.[2] I have seen even an atheist practicing yoga to achieve peace within.

The Jnana marga and yoga marga are introverted forms

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[1]Ibid., 230.

[2]Swami Nikhilananda, <u>Hinduism</u> (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1982), 130.

of spirituality practiced only by the Hindu elite. In contrast, the karma marga and bhakti marga are extroverted forms of spirituality followed by the unreflective masses in India.[1] Many Indian Christians with their orientation towards Western Christianity practice neither introverted nor extroverted forms of spirituality. Their religious experience may be only on the cognitive level, leading to a kind of classroom religious experience. At the same time, traces of bhakti can be seen in the Christian spirituality of those who have been converted out of the Indian religious climate.

Recently, the Christian churches of South India have begun to see the value of different sadhanas in developing spirituality in the life of the Christians. They view yoga as an authentic part of Indian culture which can be adopted to enrich the prayer life of the Christians in the church. They consider that yoga is a spiritual treasure that India has to offer to the world and one that Christians can adopt in order to enrich Christian spirituality just as the Hindus and others have done.[2] I believe Western Christianity can be greatly benefitted by adopting yoga and other sadhanas.

We have seen above how the four margas or sadhanas

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[1]James D. McMichael, "Spiritual Master in the Path of Knowledge in Indian Tradition," <u>Journal of Dharma</u> (January-March 1986): 19-20

[2]Brenda Lealman, "Siva Dances for Christians," <u>Theology</u> (September 1979): 347-48.

have shaped Indian spiritual life. In the following section, I discuss four values Hindus follow in addition to the four **sadhanas** mentioned above.

Purusarthas

Purusarthas means human ends or desires. Hinduism believes in the fourfold end of human life. They are: **artha** (wealth and physical comforts), **kama** (pleasure, enjoyment, and hedonic satisfaction), **dharma** (righteousness, duty, and law of inner growth) and **moksha** (freedom, liberation, or salvation).[1]

Artha

Hinduism advocates a legitimate way of acquiring wealth to maintain the family. **Artha** includes all material things by which a person can maintain his family, follow his vocation, and perform his religious duties.[2] It is the sign of worldly success. It is considered to be important to have wealth in order to realize two other ends, **kama** and dharma. Artha is good only as a means to an end and is not an end in itself.

Kama

The word kama stands for all the desires of one's senses. However, the pursuit of pleasure is subject to the

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[1]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 66.

[2]Organ, 198.

moral law. One should never indulge in an excess of pleasure, but should only satisfy the legitimate demands of one's body. Kama not only includes conjugal love, but also the enjoyment of art and music.[1] Artha and kama are only means to promote virtue, which is dharma.

Dharma

The word "dharma" derives from the root **"dhri"** meaning to sustain or to support. Dharma is translated into English as duty, law, virtue, righteousness, justice, and morality. Dharma is basically doing the things that sustain society and the growth of the individual. It is the responsibility of everyone to do one's duty as required by one's station in life such as being a member of a caste and being at a stage (**asramas**) in life. The Indian mind is so conditioned by dharma from childhood that people naturally act in the way of dharma. To not follow one's dharma is seldom entertained as a viable alternative.[2] Like the first two human ends, dharma is also not an end in itself but a means to liberation (**moksha**).

Moksha

Moksha is the supreme end (summum bonum) of life.[3]

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[1]Ibid., 196.

[2]Ibid., 201.

[3]T. M. P. Mahadevan, 66.

The first three ends mentioned above belong to the realm of worldly values which pave the way for moksha.[1] Desire for moksha is a natural desire in all humans. Hindus believe that all religions basically try to deal with the question of moksha, liberation or salvation. For millions of popular Hindus, it is freedom from **karma-samsara** which is release from sin and reincarnation. But for classical Hindus it is freedom from ignorance and the attainment of self-realization which normally occurs at sanyasa stage in life. Sanyasa is explained further in the next section.

Sanyasa

Sanyasa is one of the four stages in life (see page 83 above). It is the last stage in which a person renounces all worldly ties, wealth, and family, and follows a life of asceticism. Although this ideal is open to all, it is mostly followed by male Brahmins. The person who attains this fourth stage is called a **sanyasin** or **sanyasi**.

A sanyasin is a wanderer who follows a disciplined lifestyle of fasting, avoidance of meat, alcohol, and sensual pleasures, and who observes the vows of celibacy, silence, renunciation, and contemplation. This sanyasa ideal has been viewed by many Catholics in India as a

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[1]Nikhilananda, 81.

powerful medium for communicating the gospel to the Hindus.[1]

The key factors that we have discussed above are concepts closely related to the Hindu ashrams. They are not Hindu beliefs, but Hindu religious and cultural forms which are used in many of the Hindu and Christian ashrams.

Hindu Ashrams

There are numerous Hindu ashrams in India and the West. For the purpose of this paper, only some of the significant ones representing various idealogies found in contemporary India are discussed. These ashrams have made important contributions to the spiritual as well as cultural life of India. In the following section a brief survey is given concerning each ashram, its history, objectives, and activities.

Ramakrishna Order

The Ramakrishna Order is one of the well-known ashram movements in India and the West. Some references were made above to the discipleship method followed in this order.

The Ramakrishna Order was started by a poor Bengali

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[1]For further knowledge on this subject, read Jesu Rajan, Bede Griffiths and Sannyasa (Banglore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1989); and Klaus Klostermaier, "Sanyasa--A Christian Way of Life in Today's India?" in Indian Voices in Today's Theological Debate, ed. H. Burkle and W. M. W. Roth (Lucknow: Lucknow Publishing House, 1972).

Brahmin priest Ramakrishna and has been promoted all over
the world by his disciple Swami Vivekananda, who came to the
United States in 1893 to attend the World's Parliament of
Religions held in Chicago. After studying and practicing
various religious traditions including Christianity and
Islam, Ramakrishna declared that all religions are true and
merely take different paths to the same God. His teachings
appealed to the young, educated Bengalis who were already
under the influence of the New-Hindu reform movements.
After his death in 1886, Vivekananda became his spiritual
heir as designated by Ramakrishna himself.[1]

Vivekananda officially formed the Ramakrishna
Mission on May 1, 1897, at Belur, near Calcutta, with the
objectives of spreading the message of Ramakrishna and
helping the community with social services. National
development, the uplift of women, education, medical
service, and training of **sanyasis** are the major objectives
of the Ramakrishna Order. Since its establishment, the
Order has engaged in establishing hospitals, dispensaries,
orphanages, elementary and high schools, colleges, cultural
training centers, and monasteries in India and abroad.[2]

The Ramakrishna Order is operated like a typical
Christian missionary organization with effective policies

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[1]Helen Ralston, <u>Christian Ashrams</u> (Lewston, NY:
Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 55.

[2]Organ, 355.

and structure. It is obvious that Vivekananda was influenced by Christian missionary organizations. He integrated the Hindu concepts of sanyasa and dharma with the Christian models for monastic orders and missionary institutions in carrying out his religious movement. Every ashram that comes under the Ramakrishna Order has a guru to initiate its members, but commitment and obedience of the members are directed towards the organization rather than to the individual guru.[1] The Order also emphasizes jnana and karma margas among its members.

Sivananda Ashram

The Sivananda Ashram is the most representative of the many Hindu ashrams. It was started by Sivananda, a Tamil Brahmin medical doctor, in 1923 near Rishikish in the foothills of the Himalayas. He legally registered his ashram in 1936 as the Divine Life Society which presently has about three hundred branches all over the world.[2] Swami Chidananda is its current President and Swami Krishnananda is the General Secretary. Under their leadership, the activities of the ashram are well organized and effectively carried out. The aims and objectives of the Society are to spread spiritual knowledge, operate educational institutions, help orphans, and operate medical

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[1]Ralston, 56.

[2]Vishal Mangalwade, <u>The World of Gurus</u> (New Delhi: Nivedit Good Books Distributors, 1987), 64-65.

services.[1]

Sivananda followed the advaita vedanta system of Hindu philosophy. Although this philosophy advocates jnana marga, Sivananda believed in karma and **bhakti** margas as valid paths to salvation. In accordance with these teachings, the ashram conducts **kirthan**, **bhajans**, yoga classes, **pujas**, and **satsang**, which is a devotional meeting equivalent to a frontier camp meeting. The ashram also feeds the poor, cares for the sick, and publishes books and periodicals.[2] It is open to Westerners, with many Christians from the West coming to learn about Hinduism. This ashram does not try to convert Westerners, but instead encourages them to study the Gospels and live accordingly.[3] Visitors can stay for years in pursuit of spirituality.[4]

Shantiniketan Ashram

The word **"santiniketan"** means "abode of peace." This ashram was started by Maharishi Devadranath Tagore in 1863. His son, Rabindranath Tagore, started a school in that ashram in 1901 to impart spiritual knowledge and

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[1]Satish Chandra Gyan, <u>Sivananda and His Ashram</u> (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1980), 130-31.

[2]Daniel J. O'Hanlon, "The Ashrams of India," <u>National Catholic Reporter</u>, 15 August 1975, 7.

[3]Klostermaier, 174.

[4]Ralston, 63.

culture to young people.[1] His ashram school gradually grew into an university in 1921 and is named **Vishvabarathi** (Eastern University).

The aim of the ashram and the university was to serve as a center for education that promoted intercultural and inter-racial amity and understanding. Tagore wanted to bring unity to all humankind, free people from all antagonism caused by race, nationality, creed, and caste and do this all in the name of the One Supreme Being.[2]

Aurobindo Ashram

The Aurobindo Ashram is located in Pondicherry, once a French colony in India. It is a flourishing contemporary Hindu ashram occupying a large part of the town and owning about four hundred buildings.[3] It does not resemble the traditional Hindu ashrams in appearance since it has a theater, dance hall, and music center.[4] It is much like a large Western hotel in appearance and organization.[5]

The ashram was founded by Sri Aurobindo in 1926. After his death in 1950, the ashram was headed by his disciple Mira Richard, a French woman, until her death in

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[1]Jesudason, 33.

[2]Ibid., 34-35.

[3]Ralston, 60.

[4]Thannickal, 86.

[5]O'Hanlon, 7.

1973. It is presently managed by a five-member Board of Trustees. However, Mira Richard, known as "the Mother," remains a dominant symbolic guru of the ashram, and has had more influence than Sri Aurobindo. In the nineties the ashram has more than two thousand members with many of them Westerners.[1]

The ashram was established with the purpose of synthesizing the spiritual heritage of the East with the material heritage of the West. Aurobindo developed, from his studies and experience, an integral yoga[2] bridging the gap between the spiritual and the material.[3] To put this into practice, he established an ashram with modern facilities. Because of this emphasis, this ashram is thriving both in India and in other parts of the world where it has established many branches. Many educated Indians have given their retirement funds to the ashram and then spend their last years in the ashram.[4]

Ramanashram

The Ramanashram of Ramana Maharishi, a Tamil Brahmin (1819-1850), is located in Thiruvanna-malai, Tamil Nadu.

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[1]Ralston, 60.

[2]Integral yoga is the synthesis of Jnana, Karma and bhakti yoga. According to Aurobindos' Integral yoga is the path to liberation.

[3]Thannickal, 84.

[4]O'Hanlon, 7.

The ashram was created by the followers of Ramana as a small community, but it became a large organization after his death. Helen Ralston observed:

> About seventy men (no women) are permanent residents, while hundreds of visitors, men and women, foreign and Indian, visit the ashram for varying periods. . . . There is no community life among the ashramites. Some devotees or disciples of Ramana Maharishi are guided by individual Swamis of the ashram.[1]

At present the ashram is administered by a Board of Trustees with a manager as the administrative head.[2]

Ramana was a mystic and **Jnanayogi** who attracted people by his powerful presence and message. He followed the philosophy of advaita vedanta as taught by Sankara[3] and did not concern himself with social reforms like Gandhi's and Vivekananda's. However, he greatly valued social service.[4] Many Westerners visited Ramana including F. H. Humphreys, Paul Brunton, Somerset Maugham, Zimmer, Jung,[5] and the founders of the first Catholic ashrams, Monchanin and Le Saux.[6]

Many modern Hindu ashrams are different from ancient Hindu ashrams in their activities and have adapted to the

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[1]Ralston, 57.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Mahadevan and Saroja, 243.

[4]Ralston, 57.

[5]Mahadevan and Saroja, 221-22.

[6]Ralston, 57.

contemporary world. However, Ramanashram is the only one that seems to follow the ashram model of the Upanishad period with the aim of advocating the philosophy of advaita.

Protestant Ashrams

Protestant Christians are considered to be the pioneers of the Christian ashram movement in India. The purpose of the Protestant ashram movement was to give India an Oriental Christ.

Christu-Kula Ashram

The Christu-Kula Ashram was the first Protestant ashram and was started at Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu, in 1921 by S. Jesudason and Dr. E. Forrester Paton under the guidance of the National Missionary Society of India. The Society had advocated the ashram model at its North India conference in 1912 as a valuable indigenous model for evangelism in India. Although the founders were affiliated with the National Missionary Society, the ashram was established independent of control by any national or foreign organizations.[1]

The term **"Christu-Kula"** means "family of Christ." The ancient Hindu ashrams were called guru-kula, because they were centered around a guru. The founders of the Christu-Kula Ashram recognized Christ as the only guru, therefore, they named their ashram Christu-Kula. The ashram

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[1]Ibid., 70.

presently has one administrative head and three other permanent members to help manage activities.

This ashram consists of a hospital, a small school, and a chapel built in the architectural style of the Dravidian Hindu temples, with two **kopurams** or towers. The ashram also has ninety-one acres of land and sixteen buildings used to carry out its activities.[1]

The activities of the ashram include daily morning and evening worship, caring for the sick in the hospital, and providing religious education to children. The ashramites also participate in evangelism in nearby villages; however, they do not conduct the ordinance of baptism in the ashram. People who accept Christ are led to become members of the Church of South India.[2]

The primary aim of the ashram is to live an integrated life of prayer and action.[3] This ashram emphasizes the principles of renunciation, brotherhood, celibacy, and service in order to realize the kingdom of God within the ashram context.

Christa Sishya Ashram

The Christa Sishya Ashram is situated at Thadagam, Tamil Nadu. It was founded by the Anglican Bishop, Herbert

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[1]Thannickal, 171.

[2]Ralston, 71.

[3]Ibid., 173.

Pakenham Walsh, and his wife Clare on January, 1936, on a beautiful site of six and a half acres of land at the foot of the Nilgiri mountains. The ashram originally followed Protestant principles and lifestyle, but today it is considered to be an Orthodox Syrian ashram. Worship is conducted according to the Orthodox Syrian rite.

The purpose of the ashram was evangelism, health care, and community development. In order to realize these purposes, the ashram operated a medical center and two branch offices for village uplift work, and participated in village evangelism. In the nineties, activities are limited to conducting retreats, seminars, and camps due to lack of membership. In the beginning, married people were allowed to be members of the ashram, but for the past ten years celibacy was required of all seeking membership. This has caused the ashram to lose some of its members and make ashram life unattractive to young people.[1]

The study of these two Protestant ashrams clearly shows that the practice of celibacy has become a hindrance to the growth of ashrams in India today. Most Catholic ashrams also follow the practice of celibacy, but are not declining because celibacy has long been an accepted form of life within the Catholic tradition. Although Hindu ashrams and Catholic monasteries practice celibacy, this is not consistent with Scripture.

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[1]Ralston, 84-85.

Catholic Ashrams

Although the ashram movement began with the establishment of the first Protestant ashram in 1921, Catholics in general did not show much interest in the ashram model until Vatican II (1962-65). However, a few Catholics like J. Monchanin and H. Le Saux seriously contemplated starting ashrams in the late forties. Their main concern was to develop an indigenous liturgy and emphasize the contemplative life. With these two ideas in mind, the first Catholic ashram was started in Tamil Nadu in 1950. After Vatican II, many Catholics showed interest in the ashram model and established many Catholic ashrams in India.

Saccidananda Ashram

Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux, French priests, founded the first Catholic ashram with the name Saccidananda in 1950. The ashram is located near the holy river Cauvery, near Kulithali, Tamil Nadu. The ashram looks very much like an ancient Hindu ashram with its huts, temple, meditation hall, library, gardens, and beautiful surroundings.

After coming to India, Monchanin and Le Saux adopted the Sanskrit names **Parama Arubi Ananda** (The Bliss of the Supreme Spirit) and **Abhishiktananda** (The Bliss of the Anointed One), respectively.[1] They realized that the real

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[1]Ibid., 92.

Christianization of India could come only by living a life of contemplation, meditation, worship, liturgy, and study. They also considered the ideal of sanyasa as the most effective way of Christian witness. They wanted to integrate the Christian monastic tradition with the Hindu sanyasa tradition in order to model a meaningful expression of Christianity in India. In addition, they intended to identify themselves with the Hindu pursuit of the Absolute by relating the advaita view of the Absolute with their own experience of God, the Holy Trinity.[1]

The name, Saccidhananda Ashram, conveys the idea that the Absolute which is conceived as **sat** (Being), **cit** (Consciousness), and **ananda** (Bliss) in Hindu tradition is identified with the Christian Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by the founders. Although the ashram is widely known as the Saccidhananda Ashram, it is officially called The Ashram of the Holy Trinity.[2]

Monchanin died in 1957 and Le Saux moved from the ashram in 1968 to live the life of a hermit in the Himalayas and died in 1973. After he left the ashram, Dom Bede Griffiths, a Welsh Benedictine, came from the Kurismala Ashram to take care of the Saccidananda Ashram. At present (1993) he is recognized as the guru and the head of the

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[1]Viyagappa, 46.

[2]Michael O'Toole, <u>Christian Ashrams in India</u> (Pune: Ishvani Kendra, 1983), 108.

ashram. The ashramites are now affiliated with the Benedictine monastery of Camaldoli in Italy.[1] However, the ashram is free to develop its own form of worship and lifestyle adapted from Hindu ashrams.

The main activities of the ashram are meditation, study, classes on yoga and spirituality, corporate prayer three times a day, and work in the garden. The ashram also observes major Christian and Hindu festivals like Pongal (harvest festival). Involvement in social services and evangelism is limited. However, the ashram runs a nursery school in one village and two spinning units in another village.

The unique feature of this ashram is its adaptation of Hindu forms of worship. I have visited the ashram three times and spoken with Bede Griffiths and others, and participated in their worship. The worship consisted of bhajans, reading from Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, Tamil classics and the Bible, **arati** (waving light), sprinkling of water, the ringing of bells, prayers, and distributing **Kun-Kumam** (purple powder to put on the forehead).

The worshippers sat cross-legged on the temple floor around an Indian lamp decorated with flowers, during a worship which lasted for thirty minutes. The Hindus who

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[1]Helen Ralston, "The Construction of Authority in the Christian Ashram Movement," <u>Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions</u> (January-March 1989): 66.

accompanied me participated in the worship without hesitation, but did not seem to understand the meaning of the rituals since no one explained the meaning behind the symbolism which had been adopted from Hinduism. I felt that the ashram should have developed a method to explain the meaning of the rituals to the visitors.

The Saccidananda Ashram is a great center for Christian spirituality, serving not only the Hindus but also Westerners who come to India in search of meaning and purpose in life.

Anbu Vazhvu Ashram

The word "**Anbu**" means love and **Vazhvu** means "living the life." Living the life of love is the ideal expressed through this ashram which is located in Palani, Tamil Nadu. Palani is one of the pilgrim centers in Tamil Nadu for the devotees of Murugan, the popular Tamil god. Father Philip Payant, a French-Canadian Holy Cross Father, founded this ashram in late 1972 on six acres of land where rice, vegetables, and fruits are grown for their own use as well as to help operate the ashram on a self-supporting basis. The ashram also has other facilities such as a kitchen, dining room, huts,[1] and a well-organized library with much Tamil literature.[2]

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[1] Ralston, Christian Ashrams, 99.

[2] O'Toole, 88.

The objective of the ashram is to integrate the three ways (Jnana-marga, Karma-marga, and Bhakti-marga) using indigenous symbols, rituals, and music in worship. Meditation is practiced in the personal prayer life of the ashramites.[1] This ashram also strives to train the disciples for service with Helen Ralston recently reporting that twelve candidates have passed through the ashram training.[2]

The ashram did not seem to carry out any evangelistic work in the neighborhood. However, its presence in a pilgrim center itself is a great Christian witness to the Hindus who come to this town.

Thus far, we have seen how the ashram came from Hindu traditions and how it has been adapted in modern India by both Hindus and Christians. Next, we turn our attention to some communities within Jewish and Christian traditions where practices similar to ashrams are followed, especially in respect to community life and spirituality.

Jewish Communities

Although the ashram comes from a Hindu tradition, its characteristics are not exclusive to that tradition alone, for ashram-type religious communities are found in Jewish culture too. According to the Old Testament, many

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[1]Ralston, Christian Ashrams, 100.

[2]Ibid., 99.

Jewish communities have existed since the time of Samuel.

Schools of the Prophets

The schools of the prophets mentioned in the Old Testament were analogous to the guru-kula ashrams of ancient India. In these schools, the prophets functioned as gurus and the disciples or the students were called sons of the prophets (2 Kgs 4:38). They lived a community life amidst nature. These communities most likely came into existence around the time of Samuel (1 Sam 10:10). There were two such communities in Samuel's day: one at Ramah and the other at Kirjath-Jearim.[1] Later on, prophetic communities were formed at Jericho (2 Kgs 2:5) and Gilgal (2 Kgs 4:38).

The prophets, who taught the sons of the prophets, were recognized as teachers divinely appointed.[2] Regarding the spiritual character of these teachers, Ellen G. White observed:

> The instructors were not only versed in divine truth, but had themselves enjoyed communion with God, and had received the special endowment of His spirit. They had respect and confidence of the people, both for learning and for piety.[3]

The students addressed the prophet as master, bowed before him (2 Kgs 2:15; 6:15), considered themselves as servants

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[1]White, Education, 46.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

(2 Kgs 2:16; 4:1; 6:3), and sat at the feet of the prophet to learn from him. This kind of relationship which existed between the prophet and the sons of the prophet is similar to the relationship between the guru and disciples in the guru-kula ashram of the Vedic period.

Students who attended the schools of prophets were pious, intelligent, and studious. They were trained to become leaders and counselors in Israel. They studied the law of God, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry, and sustained themselves by hard work. Additionally, each one learned a trade.[1] They built their own huts to live in (2 Kgs 6:1-2). Some of the students were married (2 Kgs 4:1). People also brought gifts to the prophets to support the school. We read that the sons of the prophets ate meals together (2 Kgs 4:40-44). Similar activities were also carried on in the guru-kula ashrams during the Vedic period. Although the ancient ashrams and the schools of the prophets had theological differences, their form and structure were approximately the same.[2] The schools of the prophets gradually disappeared from Israel; however, the community ideal continued to prevail until the time of Christ.

Qumran Community

At the time of Christ, there were religious sects

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[1]Ibid., 46-47.

[2]Thannickal, 96.

and communities in Judea. It is believed that John the Baptist might have come from the Essenes communities. Some authors think that John was a member of the Essenes, a monastic community, most likely an offshoot of the Qumran community.[1]

It is believed that the initial settlement at Qumran might have occurred around the mid-second century B.C., when one branch of the Hasidim under the leadership of one called the Teacher of Righteousness resorted to the wilderness of Judea. Later on, many new members probably joined the Qumran community during the reign of Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.).[2] The community flourished until A.D. 68 when it was destroyed by the Roman Legions.[3]

The activities of the Qumran included study, worship, fellowship, and writing or copying manuscripts. The Dead Sea Scrolls which were discovered in 1947 are considered to be the manuscripts of the Qumran community. It is believed that their members did such manual labor as making pottery. Archeological evidence shows that the Qumran had a kitchen, laundry, assembly hall, library,

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[1]Ibid., 97.

[2]Everett Ferguson, <u>Backgrounds of Early Christianity</u> (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 413.

[3]Ibid.

numerous storage rooms, and workshops.[1]

Qumran was a spiritual community where the members renounced worldly pleasures and shared their worldly possessions. Members met together regularly for prayer, study, and food.

Qumran was a well-organized community. The supreme authority in all doctrine and economic matters was held by the priests. There was a general council, which served like a parliament where community matters were discussed. Membership into the community was granted only after two years of probation in which the person's intellectual capacity and moral character were examined. A member had to place all his property in trust with an "overseer" after he was admitted into the community. He was then assigned duties in the community by another office.[2]

Certain religious and administrative practices mentioned in the New Testament seemed to have been adopted from Qumran. The office of the Bishop, deciding issues by the casting of "lots," selling of one's possessions, laying the proceeds at the feet of the apostles, the Lord's Supper, and feet washing were some of the elements adopted from Qumran.

Qumran was similar to ashrams in some aspects with

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[1]J. Carmignac, "Qumran," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, rev. ed. (1991), 4:15.

[2]Thannickal, 100-101.

members in both communities isolating themselves from the world and living a disciplined life under the strict rules of their teachers. Members in both communities also engaged in study, meditation, fellowship, and work, and members were initiated into the community after a period of probation.

Christian Communities

Community of Jesus

The ministry of Jesus to His disciples gives us another picture of a community that was unique, yet resembled the ashram community in certain aspects. It was a missionary community which lived under the direction of the guru, Jesus Christ.

Jesus the Sadguru

Jesus, in every respect, outweighed the qualities required of a guru in a Hindu ashram. Therefore, He is the Sadguru (true guru), and the only guru for Christians. Jesus told His disciples that He was the only rabbi and Master and that His followers should consider each other only as brothers (Matt 23:7-10).

In India, Christ has been accepted by the Hindus as a great and unique guru, but not as the only guru. Although Christ lived the life of a celibate, He did not seclude Himself from social life or exalt Himself like the rabbis of His days. He humbled Himself and lived like a servant. Like many Indian gurus, He transcended the earthly ties with

brothers, sisters, and parents, and considered all those who do the will of God to be His mother, brothers and sisters (Matt 12:47-50). However, He did not give up His responsibility toward His mother. He honored His mother and asked John to take care His mother as if she were his own (John 19:26, 27).

Mobile Community

Christ formed a missionary community and commissioned His disciples to form similar communities. This is an unique difference between the ashram community and the community Jesus established. Traditionally, the Hindu ashram community did not carry on any missionary task, but concerned itself with the salvation and the spirituality of its own members. It did not have any agenda to save the world. In contrast, Jesus gave His disciples the task of forming a new world community. Therefore, the disciples did not settle down in a particular place like the ashram communities. Even after the resurrection of Christ, the disciples did not plan to establish a community similar to Qumran, but only wanted to develop a consciousness of being members of the community of Jesus.

After Christ's ascension, the idea of community continued in the early Church. The book <u>Acts of the Apostles</u> speaks about the community that was formed around the apostles in Jerusalem and in other places, as mentioned below.

Apostolic Community

After the resurrection of Christ, the first Christian community was formed by the apostles. Nearly three thousand members joined this community. Its members sold their possessions and held all things in common. With one accord they spent their time in prayer, fellowship, and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:44-47; 4:32-35). However, this community did not isolate itself like Qumran in one place. Believers lived in their own homes, and met in the houses (Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19, Acts 1:13, Phil 2, Col 4:15) of some believers for worship and fellowship; they never met as a whole in one place. Dr. Bruce Bauer observed:

> Initially these Christian gatherings probably adopted the Jewish synagogue as a model for their worship structure. It is quite certain that small messianic synagogues were established in the various homes of Christian believers throughout the city of Jerusalem and that these home Churches became the focus point for early Christian worship.[1]

It seems that the apostolic community existed as cell groups without any central organization or pre-planned structure.

However, the local cells or **ekklesias** (churches) were linked with each other by the apostles' letters (Col 4:16), the visits of individuals from one group to another (e.g., Rom 16:1), the sending of financial contributions during times of need (2 Cor 8:1-14; 1 Cor 16:1-5), the

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[1]Bruce L. Bauer, "Congregational and Mission Structures and How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Has Related to Them" (D.Miss. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1982), 46.

offering of prayers for each other, and the passing of greetings and news (Col 4:12-15; 1 Cor 16:19).[1] Although the believers did not establish communities and form a central organization, they developed a sense of consciousness that they were members of a spiritual community whose head was Christ (Col 1:18, 24; Eph 2:19).

The house church model of apostolic times gradually disappeared by the time of Constantine and was replaced by a form more in keeping with the Roman governmental pattern.[2] However, the community concept continued throughout Christian history and small communities were formed apart from the institutionalized congregations.

Monastic Communities

After large numbers of unconverted people became Christians at the time of Constantine, the church began to conform with the standards of the world. In response to the worldliness found in the church, committed Christians began to form monastic communities and orders in order to live according to the teachings of Jesus and carry out the missionary function of the Church.[3] These monastic communities "also became centers from which new life and

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[1]Robert Banks, <u>Paul's Idea of Community</u> (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 48.

[2]Bauer, 67.

[3]Ibid., 68.

renewal flowed back into the local congregations."[1]

The monastic movement gradually began to spread from Egypt, Palestine, and Asia Minor westward to Gaul and other parts of Europe, including Ireland.[2] It thrived among the Irish Celts who evangelized the Germanic world, Northern Italy, and Slavic lands.[3]

During the Dark Ages (500-1000), monastic communities went through hard times. However, the monastic communities of Benedict were able to render service in remote and uncultured regions by being away from the influence of the outside world. The monks of these communities cultivated the land with their own hands and continued to develop their spiritual life in the midst of the country folks. They contextualized the gospel to the context of the beliefs and practices of the rural people.[4] Moreover, the Benedictine Rule came to be adopted among most of the monasteries in the past fifteen centuries.[5]

Monastic communities began to revive in the early thirteenth century. The most famous among them were the Franciscans and Dominicans which brought new missionary zeal

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[1]Ibid., 70.

[2]Charles J. Mellis, Committed Communities (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1976), 20.

[3]Ibid., 23.

[4]Neill, Christian Missions, 77.

[5]Mellis, 30.

to Christianity. Regarding the founders of these, Stephen
Neill wrote:

> Francis (1181-1226) lived to bring back simplicity and
> joy into the Christian world, and to release new forces
> for the service of the very poor. In the work of
> Dominic (1170-1221) there were from the beginning
> harsher traits. His Order was to be intellectually
> competent, devoted to the conversion of heretics
> particularly through the work of preaching, as its
> official title the 'Order of Preachers' indicates. But
> in each lived a genuine missionary impulse.[1]

Of the Franciscans, it is said that they were found at the
ends of the known earth before the end of the thirteenth
century.[2]

During the pre-Reformation period, these communities
helped the missionary outreach of the Catholic Church.
After the Reformation, Protestants also developed
communities, of which many were Anabaptist.

Protestant Communities

According to Anabaptists, the Christian life can
never be lived out individually but must be lived within the
context of a group.[3] Among the Anabaptists, the Hutterites
were known for establishing agricultural communes throughout
the German lands. The members of these communes practiced
asceticism, total non-resistance, renounced all private
property, and centered their lives on the celebration of the

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[1]Neill, Christian Missions, 116-17.

[2]Mellis, 27.

[3]George R. Fitzgerald, Communities (New York:
Paulist Press, 1971), 95.

Lord's Supper.[1] At the end of the sixteenth century, these communities increased in number with at least one hundred communities, with a probable total membership of 30,000.[2]

The Pietist movement came at the end of the seventeenth century and developed as a renewal movement within Protestantism. This movement gave birth to the Moravian missionary movement in the eighteenth century. The Moravians continued to be a very vital missionary community for well over a century.[3] Regarding the Moravians, Stephen Neill observed:

> The Moravians have tended to go to the most remote, unfavorable, and neglected parts of the surface of the earth. Many of the missionaries have been quite simple people, peasants and artisans; their aim has been to live the Gospel, and so to commend it to those who have never heard it.[4]

Moravian missionaries even went to Greenland and the West Indies to spread the gospel. The mission of the Moravians was carried out as a community[5] and they also inspired others to establish new Christian communities in the last two centuries.

In the nineties, there are Christian communities all over the world which follow approximately the same

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[1]Ibid.

[2]Mellis, 36.

[3]Ibid., 42.

[4]Neill, Christian Missions, 237.

[5]Mellis, 41.

principles followed in Hindu ashrams. Due to the limited scope of this paper, it is not possible to describe all of them. However, it is necessary to name some in order to show that community life has been part of the tradition of the Christian Church. Some of the significant ones are: the Bruderhoff Community in the village of Sannerz in Germany, the Aiyetoro Community in Nigeria, the Family of Jesus in China, L'Abri Community of Francis A. Schaeffer in Switzerland, Riverside Community in New Zealand, Koinonia Farm in Georgia USA, Taize in France, and Seventh-day Adventist self-supporting communities in the U.S.A. All these Christian communities more or less share the ideals of the Indian ashram and the apostolic community of the early church. These communities attract many young people from all over the world and serve their spiritual needs.

SDA Communities

The only above-mentioned Christian communities I have visited are the SDA communities in the U.S.A. I found these to be similar to the ashram in many respects. These ashram-like communities were once known as self-supporting institutions and are now called supporting ministries.

The SDA communities are well organized and carry on the educational, medical, and evangelistic ideals set forth by Ellen G. White, one of the founding leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They serve as spiritual retreat centers where natural remedies, vegetarian cooking,

vegetarian restaurants, health foods, missionary training, community life, home education, and personal witness programs are carried out. The significant supporting ministries are: Wildwood Sanitarium, Little Creek Academy, Laural Brook Academy, Yuchi Pines, Oak Haven, Living Springs, and Eden Valley.[1] These institutions came into existence with the encouragement of Ellen G. White's writings, and they now work in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Christian communities, where the ideals of community life are lived, have always been a vital part in the tradition of the Christian Church in general and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular. We can safely say that many of the principles followed by Hindu ashrams are scriptural and spiritually uplifting.

The ashram model has a great attraction to Hindus because it serves their spiritual needs and is not a foreign entity, but an entity that comes from the religious heritage of India. Therefore, I believe that a Christian ashram based on the Bible, Church traditions, and Tamil culture can effectively communicate the gospel and witness to the saving power of Jesus Christ in Tamil Nadu.

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[1]For further information about these institutions, read Robert H. Pierson, Miracles Happen Every Day (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1983).

CHAPTER VI

ASHRAM: A CONTEXTUALIZED MODEL
FOR DISCIPLING HINDUS

Introduction

Chapter 5, briefly explained the nature and function of both Hindu and Christian ashrams which are presently active in India. I listed the Christukula Ashram, Sacchidananda Ashram, Ramanashram, and the Aurobindo Ashram as a few of the prominent ones located in Tamil Nadu, a state in India which is considered to be a spiritual stronghold. In my opinion, these ashrams, although located in Tamil Nadu, have not adapted the religious aspirations and thinking of Saiva-siddhanta, which is the famous and popular religious system in Tamil Nadu. Therefore, I have developed an ashram model which can meaningfully relate itself to Saiva-siddhanta which represents the religious aspirations of the Tamils, their culture, and way of thinking.

I described the religion of the Tamils and their culture in chapter 4. However, this chapter attempts to integrate the cultural and religious forms of Tamil Nadu with the meaning of the gospel in order to disciple Hindus

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on the basis of the contextualized theology of discipleship discussed in chapter 3. I justify my whole endeavor on the basis of the concept of contextualization which is supported by the evidences from the Bible as presented in chapter 2.

In this chapter, I develop an ashram model within the framework of the School of the Prophets, the apostolic Church, and the communities of the self-supporting institutions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Therefore, my ashram model has its roots in historic Christian tradition, while at the same time being relevant to the Hindu ashram tradition. Although the ashram model has gone through several changes from the Vedic period to the contemporary period, many features like the simple life style, the presence of a guru, the contemplative life, a natural environment, the practice of yoga, vegetarian food, and discipling still remain as essential features of all Hindu ashrams.

Therefore, my ashram model includes many of these features, as well as the Christian ideals of social service, witness, and training. I have also incorporated the features of healthful living and the dignity of work from the self-supporting institutions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, I do not consider my ashram model to be just another evangelistic strategy to be used for Christian proselytism. Instead, I see it as a model for discipleship. Unlike most SDA self-supporting institutions,

this ashram will not engage in church planting, although I am in favor of it. Instead, the ashram has as its goal to be a symbol of the kingdom of God, the light, salt, and leaven in the midst of people who have not known the power of Christ and His gospel (Matt 5:13, 14, 16; 13:33; Luke 13:21; Acts 13:47; 26:23; 2 Cor 4:6).

I would like to name my ashram the Karunaiyananthar Ashram. I prefer this name because "Karunaiyananthar" is one of the indigenous names given to Jesus Christ by the Tamil Christian poet, Vedanayaha Shastri,[1] and I believe that this name will appeal to both Hindus and Christians. The name Karunaiyananthar means "one who is compassionate and blissful." Hereafter, I use the short form, K. Ashram or Ashram, when referring to the Karunaiyananthar Ashram.

In developing this ashram model I have attempted to take into consideration the history of the Church with its various Christian communities and the SDA self-supporting institutions which to a certain extent resemble the ashram ideal. These institutions have emphasized a simple lifestyle, vegetarianism, healthful living, natural remedies, country living, community, social service, a life of prayer, and personal witness. In the next section, I explain the structure of the K. Ashram.

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[1]The former editor of <u>Nalvazy</u> magazine of Southern Asia Division of SDA, Pr. J. P. Massilamony, told me this during a conversation with him in June, 1986, and suggested this as an appropriate name for the ashram.

K. Ashram Structure

The K. Ashram will not have an elaborate organizational structure like organizations in the West to carry out its objectives. The ashramites will totally depend on the leading of the Holy Spirit in developing ways to maintain the ashram principles and carrying out its objectives. However, the Ashram will have a simple and flexible structure in order to meet the legal requirements of the government. Additionally, the Ashram will strive to identify itself as an indigenous organization and function without the control of any foreign institution.

In discussing the structure of K. Ashram, I would like to point out the principles, goals, objectives, membership, leadership, and the oath to be taken by its ashramites. I do not intend to elaborate on the administrative structure of the Ashram, but rather to focus on its activities.

Guiding Principles

The K. Ashram will be developed and operated on certain principles in order to achieve its goals and objectives, with most of the principles being adopted from other ashrams. According to Bishop A. J. Appasamy, Christian ashrams generally have adopted five ideals or principles such as freedom, poverty, service, fellowship,

and prayer.[1] Stanley Jones lists them as fellowship, simplicity, self-denial, service, and worship.[2] I have adopted eight principles: spirituality, indigenization, service, work, simplicity, family life, unity, and mission.

Spirituality

In Christianity the idea of spirituality centers around Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). It includes the idea of knowing Him through experience, serving Him, and serving His creation which consists of nature, human beings, and other creatures. These ideals can only be realized by participating in certain spiritual exercises such as contemplation, prayer, worship, the reading of scriptures, fasting, witness, and the observance of feasts. (Hindu and Christian spirituality are examined on p. 167-68 above).

Indigenization

The Christian Church in India is still largely a Western entity. Its architecture, ecclesiastical structure, theological terminology, and ways of worship are all essentially Western.[3] The K. Ashram will strive to model

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[1]A. J. Appasamy, "Christian Ashrams," Frontier (Winter 1961): 285.

[2]E. Stanley Jones, "New Wine in New Wineskins," The Christian Century, 22 September 1965, 1161.

[3]Russell Chandran, "The Church in and against Its Cultural Environment," The International Review of Missions 41 (1952): 259-60.

an indigenous Christian community and provide opportunity to Christians to adopt the cultural forms of Tamil Nadu while maintaining Christian meanings. It will also encourage new converts not to become "Western" or to create cultural barriers by breaking away from the joint family and caste when they begin to follow Christ. Within the Ashram the ashramites will continue to follow the Tamil cultural practices, customs, costumes, and manner of behavior that are not contrary to biblical principles.

The K. Ashram will also express the principle of indigenization in all aspects of the ashram life. For example, the ashramites will speak the Tamil language, wear Tamil dress, greet each other using Tamil forms, welcome special guests with arati and garlands, and celebrate Tamil festivals and rites of passage without losing their Christian identity.

Service

The principle of service to be followed in the K. Ashram is similar to the Hindu view of karma yoga, which is one of the sadhanas discussed above. Karma yoga, as mentioned in Bhagavat-Gita, emphasizes the ideal of nishkama karma, which is action done without attachment to the results. The same principle is also taught by Jesus Christ (Matt 6:3). However, karma yoga, which is practiced in Hinduism, is not very concerned with social action, concentrating instead on religious actions such as

sacrifice, Puja, other religious observances, and caste duties. Karma yoga for Christ includes serving the poor and destitute in society.

Christ emphasizes that the motivating factor for karma yoga is not personal salvation, but compassion. When Christ was on earth, He served people out of compassion and wanted His followers to do the same. This concept is reflected in His parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), the sheep and goats (Matt 25:32-41), and His asking the rich young ruler to sell all his wealth and give to the poor (Matt 19:16-21). Since concern for the poor and destitute is an integral part of the religion of the Bible and Christ (Deut 26:12; Isa 58:6, 7; Jas 1:27), a person cannot consider himself to be a follower of Christ without being compassionate toward the people who are in affliction.

Service is also an integral part of faith, according to the Bible. In Hinduism, faith is devotion which is shown to God in terms of prayer, meditation, fasting, and worship. Hinduism does not call for social service. However, in Christianity, faith in God or bhakti must be expressed in terms of serving the poor and the needy (Jas 2:14-20). Therefore, social service is a necessary constituent of nishkama karma and bhakti in Christianity and will be done in the Ashram as the expression of faith in Christ and in obedience to His teachings.

In addition, the services done within the Ashram and

the surrounding neighborhoods will convey the message that the K. Ashram is not a secluded community, living for itself, but a servant community, existing for the welfare of the surrounding area. Furthermore, this community service will also allow the Ashram to express its love and solidarity with the people. Service is done without any ulterior motive to proselytize. It is a sincere expression of the love of God experienced in the innermost soul of the ashramites.[1]

Work

Manual labor will be another important aspect of the Ashram life. K. Ashram will seek to teach and promote the dignity of work among the ashramites and people in the neighborhood. This is in contrast to the traditional Hindu values regarding manual labor. Many Hindus, especially the high castes, view work as below their dignity, and some even prefer to die of hunger rather than earn a living by manual labor. This attitude is rooted in the caste system which assigns work like cultivation, garbage collection, cleaning toilets, and other menial jobs to the low castes. In addition, the Hindu doctrine of **karma** teaches that people are born as low castes as a result of bad actions done in the past life and emphasizes that salvation depends on following assigned caste duties in this life.

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[1]M. M. Thomas, The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution (Bangalore: CISRS, 1966), 108.

In carrying out the principle of work, the
ashramites will be assigned different tasks, regardless of
their caste background, with even visitors being encouraged
to participate in different jobs such as cleaning toilets,
helping in the kitchen, and working in the garden. The
Ashram will also recruit volunteers to clean up the
neighborhood and to see that it is well-kept.

Health

Physical health is an important prerequisite for
mental and spiritual health. Therefore, observance and
promotion of health laws will be an essential feature of the
K. Ashram. The principles of health taught and practiced
in many Seventh-day Adventist self-supporting institutions
such as Living Springs, Oak Haven, Wildwood, and Eden Valley
will be integrated in order to promote healthful living
among the public. The K. Ashram will conduct programs to
help people quit habits harmful to physical health and teach
them about the value of natural remedies and preventive
medicine.

Family Life

The K. Ashram will strive to integrate the values of
family life in its community life. This may appear contrary
to the ideal of celibacy practiced in many Hindu ashrams
today. I have adopted the principle of family life in my
ashram model from the example of the guru-kula ashram and

the Schools of the Prophets. Family life was an integral part of ashram life in ancient Hindu ashrams, with celibacy being introduced only at a later period as mentioned above. Therefore, it is not necessary that the K. Ashram observe the vow of celibacy.

Christ and John the Baptist did not require their disciples to observe celibacy, although both John and Christ were celibate. However, Christ recognized the value of celibacy in the context of the Kingdom of God, but left it up to each individual to choose (Matt 19:12).

The Apostle Paul also talked about the value of a celibate life in the context of the soon coming of Christ (1 Cor 7: 29). He also considered celibacy to be a gift (1 Cor 7:7). He taught that the imposition of celibacy on people will be a false doctrine in the last days (1 Tim 4:3). With these as guiding principles, if someone chooses to live a celibate life according to the gift he/she receives, there will be freedom to do so in the K. Ashram.

Therefore, the K. Ashram will be open to both celibates and families. Each group will live in separate quarters in the Ashram or in the neighborhood, but will be part of the ashram community and experience the social and spiritual aspects of community life within the structure of the Ashram. The Ashram would not consider the celibate as holier than the married person, although this view is widespread among the Indian public. The lifestyle in the

Ashram would be such that there may not be much difference between the celibates and the married.

Simplicity

The K. Ashram will encourage people to follow a simple lifestyle which has great spiritual value and attraction in India. Many Hindu ashrams advocate the principle of renunciation, with the view that matter is an illusion and evil, and salvation depends on the renunciation of material things. The Bible advocates simplicity or renunciation of a materialistic lifestyle not for the sake of salvation but for the sake of the Kingdom. When Jesus sent His disciples on a missionary tour, he asked them to go with few material things (Matt 10:9, 10).

The K. Ashram will exercise simplicity in regard to dwellings, dress, and food. By following a simple life, the ashramites will be able to identify with the poor in the community and build relationships with them. If some wealthy Christians want to join the Ashram, they will not be required to renounce their material things, but will be encouraged to sponsor projects in the Ashram and in the neighborhood. They will be encouraged also to follow the simple lifestyle of the Ashram while they are in residence, so that unity among the ashramites can be maintained.

Unity

The principle of unity is a broad principle which

includes equality, fraternity, social justice, and the idea of unity between different religious and caste groups. The K. Ashram, as an nondenominational entity, will also strive to develop unity among Christians from various denominations in order to effectively witness to the power of Christ among the Hindus. In the nineties, the denominational differences and enmities found among Christians in India seem ridiculous to the Hindus and the name of Christ is being blasphemed by Christians fighting Christians. Therefore, our Ashram will strive to bring Christians of various denominations together in Christian action.

The Ashram will also encourage Christians to join hands with Hindus in fighting against the common enemies of humanity such as poverty, sickness, natural calamities, corruption, and social injustice. In a pluralistic society like Indian, it is important to maintain and model a unity that is possible among its various people in spite of religious differences. To help achieve this goal, the K. Ashram will conduct programs like interfaith dialogues in order to bring understanding and peace among India's various religious groups.

Mission

The K. Ashram will be a missionary community where disciples are made and sent out among the Hindus to communicate the gospel effectively. Although the Ashram itself will not carry out any evangelistic crusades in order

to plant new churches, it will train Christian laypeople to share the gospel with Hindus in their respective places in accordance with the K. Ashram ideals.

The Ashram will not be a camouflaged proselytizing agency for any Western denomination. Rather, it will be a discipling agency for the Church, the Body of Christ. The Ashram will share with Hindus and Christians what it means to be followers of Christ and His Kingdom without changing one's name, dress, language, manners, customs, and community. The emphasis will be placed on knowing Christ personally through prayer, contemplation, worship, study, and service. It is expected that disciple-making will happen naturally and unnoticed as Hindu seekers are brought to experience the power of Christ in the spiritual atmosphere of the Ashram and as they see a group of Christians living an intense and committed Christian life.

The principles discussed above, if practiced, will help the Ashram realize the goals and objectives which are stated in the following section.

Goals and Objectives

Goals

The goals of the K. Ashram are to make Christ known among the Hindus of Tamil Nadu and to influence the Hindu society with the values of the Kingdom of God as taught by Jesus Christ.

Objectives

The objectives of the K. Ashram are:

1. To follow the principles discussed above

2. To develop indigenous forms of worship and witness

3. To provide an adequate library for religious study

4. To serve as a retreat center

5. To serve as a center for religious dialogue

6. To train lay people for Christian witness among Hindus

7. To publish literature to spread the knowledge of Christ among the Hindus of Tamil Nadu

8. To provide philanthropic service in the neighborhood

9. To serve as a home for Hindu converts who are ostracized by their families

10. To publish books on Indian Christian theology

These objectives and goals will only be reached slowly and steadily under the guidance of the Holy Spirit since the Ashram is dependent on finding enough volunteers to render the various services. The K. Ashram will not hire people to provide its services, since a paid ministry is foreign to Indian tradition, is contrary to the spirit of the Ashram, and would defeat the purpose of the Ashram. In the next section, I explain how the Ashram ministry would be

carried out in an organized way with the help of a volunteer team.

Service Team Structure

Volunteers at the Ashram would be classified as part-time, longtime, or lifetime volunteers. They would not come under any hierarchical power structure, but would share different responsibilities in the Ashram according to the time and talents they could invest. None of them would receive any pay for their service; instead food, accommodations, and travel expenses will be provided for them when they are engaged in service for the Ashram.

Leader

The founder of the Ashram will emerge as its leader and will live there to lead and guide the ashram community and promote its various activities. The leader also will be considered as the Ashram's chief servant and called "brother" or "sister" by his/her fellow ashramites. He/she will not have any title such as "guru" or "achariya." However, outside people might call him/her by some of these titles as they see the titles as being suitable for him/her.

Board of Trustees

A board of trustees consisting of three lifetime volunteers, including the founder, will manage the affairs of the Ashram. These trustees will manage the overall function of the Ashram and distribute the responsibilities

to various ashramites. They will be responsible for seeing that Ashram principles are observed in carrying out various activities in the Ashram. These trustees will organize an advisory council consisting of seven or more members who are in charge of different programs in the Ashram.

Advisory Council

Advisory council members can be lifetime or longtime volunteers. Each member of this council would have full freedom to develop the program he/she has chosen to look after, in accordance with the goals, objectives, and principles of the Ashram. The council members will meet at least once a week to discuss issues relating to their respective programs and will help each other in carrying out the Ashram objectives.

Volunteers

All the members of the Ashram will be volunteers, including the trustees. In addition to the members of the advisory council, the Ashram will also have several other lifetime and longtime volunteers who might live there for a year or more. These volunteers will be known as ashramites. It is expected that most of the ashramites will be people who have just retired from their jobs. Their responsibility would be to follow daily and weekly schedules as well as to help organize and operate various activities in the Ashram and to help implement all the rules of the Ashram. Above

all, the ashramites will be looked up to as people who are committed to following the teachings of Christ and setting themselves as good examples.

Ashramites will be admitted into the Ashram for service after careful observation by other members and the Ashram leader. They will receive free accommodations, food, and pocket money for personal expenses.

Part-time volunteers are not ashramites. They will not live in the Ashram, but come for a few days to serve in some special programs such as the free eye camp, the village medical service, the stop-smoking program, or the emergency relief services. These volunteers will commit themselves only for a short stay and service in the Ashram.

All volunteers will be admitted after taking a solemn oath and signing a form indicating the type of service and time they would like to render to the Ashram. They will not be required to pay any dues. Short-time volunteers can be members of any religion, while longtime and lifetime members ought to be committed Christians. (See appendix II for the oath and commitment statement.)

Volunteers will receive an orientation concerning the nature and function of the Ashram before they enlist for service. The Ashram leader will explain to them the principles, objectives, and activities of the Ashram. Volunteers will be also instructed concerning the rules applicable to the inmates and guests. In the following

section, I list those rules followed by a brief discussion concerning the activities of the Ashram.

Rules for the Ashramites

1. Ashramites will address each other as brother or sister without attaching any titles.

2. Ashramites will wear clothes appropriate to the local customs.

3. Vegetarianism will be promoted in the Ashram; therefore, ashramites should set an appropriate example.

4. Ashramites will not be required to give their personal property to the Ashram. They should continue to maintain a simple lifestyle regardless of their financial status.

5. The Ashram is a community; therefore, community consciousness should be maintained at all times. In case of differences or ill feelings among ashramites, all are encouraged to resolve conflicts immediately.

6. Ashramites should accept and respect with an open heart the non-Christians who visit the Ashram and should show a willingness to listen to their opinions and to learn from them.

Rules for the Visitors

The following rules will be written in the Ashram handbook for the benefit of the visitors who come to stay for a short period.

1. Visitors are expected to observe silence at all times in areas near the temple and the library.

2. The temple is meant for meditation and worship, and is considered to be a holy place. Therefore, visitors must show reverence by removing their shoes and washing their feet before entering the temple. They are expected to observe silence, sitting down instead of walking and talking inside the temple.

3. Visitors can stay in the guest house providing prior arrangements have been made and can dine with the ashramites at no cost.

4. Vegetarian meals prepared in the kitchen will be served as scheduled and no one is allowed to bring in other food. Visitors are not allowed to cook their own meals in the guest houses or in other places within the premises of the ashram.

5. Visiting hours are from 9:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. and from 2:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. During these hours visitors can meet with the teacher (guru) for instruction and counseling.

6. Visitors are welcome to participate in the daily activities of the ashram and may sign up for any work they would like to help with during their stay. Those not interested in the work aspect of the Ashram are encouraged to spend their time in reading, meditation, or writing. However, visitors are encouraged to avoid disturbing

ashramites who are engaged in their various activities. The Ashram also expects visitors to wear simple and modest dress that is appropriate for work and worship.

7. There are no servants in the Ashram. Therefore, each person must keep his/her own residence clean and take care of all personal needs.

8. Since healthful living is one of the principles of the Ashram, coffee or tea will neither be served nor allowed within the premises.

9. Smoking, drinking, or the use of any illegal drug is strictly prohibited in the Ashram.

10. Visitors are encouraged to engage in conversation topics related to spiritual matters and should avoid controversial issues relating to politics.

11. Visitors are expected to keep the Ashram clean and should not spit or throw garbage anywhere except in the assigned places.

12. Visitors are expected to take good care of the articles given to them for their personal use such as sheets, towels, mats, and pillows and should clean and return them before leaving the Ashram. Visitors should report to one of the ashramites if they lose or damage any item belonging to the Ashram.

13. Visitors must be aware that the Ashram is not liable for personal injuries.

14. Visitors are encouraged to keep a smiling face

and to extend courtesy to others as needed.

These rules are subject to change as necessity demands. However, the principles and objectives will remain the same. There will be structured religious activities to help realize the objectives. In the following section I explain how some of those activities will be conducted.

Religious Activities

The K. Ashram, generally, will not carry out any religious activities outside the Ashram premises. However, the ashramites are free to attend religious functions in the neighborhood if they are invited. The official religious activities of the Ashram will be confined to the Ashram compound. The Ashram will conduct religious activities such as daily worship, weekend worship, satsang on Saturday evening, religious dialogue on Sunday afternoon, and observance of Christian and Indian national festivals, seminars, and retreats.

Daily Worship

Daily and weekend worship services will adopt indigenous forms in order that the Christian worship may become a way of witnessing for Christ among the Hindus and enriching Hindu spirituality with Christian meaning.

In explanation of the Hindu philosophy of worship, generally speaking, Hindus give more importance to the acts of worship than to the object of worship because worship is

a spiritual technique by which a person transcends thought and unites himself with God. Because of this, Hindu worship is enriched with many symbolic objects and acts.

Similarly, worship services in the Ashram will include many Indian symbols and acts such as the altar with offerings on it, people sitting on the floor, singing bhajans, lighting the lamps, burning incense, arathi, flowers, rose water, music, prayer, meditation, scripture reading, blessing, and distribution of **prasada** (food blessed during worship). In such a worship atmosphere, Hindus will certainly feel at home and feel spiritually blessed.

Ashramites and visitors will meet together twice each day at 5:30 A.M. and 7:30 P.M. for worship. These worships will last for half an hour and will consist of ten minutes of silent meditation, ten minutes of bhajan, five minutes of reading, and three minutes of **Puja**.

Contemplation

Contemplation is another Hindu worship form that will be adopted by the Ashram. Contemplation or meditation calms the mind and helps a person focus on God. Many devout Hindus sit before their **Ishtadeva**, read their scripture, and reflect over it in silence. The same practice will be adopted in the Ashram.

First, the one who conducts the worship will read a passage from the Bible and ask everyone to contemplate on it for several minutes. After meditation, another five minutes

will be used as a few individuals in the audience share the
spiritual meaning they found in the text.

Bhajan

Bhajan is group singing accompanied by Indian
musical instruments such as cymbals, tabula, harmonium, and
tambourines. Bhajan is a spiritually uplifting experience
for many Hindus. During bhajan, many will be so affected by
the meaning of the songs that they might display their deep
feelings and emotions by shedding tears of joy and love.
Generally, bhajan attracts all kinds of people, young as
well as old, and educated as well as uneducated popular
Hindus. Therefore this method of worship will also be
integrated into the Ashram worship.

Reading

Passages selected from the Bible and other religious
scriptures or books will be read after the bhajan. The K.
Ashram will use a book similar to the morning devotional
books used in many Christian homes.

Puja

The term puja refers to the ritual of worship and
will be the climax of the worship service. Puja consists of
lighting a lamp, burning incense, ringing a bell, waving a
lamp in front of the audience, sprinkling water, and
distributing prasada (sweets, or fruits and herbs). After
reading the scripture, the **pujari** (one who conducts the

worship) will burn some incense and light the lamp that is placed on a brass plate surrounded by sweets and fruits. The lamp itself is made with sweet dough. He will wave the lamp three times in front of the audience saying,

> Jesus is the light of the world, and he is the healer of mankind. He is the One who blesses you and gives you good health and long life. May His grace be bestowed upon you and give you joy, peace, and salvation. **Om.**

After that he will sprinkle the water and say,

> The blood of Jesus purifies you from all your sins. May the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you forever. **Om.**

The sweets which symbolize God's saving grace and the herbs which symbolize God's healing power will then be distributed to the audience at the end of the puja. After puja, the audience will leave quietly.

Puja is the climax of every worship service in the Ashram. The blessing that is given at the end of the puja will have a special attraction to the Hindus, because most of the Hindus go to temples, where puja is performed daily, in order to receive blessings from God, since they truly believe in the power of blessing. The special weekend worship services will also include puja and will be explained next.

Weekend Worship Service

Special worship services will be conducted three times a week as mentioned above. These worship services

will be a little longer than the daily worship and will
consist of all the features of the daily worship plus a
religious discourse and the bringing of offerings to the
altar. The pujari or another religious leader in the
Ashram, or a minister from a Christian church, will give a
twenty-minute devotional talk to the audience. Then a puja
will follow. On Fridays and Saturdays, there will be a
testimony session following the puja in the fellowship hall.
On Sundays, puja will be followed by a communion service in
the fellowship hall.

All these weekend services are designed to meet the
spiritual and intellectual needs of the Hindus and
Christians of all denominations. Consideration will be
given to ashramites to attend worship services in the Ashram
as well as to attend services in their respective churches.
The worship schedule in the Ashram is designed to
accommodate this need. For example, Christians who keep
Sabbath will be able to attend local church services after
puja is finished. In the same way, other Christians could
attend local services on Sundays. Saturday evening is a
free time for many religious people in Tamil Nadu. At that
time, the Ashram will conduct satsang which is quite similar
to church worship, but not exactly the same.

SatSang

Satsang will be held on Saturday evening at sunset
in the fellowship hall from 6:30 P.M. to 7:30 P.M. Satsang

consists of special songs and music, group prayer, witness, preaching, and benediction. Preachers from different churches will be invited to preach during satsang on topics relating to Christian spirituality. Satsang will be an occasion to deliver a message from the Bible, not a time for discussion or sharing of ideas, that is done only at the time of Bible study. The purpose of satsang is to inspire people to live the life of Christ wherever they are and to share His teaching with their neighbors.

Bible Study

Bible study is another religious activity that the Ashram will carry out on Saturday mornings. The study will not consist of topical or doctrinal lessons, but will instead deal with the narrative teachings of Jesus Christ found in the four Gospels. The participants will sit around the teacher, read a few verses from the Gospels, then ask questions relating to the verses read, followed by a discussion period. The teacher will serve as a moderator and will help the audience draw some spiritual lessons from the passage which can be applied to one's practical life. Any questions regarding doctrines will be discussed personally on an individual basis. (See appendix III for the schedule of worship services.)

Dialogue

Dialogue is a method of communication in which the

participants share their ideas with each other with open minds and mutual respect. Recently, the term interfaith dialogue or inter-religious dialogue has become popular among various religious groups. It has become a method of sharing and understanding each other's worldview. In a pluralistic Indian society, interfaith dialogue has become an essential method of communication between various religions.

After Vatican II, many Christian churches in India also adopted this method of dialogue as an effective means of communicating their understanding of the gospel to others. Hindus who are normally resistant to traditional Christian preaching seem to respond positively to dialogues.

Christian dialogue with the people of other faiths does not mean the denial of the uniqueness of Christ or the charma He taught. It simply means that with mutual respect we are willing to listen to others talk about their understanding of Truth and Ultimate Reality, and are interested in sharing with them our experience of God. Dialogue gives Christians an opportunity to see Reality from the perspective of others and also to contextualize the message of Christ in a meaningful way. With this purpose in mind, the Ashram will plan for dialogue meetings.

I believe that dialogue should be genuine. The participants should be open-minded and be able to respect other's views in spite of differences. It is often hard for

individuals to be open-minded if they believe that their
denomination or religion alone has the complete and correct
understanding of God and Truth and that all others are
wrong.

Personally, I believe that no religion has a
complete knowledge of God or the Ultimate Reality, as some
Hindu Philosophers refer to Him. There is a difference
between reality and Reality. The Reality is what God is in
Himself and reality is what God is for myself, which is my
own perception of God. God is objective Reality and my
perception of that Reality is subjective reality. Many
people assume reality to be Reality. Although we believe
that we have God's revelation in the Bible, still our view
of Reality is fuzzy and partial (1 Cor 13:12),[1] because God
has not revealed everything to us (Deut 29:29, John 13:7;
16:12). Another reason why Reality is fuzzy for us is that
we are conditioned by our culture. Therefore, what one
believes is real to him or her, but it may not be Real.

I believe that the God who revealed His universal
principles to the patriarchs and prophets in the forms of
Jewish culture also communicated many of those same
principles to people in other cultures, using their cultural
forms. Through dialogue, people can learn to uncover the
cultural forms and discover the universal principles which I

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[1]Charles H. Kraft, _Christianity with Power_ (Ann
Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1989), 11.

call dharma.

Another benefit of dialogue is that people can enrich their spiritual life and understanding of Reality by learning spiritual techniques and ideas from others. For example, Christians can adopt from Hindus their contemplative worship style, feeling of God's presence, a sense of reverence in the temple, a feeling of sacredness toward nature, and the spirit of detachment for material things. Similarly, Hindus can adopt from Christianity God's concern for the poor, sick, and oppressed. Hindus also can add the Christian view of God's love to their sense of justice, which is explained in terms of the law of karma. In turn Christians can add the Hindu view of nishkama karma to their view of human service.

Through dialogue, the participants can also help each other to abolish the evil practices found in their culture. For example, Christians can influence the Hindus to eradicate the evils of the caste system from India through dialogue. Similarly, Hindus can influence Christians to hold on to high moral and family values which are eroding in the Christian world.

I have developed four principles which the participants should follow in order to have meaningful dialogue sessions:

1. Ultimate Reality is not completely revealed in any one religion.

2. Every religion has some truth about the Ultimate Reality. One religion may have more truths than another.

3. Everyone should be open-minded and try to understand the religious ideas and experience of others.

4. Everyone should be prepared to test and experiment with the religious forms of others on a practical level in order to appreciate them.

The K. Ashram will allow for genuine dialogue and will help people carry on a dialogue in an organized way. All the ashramites and visitors will be instructed on the four points mentioned above prior to the beginning of the dialogue session. These four points will also be printed in the Ashram handbook.

Every interfaith dialogue meeting will begin with the reading of the following statement by the participants.

> We who are gathered here for dialogue
> recognize that there is an Ultimate Reality
> known by different names in different religions
> and that we all have our own perception of that
> Reality which we believe to be true on the basis
> of our Scripture and experience. However, we
> sincerely believe that our perception of Reality is
> partial and incomplete. Therefore, we hope that
> sharing with others out of our own experience of
> Reality will help us all to have a better understanding
> of the Ultimate Reality. We believe that we all can
> enrich our spiritual life by continuing the dialogue in
> an appropriate manner, by not attacking or condemning
> others, and by treating everyone with mutual love and
> respect. We pray to God, the Ultimate One, to help us
> to be open-minded and tolerant in our attitude toward
> our brothers and sisters of other Faiths, so that, we
> all may live together in peace and harmony.

This statement will be printed in the Tamil language and distributed to those who participate in the dialogue; it

will also be printed in the Ashram handbook.

Festivals

The celebration of numerous festivals is an essential feature of Hinduism, helping its adherents keep in touch with the spiritual truths behind the myths represented by the festivals. The Christian churches in India do not celebrate as many festivals as the Hindus do. This is another reason why Christianity does not appeal to the masses and is unable to meet many of the felt spiritual needs of so many.

Christianity, being a historic religion, could have formulated several Christian festivals and contextualized some of the Hindu festivals with Christian meanings. Except for Catholics and Anglicans, other churches such as Penticostals, Jehovah Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists do not celebrate any festivals. However, it is interesting to note that Ellen G. White, one of the early founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, favored the celebration of Christmas. In fact, she contextualized it to meet the spiritual needs of American children.[1]

Several Christian ashrams like the Saccidananda Ashram do celebrate some Christian festivals and have experimented in contextualizing the Hindu festivals like Deepavali and Pongal. Deepavali is a festival of lights

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[1]Ellen G. White, _Adventist Home_ (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 82-83.

which commemorates the victory of good over evil. It is celebrated by some Christian ashrams to remember the victory of Christ over Satan which brought salvation to humanity. Pongal, a harvest festival, is also celebrated by some Christians to give thanks to God for a good harvest.

The K. Ashram will also celebrate some Christian and Indian festivals to meet the spiritual and social needs of Christians as well as Hindus, and to provide opportunities for both groups to share the spiritual meanings behind the festivals. Therefore, these festival celebrations have both evangelistic and spiritual purposes. The celebration of Indian festivals would also help Christians to more closely identify themselves with the main cultural life of India.[1] When celebrating the festivals, the K. Ashram will integrate the indigenous elements of celebration such as the use of lights, flowers, garlands, trumpets, food, gifts, fruits, vegetables, incense, sandle paste, perfumed water, bells, music, dance, and songs.

Seminars

The K. Ashram will also conduct seminars on spiritual growth, discipling Hindus, health, and family life. These seminars will be conducted for the benefit of laypeople who are actively engaged in ministry in local churches. There is a growing need among Christians in India

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[1]Nirmal, 80.

to have some knowledge and training in these areas of Christian ministry. These seminars will be conducted from a religious perspective; therefore, I have included them under religious activities.

Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth seminars will focus on the spiritual growth of Christians in local churches. The emphasis will be on prayer, contemplation, spiritual healing, worship, Bible reading, fasting, festivals, and personal testimony. The purpose of these seminars will be not only to help Christians grow spiritually, but also to help local churches prepare their members spiritually in order to more effectively witness to Hindus in the neighborhoods. The seminars will be conducted with the help of the local church ministers and elders who are active in the ministry of the congregation.

Discipling Hindus

A discipling seminar will focus on equipping Christians to bear effective witness among Hindus. The seminar will cover four main areas such as the culture and religion of the Tamils, the Christian message in the context of Tamil Nadu, indigenous methods of communication, and the spiritual life of the messenger. These seminars will also discuss the discipling principles and methods followed by Jesus and the Apostles. Prayer and healing will be

emphasized in this seminar as effective means of bringing people to Christ.

Health

The health seminar will cover two areas, chemical dependency and a healthy lifestyle. Chemical dependency, especially alcoholism, has not only become a serious health problem but is also a social ill. Many people in India, both young and old, are becoming victims to the addiction of alcohol. Christian ministers and laymen often do not know how to work with alcoholics. They follow the traditional method of condemning the alcoholics to hell. This seminar would give training in understanding the problems alcoholics face and would help them overcome their addiction through dependence on the power of God.

The seminar on health will also deal with the prevention of diseases, natural remedies, and nutrition. The K. Ashram will use the resources available from SDA supporting ministries such as Wildwood Sanitarium, Weimar, Living Spring, and Eden Valley. In addition, the Ashram will make use of the resources available through the local government's health department and institutions which promote holistic health and natural remedies.

Family Life

The family life seminar will deal with those family issues confronting the people in Tamil Nadu. This seminar

will help people gain some insight into family problems relating to dowry, inter-caste marriage, joint-family system, wife abuse, family planning, and the education of children. These issues will be discussed from a biblical perspective. After studying the Christian principles of family life, practical solutions will be planned in the cultural context of India in order to deal with these problems.

These seminars will also help keep the Ashram connected with society and will bring both Hindus and Christians together as they deal with their common issues.

Retreats

Retreats are meant to bring spiritual renewal in the life of the people. Retreats will be organized by the Ashram in coordination with the local churches. These retreats will be similar to camp meetings conducted in the U.S., but they will not be crowded with too many sermons. The programs during the retreat will include contemplation, yoga, personal testimony, discourses on certain spiritual themes, biographies of Christian and Hindu saints, **bhajan**, and dialogue.

The retreat will be open to all, including non-Christians who want to renew their spiritual experience with God. It was reported by Stanley Jones that many Hindus, Moslems, and even communists attended his week-long retreats

at Sat Tal Ashram.[1] Retreats can be used to bring people together and to help reconcile them with God.

Other Religious Activities

We have discussed in the previous section certain scheduled and structured religious activities in the Ashram. Apart from these, the Ashram will also have several other religious activities which are relevant to the religious life of the Tamils.

Divine Healing

Most of the Hindus in Tamil Nadu believe in divine healing. Many of them, when they become sick, make vows to certain gods or goddesses and go to the temple for healing. The priests conduct a special puja to bring healing to them. Some Hindu temples are meant for casting out demons. The priests use certain techniques and offer special prayers for the demon-possessed.

Recently some Hindus have gone even to certain Catholic churches to seek divine healing. Many Hindus also attend Pentecostal meetings, seeking healing and deliverance from the power of evil spirits. Other Protestant denominations and ashrams generally avoid the whole area of divine healing, focusing instead on medical service as an alternative.

Divine healing has been an integral part of the

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[1]Jones, "New Wine in New Wineskins," 1161.

Church's ministry since the time of Christ and His disciples. The ministry of Jesus consisted of preaching and healing (Matt 4:23). He also gave authority to His disciples to heal the sick and cast out demons (Luke 9:1; Mark 16:17, 18). After a short missionary tour, the disciples reported to Jesus that they were able to cast out demons in His name (Luke 10:17).

After the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples continued to heal the sick and cast out demons with the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 3:7, 8; 5:16; 9:34; 14:10; 16:18; 19:12; 28:8). The Apostle Paul affirmed that the gift of healing is bestowed upon the Church (1 Cor 12:9). Jesus and Paul both gave instructions on how a healing ministry should be carried out with prayer, anointing with oil, confession, and fasting (Mark 9:19; Jas 5:14-16).

In accordance with the instruction of Jesus and Paul, the K. Ashram intends to practice a Christian ministry of healing. This ministry will be carried out in a quiet way within the Ashram premises. Every day one hour in the evening will be set apart for this purpose. I believe that this healing ministry will open the way for many Hindus to experience the power of Christ and the miracle of conversion to Christ.

Fasting

Fasting is another religious practice included in the life of the Ashram. It is one form of spirituality

which is emphasized throughout the Bible. Christ, Paul, and
Barnabas prayed and fasted for many days (Luke 4:2; Acts
9:9; 10:30; 13:2, 3; 14:23; 27:33). The Old Testament also
gives many examples of people fasting for various reasons
(Exod 34:28; Ezra 10:6; Dan 10:3).

Fasting is also an important part of Hindu spiritual
life. Many Hindus fast on the eleventh day of the month.
Some Hindus fast for certain days in order to fulfill vows
and prepare for special ceremonies. Some Saivites fast on
the fourteenth day of every month.[1]

The Ashram will not have any scheduled days for
fasting. It will encourage the ashramites to fast and pray
on special occasions such as when praying for the healing of
demonized or seriously sick people. The Ashram will also
encourage individuals to fast for their own spiritual
growth. However, the Ashram considers compassionate service
as true fasting (Isa 58:6-7).

Educational Activities

Many Christian ashrams and some Hindu ashrams
operate schools to educate the children in the neighborhood.
The K. Ashram does not plan to run any schools. However,
the Ashram will involve itself in such educational
activities as adult literacy and a library service, which
are essential to the development of the neighborhood and

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[1]Morgan, 165.

will contribute to a Christian witness among the Hindus.

Adult Literacy

Adult illiteracy is one of the major problems which is hindering the progress of the Indian society. In the nineties, 64.8 percent of the people above age twenty-five are illiterate in India, having no ability to read or write.[1] The K. Ashram will operate an adult literacy program to help educate this group. The Ashram will organize a team of volunteers to carry out this service in the neighborhood.

Library Service

The K. Ashram will have a library with two sections, one open to the public and the other for the ashramites. The public section will contain daily newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines, and story books for children. The other section will have books on world religions, especially Hinduism and Christianity. These will be helpful tools for both ministers and laymen who come to the Ashram for short-term theological training.

Theological Education

Generally, theological education has been viewed in terms of giving theoretical knowledge in a seminary setting. Traditionally, theological education in India followed the

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[1]Britannica Book of the Year, 1993 ed., s.v. "India." 627.

model of theological education given in the seminaries in Western countries. However, after adding the formula "self-theologizing" in addition to the previous three-self formulas (self-support, self-propagation, and self-governing) to guide the work in mission fields, many indigenous theologians began to think in terms of developing a contextualized theological education to meet the needs in the local cultural setting.

As a result, many new religious courses are being introduced in the seminary curriculums in India, but not many changes have been introduced in the cultural aspect of campus life. For example, many students and faculty members still wear Western cloths and play Western music in the worship. Moreover, boys and girls mingle freely with each other, like the students on Western campuses. This is totally contrary to Indian culture.

Bible colleges and seminaries in India continue to maintain a Western lifestyle and continue to promote Western values. This has become detrimental to discipleship in India. Therefore, a contextualized theological education is of little use without contextualizing seminary life as well. In my opinion, Christian ashrams can provide a proper setting for theological education in India.

The K. Ashram intends to offer theological education to laypeople who want to communicate the gospel to Hindus. It may not offer formal theological education like the

Christian seminaries. However, the life in the Ashram itself will be such that Christians who stay in the Ashram for a year or two will be naturally trained for Christian witness among the Hindus. They will be trained as they participate in various activities of the Ashram. Training will be by doing rather than by the traditional method of listening to lectures.

There will be no set time to complete the training. Instead, it will be left up to the convenience of the trainees. However, a complete training cycle might require one full year of stay in the Ashram. A student could increase this from two to four years, according to his convenience.

Training will cover three main areas: theoretical study, field study, and communication skills. The theoretical study will offer knowledge in Tamil religious literature (see pp. 96-99 above), popular Hinduism, Saiva-siddhanta, contextual theology, health and healing, and the teachings of Christ. Students will visit important Hindu temples and speak with Hindus about their religious beliefs and practices as part of practical training. In addition, students will be trained to communicate the gospel through indigenous mediums such as drama, dance, music, bhajan, **viladi**, and **katha kalashebam**. The medium of instruction would be Tamil.

This training will be offered free of cost to the

students. However, each student is expected to meet his food and travel expenses as needed. The Ashram will accommodate only twelve students per year in order to maintain the quality of training. The spiritual qualities of the students will be evaluated as mentioned earlier (see p. 179) before he/she is accepted for training.

Social Services

Social service is another feature of the Ashram. The Ashram will engage in social service on the basis of the principles mentioned earlier (see pp. 173, 220). The Ashram will render services such as care for the poor and destitute, health education, adult education, protection of abused women, and relief services. The Ashram will also gather volunteers to help people at the time of natural calamities and cooperate with other agencies in carrying out social services as an expression of Christian love and solidarity with the people in the neighborhood.[1]

The K. Ashram will serve as a home for twelve fatherless boys. The boys will be trained in the Ashram to become responsible citizens in society with the hope that some would become ashramites in the future. While they are in the Ashram, they will attend outside schools, learn a trade and a musical instrument, and gain practical experiences in the Ashram.

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[1]Camps, 66.

In spite of all that has been said about the K. Ashram, one may still raise the question of how Hindus would be discipled in the Ashram and what strategy would be used in discipling them. I address these questions in the next section.

Methods of Discipling Hindus

Discipling is different from proselytism or mass conversion. It is bringing a person to experience Christ which results in inner transformation. In other words, a person becomes a new creation in Christ. Discipling does not happen by following a certain strategy or procedure. Rather, it is purely the work of the Holy Spirit. The K. Ashram will provide a spiritual environment where a person can be in touch with the Holy Spirit. The Ashram would serve only as a means for discipleship to occur.

It was discussed above that disciple-making occurred in the early church by means of preaching, teaching, and personal acquaintance with a teacher. It was also pointed out that the disciples were made in Hindu ashrams as a result of the personal charisma of the guru, study of scripture, and meditation. The contextualized approach to discipleship which is developed in this paper includes the charisma of the teacher, preaching, teaching, studying, and above all living the gospel in the setting of an ashram.

The K. Ashram will not engage in any step-by-step strategy for discipling Hindus, because the Ashram itself is

the strategy. The quietness and beauty that surrounds the Ashram, the presence of the teacher (guru), the love of the ashramites, an atmosphere of silence and solitude, the songs of the birds, the sound of the Indian music, the solemn worship in the temple which is filled with rich religious symbols, satsang, dialogue, the simple and modest lifestyle of the ashramites, and the sense of the presence of Christ in the Ashram will be the avenues the Holy Spirit could use to lead a person to Christ and transform his/her life.

In addition to discipling Hindus, the Ashram hopes to have a positive influence on the whole of Hindu society by bringing the presence of Christ among the Hindus. This will be accomplished as the ashramites live His life, showing Christ as healer and giver of peace and joy. When Hindus see the living Christ, His beauty, and serenity in the life of the Ashram community, the result will be a positive change within the whole community.

A legitimate question might be asked at this juncture. Will Hindus be converted and join any church through the Ashram? If the Ashram is not affiliated with any denominational church, to which church will the new converts join. Who will minister to them?

Of course, Hindus will be converted to Christ through the Ashram, but baptism and joining a local church may not be possible for many Hindus. Christ is acceptable to them but the church is not, because it appears to them to

be a Western entity and a symbol of colonial rule. Christ's teaching of love, peace, forgiveness, renunciation, purity, and perfection would appeal to all Hindus, but His teachings are covered with the dogmas of various Christian denominations and marred by Western materialism and the imperialism of the Christians who colonized India.

Therefore, the Ashram would leave the question of baptism and church membership to the decision of the converts. The Ashram will adequately equip them to live the gospel in the midst of their own people. It is possible that a few might join a local church, and some might join together to form their own fellowship in accordance with local cultural patterns. However, the Ashram will not ask them to join any particular denomination or church.

Thus far, I have expressed my concerns in the area of Christian life and ministry. The next section addresses the question of developing a contextual theology and producing literature that would deal with the religious questions pertaining to Hinduism.

Contextual Theology in the Ashram

The K. Ashram will serve as a center where Christians will be able to find resources to help them develop a contextualized theology. There will also be opportunities to dialogue with Hindus who come to the Ashram, to learn what questions and doubts Hindus have, and to discover specific points of contact from which Christians

will be able to develop ideas and practical solutions to reach Hindus with the message of Christ.

The ashramites of the K. Ashram will pay special attention to the theology of Saiva-siddhanta, instead of Advita Vedanta to which many Christian ashrams have paid attention in Tamil Nadu. Since the majority of the Hindus of Tamil Nadu are Saivites and followers of the theistic ideals of Saiva-siddhanta, it would be proper to develop a Christian theology in response to that context. One way to do that would be to write pamphlets on topics which deal with questions the majority of the Hindus have in Tamil Nadu.

Pamphlets

I would like to suggest some contextualized titles under which pamphlets could be written and distributed.

1. The Unknown God of Tamil Nadu

2. Finding the True God

3. The Last Day of **Kaliyuga**

4. The Mystery of Rebirth

5. Can **Karma** Be Overcome?

6. God Who Became a Man

7. The Way to Worship the True God

8. The Gods of the **Kali Yuga**

9. The Vows That Are Favorable to God

10. Animal Sacrifice! Is God Interested in Blood?

11. The Only **Avatar**

12. How Many Ways to God?

13. Jesus, the Fulfiller of Hinduism

14. **Sat** Guru Jesus

15. Is Christ a **Karma Yogi?**

16. **Ahimsa** of Christ

17. **Nishkama Karma** and the Sermon on the Mount

18. Ram **Raj** of Christ

19. One Caste and One Justice

20. Christ the **Karuna** Murthi

21. The Significance of Siva and Parvathi

22. Is Religion an Opiate?

23. The New **Marga**

24. Christian **Yoga**

25. The Temple of God

26. The Battle of the Gods

27. **Sakthi** and Holy Spirit

28. Where Are the Ancestors?

29. Freedom from Devil Possession

30. **Karma** and Christ

32. Pilgrimage to the Eternal City

33. Love Is Shiva or Shiva Is Love

34. Is Christianity a Religion or **Dharma?**[1]

These topics show how an indigenous theology can be expressed through literature. In addition, the message must

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[1]Some of these pamphlets are available at Karunaiyananthar Ashram, Thirupanthuruthi 613103. Tamil Nadu, India.

also be contextualized through the use of the rich symbolism found in Hinduism. I believe symbols not only convey deep meanings but also create religious emotions and curiosity among those we hope to reach with the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Gospel Through Symbols

Every culture uses signs and symbols to convey certain ideas, values, actions, and other events of life. Symbols may be objects, colors, sounds, odors, acts, and events.[1] The meanings attached to these symbols may differ from culture to culture. Therefore, a knowledge of local symbols and their meanings is very important in developing a contextualized approach. Missionaries in the past totally avoided the use of any local symbols in the churches due to their own personal prejudices and their lack of knowledge and understanding of the local culture. As a result, they too often used the symbols from their own cultures in their attempt to communicate Christianity in India.

For instance, Christian churches which are built in India often have the same Gothic architectural style as do the churches in Europe and the United States. Many Indian churches are totally devoid of any local symbols. Rarely have the churches adopted any of the forms associated with worship in India that are found in Hindu temples.

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[1]Paul G. Hiebert, <u>Cultural Anthropology</u> (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 114.

Most of the churches have the cross as their only symbol. However, Seventh-day Adventists, the Assembly of God, and Jehovah Witnesses do not even use the cross as a symbol in their churches and are opposed to any use of symbols. As a result, Christianity appears lifeless and unattractive to the Hindu mind.

However, recently some Christian ashrams, like the Christu-Kula Ashram and the Saccidananda Ashram, have adopted Hindu symbols but given them Christian meanings. One of the most adopted symbols is the letters "OM" which represents the Ultimate Reality.

Symbol Om

Let me explain briefly the meaning of "Om" in Hinduism and why this has been adopted. Om is the eternal sound symbol of the unmanifest Brahman or God. OM is believed to be the first manifestation of God. "Om existed when nothing existed. Out of 'Om' all things have come into existence,"[1] says Swami Chidananda. This symbol is used in Christian ashrams as a symbol for 'Logos' or 'Word' which refers to Jesus Christ.

The K. Ashram also plans to use this symbol with the cross at the center to convey the meaning that Christ is the "Om." Other symbols like worshipping with folded hands, removing one's shoes, the washing of feet, ringing bells,

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[1]Swamy Chidananda, Om (Keedysvill, MD: Divine Life Society of Maryland, 1993), 6.

arathi, lighting the lamp, and sprinkling perfumed water also will be used.

I am aware that Christians who have been brought up accustomed to the Western value system in India would certainly object to the adoption of some of these symbols. On the other hand, these symbols are important if the Ashram is to remain indigenous and relevant in Indian context. It is also important to reeducate Indian Christians concerning the knowledge and proper use of Hindu symbols. Therefore, the Ashram will use Indian symbols in the architecture of the temple and the gate, and teach Christian meanings for these symbols in order to represent Christian ideas and aspirations. The Christian meaning of each symbol used in the Ashram will be explained in the Ashram handbook.

Symbols at the Gate

Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu have a **kopuram** (tower) at the entrance and on top of the most holy place in the temple called **mulasthanam.** Similarly, the K. Ashram will have a gate with a small tower at the entrance. Four statues of Christ (Christ healing the blind, the demoniac, and the leper, and Christ blessing the children) will be placed at the four corners of the kopuram (tower) to represent Christ as Karunaiyananthar, God of compassion and joy. Two paintings of lamps will be at the bottom of the kopuram, along with a sign of Christ welcoming people.

Symbols in the Temple

The temple will be built with the entrance facing towards the east, and with two compartments: a big hall where the people can sit, and a room (**mulasthanam**) which would symbolically represent the presence of Christ. The big hall will have a thatched roof with brick walls, whereas, the mulasthanam will have a concrete ceiling with a kopuram on top. The temple will be designed to accommodate 150 people at a time and will measure twenty feet by forty feet.

A huge open Bible with texts from the Sermon on the Mount will be erected at the center of the mulasthanam, and the words "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" will be written on the wall above the Bible. In front of the Bible, seven lamps will be kept to represent the presence of Jesus as mentioned in the Bible (Rev 1:13).

At the entrance of this room, the tablets of the Ten Commandments will be kept on both sides. The text "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27) will be written at the entrance to the mulasthanam. A small, one-foot-high platform eight feet by ten feet in size will also be erected in front of the mulasthanam from which the pujari (priest) will conduct the worship. On the right side of the platform will be an altar where people can place their gifts.

A water tub and shoe rack will be built outside the temple for people to wash their feet and store their shoes. The path from the water tub to the entrance of the temple will be kept clean so that people can enter the temple with clean feet. A flower garden will surround the temple to add beauty to the place of worship. A bell tower will be built at the entrance of the garden.

These symbols, although few in number, will clearly represent the spiritual aspect of the Ashram. Other symbols may be added later as necessary.

Ashram Facilities

Other facilities to be included in this Ashram model are: a dairy, a fellowship hall, dinning hall, kitchen, small cottages, and guest houses. The Ashram will have six acres of land for farming and industries such as carpentry and weaving to help the Ashram operate on a self-supporting basis. The Ashram will be able to financially maintain itself from the food produced from the land and the gifts received from the public.

This Ashram is designed to accommodate only one hundred people at a time including the ashramites, the students, fatherless boys, and guests. To provide living accommodations, the Ashram will have two dormitories and separate residences where ashramites can maintain their family life. Some ashramites might choose to reside in the neighborhood at their own expense, but give full-time

service in the Ashram.

If membership grows in the future, the K. Ashram plans on encouraging a few of its ashramites to open other ashrams of their own in the outlying areas in Tamil Nadu. The K. Ashram might help these with some financial support and guide them as they begin their new ashram, but will not seek to control the new venture, for it is not the plan of the K. Ashram to establish branches.

Conclusion

The model I have suggested in this chapter will be open to new possibilities. New principles, objectives and activities might be added in the future, but the goals will remain the same. This Ashram will not engage in proselytism, the propagation of dogmas, denominational affiliation, national politics, paid ministry, or a heavy dependence on foreign funds. This Ashram might accept foreign funds in the beginning to help establish itself on a self-supporting basis. Even later on, it would be open to receive money from friends abroad in order to support particular projects such as eye camps, seminars, and stop-smoking programs, etc.

The K. Ashram will do its best to preserve its Indian identity. At the same time it will maintain its universal Christian character by following the Christian values of love, faith, and hope. Moreover, this Ashram will strive to maintain good relationships with all

denominations, churches, and agencies which share similar objectives, and will cooperate with them in carrying out common programs. In this way, the Ashram will not become exclusive or isolated. Ashramites who continue to have membership in their respective churches will easily be able to maintain their sense of belonging to the universal Church of Christ.

Finally, I would like to state that the ashram is just one of the many suitable models for discipling Hindus. There may be other approaches that need to be explored by Christians in India. Thus far, the churches have not made a serious effort to develop new approaches in addition to the more traditional methods which have proved to be unattractive to the Hindus. In chapter 7, I conclude my paper with recommendations to Christian leaders for more effectively using existing Christian ashrams as well as adopting the model as described in this paper.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Great Commission of Christ to disciple all nations can be carried out successfully in India if the focus is on discipleship rather than proselytism. I would like to emphasize again that proselytism is foreign to India since it involves not only a change of faith but also a change of culture and community. On the other hand, discipling focuses on bringing inner changes in terms of one's worldview and the transformation of one's total life.

From the beginning, Christianity has come to India as a foreign religion clothed in foreign costumes, customs, and values and has remained that way until the nineties. Although Christianity appears to be totally foreign to the Hindus, the life and teachings of Christ do not appear to be foreign to them. The personality of Christ is similar to those of Hindu saints who appeared on the Indian scene from time to time to bring spiritual renewal. Therefore, Hindus can relate favorably to Christ and His teachings.

Having this context in mind, the ashram, a well-accepted indigenous model, has been introduced as a viable means to realize the gospel commission in India.

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However, as stated above, the ashram is not the only way of approaching Hindus, but I consider it to be a suitable model for discipleship in India, because it falls within the spiritual heritage of the country as well as the tradition of the Christian church. However, many Indian Christians do not see the value of Christian ashrams in the context of India's spiritual heritage. Rather, many of them think of the ashram movement only as a reaction to the materialistic life in the Church.

In the past, missionaries approached Hindus at the cognitive and social levels with little success. As it has been pointed out, Hindus cannot be won to Christ by intellectual arguments or humanitarian services. I believe we need to take a spiritual approach that would appeal to them. A Christian ashram can demonstrate to the Hindus, who normally go from one ashram to another looking for a guru to guide them into the experience of God and salvation, that the Christian spirituality exceeds Hindu spirituality and fulfills Hindu aspirations and longing for God in Jesus Christ, the only way to God.

A Christian ashram also helps the Church and its mission without draining its financial resources, because it does not depend on the institutionalized churches for its financial support and tends to operate on a self-supporting basis. Moreover, an ashram is centered around spiritual renewal and discipleship, not centered around institutions

and programs. Therefore, it can be a great asset to the Church.

In addition, an ashram can be a vehicle to bring about peace and unity among Christians which is very important for Christian witness in India. Thus, I would like to make the following suggestions to Christian leaders and laypeople in India.

1. Ashrams are retreat centers. Therefore, Christian leaders should encourage their members to make use of the ashram facilities to conduct weekend or weekly retreats.

2. Christian ashrams provide an appropriate spiritual setting for interfaith dialogue. Therefore, the leaders should encourage their members to participate in such activities.

3. The local churches can encourage their members to participate in the training provided in the ashrams for effective Christian witness among Hindus.

4. The local churches can invite the ashramites to conduct spiritual renewal meetings in their churches.

5. Various denominations may make use of the ashram library for preparing sermons and theological research.

6. Denominational leaders should also encourage laypeople to start ashrams in several places on a self-supporting basis.

7. Ashrams should be left free to develop their own identities within the structure of Indian society. They should not be controlled by denominations or churches whose central authority lies in the West.

8. Ashrams are communities which strive to live the life of Christ. Therefore, they are not established to replace the institutionalized churches but to supplement them with spiritual energy. Therefore, church leaders, instead of viewing them with a negative attitude, should learn to view them positively and cooperate with them in bringing the knowledge of Christ to Hindus.

9. In the past seventy years, Christian ashrams have made significant contributions in the area of indigenous worship and theology, rural service, community living, and service to the poor. They might not carry out the programs initiated by the denominational churches, but they do continue to meet the needs of the local people and incarnate the gospel in Indian forms. Therefore, pastors, evangelists, and laypeople should participate in ashram activities.

10. Christians in India should return to the original model of discipleship as practiced by Jesus and His disciples. The Apostles contextualized and conveyed the gospel through experience, word and deed, and the power of the Holy Spirit as demonstrated by divine healing (Rom 16:14-21). Since ashrams strive to follow this pattern,

Christians should support the ashram movement in India.

I sincerely believe that Christianity will have a great future in India if it is contextualized by the Indian Christians. Contextualization calls first for a change in our basic assumptions about the mission of the Church and then for committed individuals to take courageous steps to develop and implement new approaches in discipleship. Paul D. Devanandan, one of the greatest Indian Christian missiologists of this century, stated:

> With courage and faith in the Great Commission we must rise and take hold of the opportunity making the Gospel relevant and meaningful to Nationalistic, Orthodox and Renascent Hinduism.[1]

In conclusion, I would like to point out that this paper is pleading for a change in the mission of the Church in India. Currently, the missionary activities carried on by different denominations focus mainly on proselytism rather than on discipleship. Many Christian evangelists still use the traditional methods of preaching, distributing literature, and Bible study. Further, Christian institutions are used still as avenues for the purpose of proselytism.

Since success is measured in terms of reports based on baptismal statistics, most of the paid evangelists target nominal Christians or low caste Hindus in their evangelistic enterprises in order to achieve the baptismal goals set by

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[1]Wietzke, 1:231.

their denominational leaders. Due to this type of evangelistic endeavor, discipleship among the Hindus in India is very much neglected.

Another drawback in our evangelism is that most evangelistic models use only the cognitive approach in reaching the people. They teach them the doctrines and truths of their respective denominations without understanding the spiritual needs of the Indian people. This is mainly due to a lack of personal spiritual experience and training in reaching the Hindus at their deeper spiritual level of need. Moreover, the evangelistic programs which Indian Christians inherited from the West are not suitable for the spiritually minded Hindus who are longing for a mystical experience with God.

In addition, the local evangelists do not have the freedom to develop contextual approaches, and most are afraid of being labeled as syncretistic if they use any local forms. Moreover, they depend on their denominational salary for survival; therefore, they do not want to lose their jobs as a result of venturing into anything new which may not meet denominational approval.

The ashram model provides an alternative approach to evangelism in India. It is concerned with discipleship, not proselytism. It targets the Hindus and utilizes a spiritual approach of discipleship by living the gospel in their midst and by teaching the dharma of Christ in the context of

Indian culture and religion.

The people who will be involved in this task are volunteer laypeople, not paid workers; therefore, they will not be under any pressure to implement any foreign programs, and will be free to adopt the principles of contextualization and to develop indigenous programs by using appropriate cultural forms to disciple Hindus. Since the ashram workers will be volunteers, they will not be preoccupied with statistics and reports. They will participate in the mission of the Church purely in response to the divine call; therefore, they will not promote the cause of a particular denomination, but will be committed to furthering the cause of Christ among Hindus.

With the help of such volunteers who venture in developing contextualized models like ashrams, we can succeed in discipling Hindus as we look toward the twenty-first century in Christian mission.

APPENDICES

CHRISTIAN ASHRAMS IN INDIA

1. Aikiya Alayam, Madras, Tamil Nadu.

2. Anbu Vazhvu Ashram, Palani, Tamil Nadu.

3. Anjali Ashram, Mysore, Karnataka.

4. Asha Niketan, Calicut, Kerala.

5. Asirvanam, Bangalore, Karnataka.

6. Bethany Ashram, Ranni-Perunad, Kerala.

7. Bethel Ashram, Tiruvall, Kerala.

8. Christa Krupashram, Mandagadde, Karnataka.

9. Christa Mitra Ashram, Ankola, Karnataka.

10. Christa Panthi Ashram, Sihora, Madhya Pradesh.

11. Christa Sevakee Ashram, Karkala, Karnataka.

12. Christa Sishya Ashram, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

13. Chritava Sattia Veda Ashram, Boyala Kuntla, Andhra Pradesh.

14. Christavashram, Kottayam, Kerala.

15. Christian Ashram, Brindaba, Utter Pradesh.

16. Christiya Bandhu Kulam, Satna, Madhya Pradesh.

17. Christ Prema Seva Ashram, Pune, Maharashtra.

18. Christu Dasa Ashram, Palghat, Kerala.

19. Christu-kula Ashram, Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu.

20. Dhyan Ashram, Manpur, Madhya Pradesh.

21. Dohnavur Fellowship, Dohnavur, Tamil Nadu.

22. Gyan Ashram, Andheri, Bombay, Maharashtra.

23. Ishapanthi Ashram, Puri, Orissa.

24. Jeevan Dhara Ashram, Jaiharikhal, Utter Pradesh.

25. Jeevan Dhara Sadhana Kutir, Rishikesh, Utter Pradesh.

26. Jyothi Niketan Ashram, Bareilly, Utter Pradesh.

27. Kodaikanal Ashram Fellowship, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu.

28. Krist Panthi Ashram, Varanasi, Utter Pradesh.

29. Krupa Ashram, Aruppukottai, Tamil Nadu.

30. Kurishumala Ashram, Vagamon, Kerala.

31. Mariam mai Ashram, Varanasi, Utter Pradesh.

32. Om Yesu Niketan, Vagator, Goa.

33. Prakasapuram Ashram, Udamalpet, Tamil Nadu.

34. Prarthana Ashram, Neygatin Kara, Kerala.

35. Premalaya, Chamraj Nagar, Mysore, Karnataka.

36. Saccidananda Ashram, Kulithali, Tamil Nadu.

37. Saccidananda Ashram, NBCLC, Bangalore, Karnataka.

38. Saccidananda Ashram, Virajpet, Karnataka.

39. Saccidanand Ashram, Narshingpur, Madhya Pradesh.

40. Sanathana Christhu Dharma Ashram, Kayamkulam, Kerala.

41. Sattal Ashram, Nainital, Utter Pradesh.

42. Sevananda Ashram, Nandi Kotikur, Andhra Pradesh.

43. Shanti Ashram, Bareilly, Utter Pradesh.

44. Shantivanam, Raipur, Madhya Pradesh.

45. Suvartha Premi Samithi, Ranthi, Utter Pradesh.

46. Suvisesha Ashram, Bidadi, Bangalore.

47. Tapavanam, Trichy, Tamil Nadu.

48. Tirumalai Ashram, Chunkankadi, Tamil Nadu.

49. Vidivelli Ashram, Saymali, Tamil Nadu.

50. Yesu Ashram, Varanasi, Utter Pradesh.

51. Yesu Ashram, Bangalore, Karnataka.

52. Yesu Karuna Prarthnalaya, Mysore, Karnataka.

53. Zionpuri Ashram, Thozhukkal, Kerala.

There may be still more Christian ashrams in India which are not included in this list.

APPENDIX II

OATH AND COMMITMENT STATEMENT

Oath

I, ..., who desires to be the disclosure of God's mercy and compassion, sincerely believe that it is not within my power to become the channel of His love. Therefore, I humbly and solemnly agree to surrender myself to God whom I have known through the scriptures and personal experience.

I believe that Christ can be witnessed to powerfully through my holy life. As a step toward the improvement of my spiritual life I will make a moral inventory of my life and pray to God continuously to remove the power of evil from me. I will admit to God all the sins I have committed and the wrongs I have done against my fellow human beings. I will confess to people the wrongs I have done against them and make peace with them. I will seek God through prayer, meditation, and the reading of scripture in order to continue a daily relationship with Him. By His grace I will carry out His mission using the gifts He has bestowed upon me.

I believe and accept "Karunaiyananthar Ashram" as one of the channels of God's love on earth. I fully understand the objectives of the Ashram and voluntarily commit myself in support of its mission for the glory of God and the betterment of humanity.

I believe and accept Christ as the Ultimate Authority in the Ashram.

I will treat the property of the Ashram as the property of God and refrain from using it for personal gain.

I will act responsibly in public, and preserve and promote the reputation of the Ashram through my behavior.

I will seek proper means to promote the ideals of the Ashram and recruit others to become its volunteers.

Signature.......................Date............

Commitment Statement

I,......................solemnly commit myself to the services I have indicated below.

[] Lifetime service

[] Longtime service   (Minimum one year)

[] Short time service   (Minimum one week)

Types of Ministry:-

[] Health ministry

[] Literature distribution

[] Relief work

[] Adult Education

[] Agricultural service

[] Family ministry

APPENDIX III

SCHEDULE OF WORSHIP SERVICES

The following worship schedules will be printed in the handbook for the benefit of the public.

Daily Schedule Monday-Friday

4:45 a.m. Wake up music

5:30 a.m. Worship

6:00 a.m. Yoga exercise

6:30-8:30 a.m. Work

8:30 a.m. Breakfast

9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Personal time for reading, meditation, or work

12:30 p.m. Lunch

1:30 p.m. Rest and relaxation

3:00-5:00 p.m. Personal time

6:00-8:30 p.m. Supper

7:30-8:30 p.m. Religious discourse

8:30-9:00 p.m. Worship

9:15 p.m. Personal devotion and sleep

Weekend Schedule Friday Afternoon-Sunday evening.

<u>Friday</u>

5:30-7:30 p.m. Supper

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7:00-8:00 p.m. Worship

8:00-9:30 p.m. Personal testimony

10:00 p.m. Sleep

Saturday

5:45 a.m. Wake up music

7:00-8:00 a.m. Worship

8:00-9:00 a.m. Breakfast

9:30-11:00 a.m. Group study

12:00-1:00 p.m. Lunch

1:00-6:00 p.m. Personal time for visiting people in the neighborhood, nature walk etc

6:00-6:30 p.m. Worship

7:00-8:00 p.m. Supper

8:00-9:30 p.m. Satsang

10:00 p.m. Sleep

Sunday

5:45 a.m. Wake up

7:00-8:30 p.m. Worship and Holy Communion

8:30-12:30 p.m. Personal time and social services

12:30-2:00 p.m. Lunch

2:00-3:00 p.m. Rest

3:00-6:00 p.m. Dialogue

6:00-7:00 p.m. Supper

7:00-7:30 p.m. Worship

7:30-9:00 p.m. Personal time

9:15 p.m. Sleep

Glossary

Absolute: Ultimate Reality, the unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent Being.

Acharya: A highly respected religious teacher.

Advaita: The philosophical system which teaches the non-duality of Ultimate Reality.

Advaita Vedanta: The advaita system which is based on Upanishads.

Agamas: The writings which are unique to the three great Hindu sects, i.e., Vaishnavism, Saivism, Saktism.

Alvars: A group of Vaishnava poets and mystics whose lives and teachings brought a resurgence of Vaishnavism in Tamil Nadu.

Amman: "Mother." Usually refers to Mariyamman, the "small pox goddess," a popular village deity in South India.

Ananda: "Bliss." The pure joy of experiencing God.

Anava Mala: It is the principle of impurity which is the source of all ignorance. The presence of anava mala is what causes the misapprehension about the nature of God, soul and world.

Anubhava: Personal experience.

Arati: Waving of a lamp before an idol or a highly respected leader or a bridegroom.

Artha: The goal of material possessions and physical comforts.

Aryans: The Indo-European nomadic people who came to India through the Kaibar Pass during the second millennium.

Asana: "Posture." In hatha yoga, asana refers to any of

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numerous poses prescribed to balance and tune up the subtle energies of mind and body for meditation and to promote health and longevity. Each asana possesses unique benefits, affecting the varied inner bodies and releasing energies in different parts of the nervous system.

Avatar: "Descent." It is coming down of God into the world.

Avidya: Ignorance or worldly wisdom.

Being: The capitalized Being refers to God's essential nature.

Bhajana: A group singing of devotional songs with cymbals.

Bhakta: "Devotee." A worshiper who has totally surrendered himself to God.

Bhakti: "Devotion." An attitude of total surrender to God.

Brahma: The name of the creator God, one of the Hindu Trinity.

Brahmachari: An unmarried male spiritual aspirant.

Brahman: The transcendent Absolute of the advaita system.

Brahma Sutra: The first known systematic exposition of Upanishadic thought composed by Badarayana around 400 B.C.

Brahmin: "Mature or evolved soul." It refers to the priestly caste in Hinduism.

Chidambaram: "Hall of Consciousness." A city in Tamil Nadu where a very famous Siva temple is located.

Dalit: It refers to the Scheduled castes of India.

Darsana: "Vision, sight." Seeing the deity in the temple

Deepavali: "Row of lights." A festival celebrated throughout India to commemorate the victory of good over evil and light over darkness.

Devi: "Goddess." A name for the wife of Siva.

Dhal: Indian lentils.

Dharna: "Concentration." One of steps in yoga.

Dharma: "That which contains or up holds the cosmos." Dharma is a complex and all inclusive term with many meanings, including: divine law, law of being, way of righteousness, religion, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth. Essentially, dharma is the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature or destiny.

Darsana: Sight of a deity or a holy person.

Durga: A form of the goddess Sakti who is considered to be both gracious as well as terrifying.

Dvaita: The doctrine of dualism, according to which reality is ultimately composed of two irreducible principles, entities, truths, etc. For example, God and soul are seen as eternally separate.

Ecstasy: "Standing outside oneself." A state of being overtaken by emotion such as joy or wonder.

Enstasy: "Standing inside oneself." A term coined in 1969 by Mircea Eliade for the Eastern view of bliss.

Grihastha: "Householder."

Guru: Teacher.

Guru Bhaki: Devotion to the teacher. Guru bhakti is expressed through serving the guru, meditating on his form, working closely with his mind and obeying his instruction.

Gurukula: A training center where young boys live and learn in residence with their teacher.

Hatha Yoga: "Forceful yoga." Hatha yoga is a system of physical and mental exercise developed in ancient times as a means of rejuvenation by rishis, hermits.

Ishta Devata: "Cherished or chosen Deity." Ishta Devata is a concept common to all Hindu sects. A Hindu may choose one of many Divine forms as his special object of worship.

Jnana: An inner awakening that comes from simply understanding a complex philosophical system.

Kali: "Black." The name of the goddess who is worshiped as one of the forms of Sakti.

Kama: "Pleasure, love." Seeking pleasure is one of the four

goals of life in Hinduism.

Karma: "Action, deed." It often refers to the law of karma which means that we reap the consequence of our actions in this life or in the next and the state of present existence is the result of our actions done in the previous life.

Katha Kalashebam: Narration of story by songs.

Kavi: "Ocher-saffron color." A Tamil term referring to the color taken on by robes of sadhus and sannyasins.

Kirtana: Devotional singing and dancing in celebration of God. It is an important form of congregational worship in Hinduism.

Kopuram: South Indian temple tower, often quite tall with ornate carvings.

Krishna: The dark-blue god who is worshiped as an incarnation of Vishnu.

Kshatriya: The social class of rulers and warriors.

Kunkumam: The red powder made of tumeric and lime, worn by Hindus as the dot on the forehead.

Kurinji: Hills.

Linga: The phallus statue worshiped by the Saivites as the symbol of Siva's regenerative powers.

Nishkama karma: Doing good without being attached to the result.

Mala: "Impurity." An important term in Saivism referring to three bonds,called pasa--anava, karma, and maya.

Mana: Impersonal power believed to pervade through material things.

Mantra: "Mystic formula." A sound. syllable, word or phrase endowed with special power, usually drawn from scripture. Mantras are chanted loudly during puja to invoke the gods.

Manu Smriti: The code of Manu.

Marga: Way or path to salvation.

Maya: It is the cosmic creative force, the principle of

manifestation, ever in the process of creation, preservation and dissolution. The term maya is often translated as "illusion."

Moksha: Release from transmigration, samsara, the cycle of births and deaths.

Nataraja: "King of dance." Nataraja is another name for Siva.

Nayanars: The Saivite poets and mystics who revived Saivism in Tamil Nadu.

Nirguna Brahman: Brahman without qualities.

Om: "Yes, verily." The mystic syllable of Hinduism, placed at the beginning of most sacred writings. Om stands for the whole world and its parts, including past, present and future. Om is the primal sound. In Hinduism, sound is the first manifestation, even before light, in the creative scheme of things.

Palai: Dry lands.

Panentheism: "All-in-God doctrine." It refers to the teaching that God pervades the world, but is also beyond it. For the Panentheist, God is in all, and all is in God.

Pantheism: "All-is-God doctrine." For the Pantheist God is neither a personal Being nor a transcendent Being, but is the totality of all existence.

Parabrahman: Absolute Reality which is beyond time and space.

Parousia: "The coming." The term is used by Christians to refer to the second coming of Christ.

Pasa: That which binds the soul and keeps it (for a time) from manifesting its full potential. In Saiva-siddhanta it refers to the soul's three fold bondage of anava, karma and maya.

Pasu: "Cow." It refers to soul in Saiva-siddhanta philosophy.

Patanjali: A Hindu philosopher who codified the ancient yoga at about 200 B.C.

Pongal: A harvest festival celebrated in Tamil Nadu. Newly harvested rice is ceremoniously cooked outdoors over an

open fire in a big pot as part of Pongal celebration.

Prapathi: A total, unconditional surrender to God.

Prasada: Food offered to the Deity. Prasada also means grace.

Proselytism: Changing a person's religious allegiance through coercion.

Puja: An Agamic rite of worship performed in the home, temple and shrine. Puja includes offering of water, incense, lights, food and arati. Puja is the Agamic counterpart of the Vedic yajna rite.

Pujari: A temple priest.

Purusharthas: Four-fold purposes (artha, kama, dharma and moksha) a Hindu can legitimately follow in life.

Rama: One of the popular incarnations of Vishnu.

Reincarnation: It is a belief in the continued rebirth of a soul.

Rig Veda: It is believed to be the most ancient Hindu scripture which might had been written about 1000 B.C.

Rishi: "Seer." The rishis lived in forest and received revelation from God. They were considered to be the human authors of Vedas.

Sadhanas: Religious discipline such as puja, meditation, prayer, fasting and austerity.

Sadhu: A holy person who wanders from place to place in pursuit of truth.

Saiva-siddhanta: The most widespread and influential Saivite school in Tamil Nadu.

Sakti: "Power." It is the active power of Siva that pervades all of existence. In Saiva-siddhanta Sakti is inseparable from Siva. In popular village Hinduism Siva and Sakti are separate entities. Sakti is represented as female, and Siva as male. Sakti is also personified in many forms as the consorts of the gods.

Saktism: "Doctrine of power." Saktism is one of the sects in Hinduism which believes Sakti as Divine Mother. There are many forms of Saktism which seek to capture divine power in order to attain the goals of life.

Samsara: The cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Samskaras: Rites of passage performed to mark a significant transition of life.

Sankara: One of Hinduism's most extraordinary monks who developed the advita doctrine in ninth century A.D. He only lived 32 years, but greatly influenced Hinduism with his monism or Smartha Sampradaya.

Sannyasa: "Renunciation." It is the spontaneous withdrawal from the world in search of enlightenment.

Sannyasin: One who renounced his life to find salvation.

Saccidananda: A name for Brahman which represents his three qualities ie. existence, consciousness and bliss.

Scheduled castes: The Hindus who do not come under the classification of four castes.

Scheduled tribes: The aborigines of India.

Siva: One of the gods in the Hindu Triad. He is worshiped as the Supreme Being by the Saivites.

Sruti: "That which is heard." Sruti refers to Hinduism's revealed scriptures.

Syncretism: Amalgamation of different beliefs.

Tantra: A specific method, technique or spiritual practice within Saiva and Sakti traditions.

Tapas: It is austerity of a severe, psyche-transforming nature which involves extreme bodily mortification.

Tilaka: Marks made on the forehead to indicate one's affiliation with a particular sect.

Turiya: It is a state of consciousness which is beyond the state of deep sleep. The turiya state transcends both the dreaming and dreamless state of mind.

Upanayana: "Bringing near." It is an initiation ceremony performed with the investiture of the sacred thread, signifying entrance into one of the three upper castes.

Upanishads: "Sitting near devotedly." Upanishads are part of the vedas. They are philosophical chronicles of rishis expounding the nature of God, soul and cosmos. There are altogether 108 Upanishads of which ten to

sixteen are classified as principle Upanishads.

Vaikuntha: Vishnu's Heaven.

Vaishnava: A worshiper of Lord Vishnu or his incarnations.

Vaishnavism: One of the major religious sects in Hinduism.
    It centers around the worship of Vishnu as Personal
    God,his incarnations and their consorts. The doctrine
    of avatar is one of the major doctrines of
    Vaishnavism. Vaishnavites mainly worship Rama and
    Krishna, the avatars of Vishnu, while waiting for the
    last avatar(Kalki) to come at the end of kali yuga.

Vaisya: The social class of bankers, businessmen,
    industrialists and merchants.

Vedanta: It means end of Vedas. Vedanta is the system of
    thought embodied in the Upanishads. Advaita vedanta of
    Sankara, Visishtadvaita vedanta of Ramanuja and Dvaita
    vedanta of Madhva are the prominent vedanta schools in
    Hinduism.

Vedanta Sutra: Truth statements of Upanishads.

Viladi: Narration of story by songs using a big bow as a
    musical instrument.

Vishnu: "All-pervasive." Vishnu is the Personal God in
    Vaishnavism. He periodically incarnates to restore
    dharma in the world.

Yajna: A form of ritual worship followed in the Vedic
    period. Butter ,grain, spices exotic woods and
    animals were   offered on a fire according to
    scriptural injunctions   while special mantras were
    chanted.

Yoga: "To yoke." Yoga is one of the sadhanas in Hinduism.

Yuga: "Period." According to Hinduism the duration of the
    world is divided into four periods such as satya (age
    of truth), treta (age of sovereignty), dvapara and
    kali(dark age). Kali yuga is believed to have begun in
    3102 B. C. Hindus expect Kalkin to come at the end of
    kali yuga on a white horse with a sword in his hand to
    judge the wicked, reward the good and restore the
    dharma.

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