

# Fatal Hindu Gospel Stumbling Blocks

by D. D. Pani

The Western Missionary Movement (WMM), in its zeal to impact India for Christ, has inadvertently placed unnecessary obstacles in front of the gospel, tripping up many who might otherwise have sincerely sought Him, and turning away far more than have been reached. One high caste Hindu (who was eventually able to turn to Christ) has traced these obstacles to the fact that members of the WMM:

[have been] totally unable to distinguish between the cultural religion they tried to preach and the unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ as seen in the New Testament. ... Because of this ... all the arduous labors of expansion by a humane Christendom were frustrated beyond measure and the impact of Western Christendom in its religious terms remained quite limited.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the labors of the WMM have not been in vain. It has been observed that due to their great efforts, “most Indians accept Christ as the greatest manifestation of redemptive love.”<sup>1</sup> However, because of the many ways the WMM has violated the culture of India, most have been prevented from personally embracing Him. The Indian Church (the major offspring of the WMM) has for the most part continued in the example set before it and has itself become a major source of hindrance to the Hindu in his search for the true God.

Consequently, the gospel is currently advancing far more slowly than it should in India. Several major reasons exist, the most significant perhaps being the failure of the western effort over the last three centuries to properly engage the culture of India. Rather than unleash the power of the gospel on the Hindu establishment, the missionary movement has helped to re-ignite, reform and revitalize Hinduism. Incredible as it may seem, while seeking to free India’s masses through the regenerating power of the gospel, this movement has actually strengthened the grip of Hinduism on the hearts of many.

During the 20th century, various elements of the 19th century Hindu renaissance movement evolved into militant forms of Hinduism. *And these fanatical brands of Hinduism have merged into the most powerful political force in the country today.*

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Under their rule, there has been a significant rise in the persecution of Christians. Most recently this force has begun to mount an extensive and systematic effort to eradicate what is left of the WMM (along with most all non-technical Western influence). It is also now seeking to minimize the Indian Christian Church.

For all its failures, the Western missionary effort in India has been herculean, involving immense human energy and sacrifice on the part of many. The vast majority of these missionaries have been extremely sincere and have left behind much better material lives in order to obey their callings. In most all cases, they ministered in the ways they thought best. Many suffered great loss, yet continued undeterred. Most, if they could have recognized their actions as a source of stumbling, would have been horrified and would have immediately chosen to change.

It is not our place here to judge these great people of the past. Instead, for a better future, we must learn from the Hindu reactions to the passionate but culturally flawed efforts of the WMM. Even today, the Western eye cannot easily see many of the obstructions that have been created, as these impediments flow naturally out of subtle but fatal flaws in Western culture itself and in Western Christendom in particular.

India today is a nation in great tension. Though a form of stability remains for now, many strong forces are at work that could at any time cause the situation to rapidly decline into anarchy. More than ever before the WMM and the Christian West must strive to be more sensitive to Hindu culture so that they can act wisely in their future dealings with India. To accomplish this, we need a set of major paradigm shifts. Similarly, the Indian Church must be encouraged, through the remaining channels of

Western Christian influence, to make these same changes.

At present, the West's greatest need for wisdom lies in how it should deal with the issue of the repression of minorities in India. We (the West) also need to see and understand the unnecessary offenses caused by our past and present actions.

During my second tenure in India, I identified five of the gospel stumbling blocks facing the Hindu, obstacles that still remain nearly invisible to the Western eye. Many (including a number of non-believing Hindus) have written on the various problems associated with the missionary effort in India and made valid lists of items offensive to the Hindu. We would do well to study these works and humbly learn from them.

However, it is not my intent here to attempt to summarize even a small portion of these works. Instead, I want to unveil just three particularly serious stumbling blocks that are not so easy to discern and to explore (in somewhat limited detail) their origins.

### ***1. The Problem of Superiority of Culture***

Whereas in Paul's time, the Jews were best reached through signs—and the Greeks through logic—the Hindu world was (and still is) most influenced by demonstration with humility. Though admired worldwide for his general attribute of tolerance, the Indian Hindu has little-to-none for arrogance.

Since the Portuguese, there has certainly been much demonstration of Christ in India by the modern West. Sadly this demonstration has been accompanied by attitudes of narrow-mindedness and lack of teachableness. These attitudes extend not only to the various Hindu philosophies and religions, but to Hindu culture itself. Thriving in the wake of imperialism, the bulk of the Western missionary effort of earlier

generations also carried with it an air of self-believed cultural superiority.<sup>2</sup> Only rarely did Western missionaries truly seek to meaningfully engage the culture. Furthermore, except for the fact that its "air of superiority" stems more exclusively from its pride in coming from more technically and materially advanced cultures from those found in India, the current generation of missionaries is no different. To the sensitive Hindu, these attitudes neutralize the "demonstration" effort of the WMM and almost totally negate the Gospel. Such attitudes have also stifled the willingness of many Hindu intellectuals to engage in dialogue with Western Christianity. Thus, this arrogant Western mindset has been and is one of the greatest barricades to the Gospel in the Hindu world.

It is amazing to me the number of Indians who have gone through Christian schools (both Protestant and Catholic) without seriously considering Christ. It is also amazing how little it takes to discredit one's witness in this culture. One small display of anger—no matter how justified—will terminate one's witness, irrespective of the degree of demonstration that preceded the display. In such anger the Hindu sees arrogance (in the form of putting down the god-hood of another).

The advance of the Gospel is significantly threatened by those who have been preconditioned to believe in the superiority (and universality) of the Western form of Christianity *and* in the relative inferiority of Indian culture. Unfortunately, this includes not only most of India's missionary forces (both Western and Indian) but also the bulk of the Indian Church. By listening to those who advocate such demeaning views, the West continues in its cultural bias. Tragically, most of these spokesmen were then—and are now—unable to distinguish between Hindu culture and

Hindu religion. As a result, Hindu culture is viewed as evil, because the Hindu religion does not bring salvation.

## **II. The Problem of Rights and Rebellion**

After I had spent two and a half years serving professionally at an institution in India, a very perceptive friend and collaborator told me why I was not having a greater impact in the Hindu community. He related it to the attitudes this community could see in my eleven year-old son.

At first I was taken aback, but I listened and strained hard to understand without being defensive. My son was well behaved and a very good student. He was well immersed in the activities and social life of this community, as were my wife and I. But because of the culture of my home, he had become an intense individual and his strength of personality “exuded” from him. And this, my friend explained to me, was the problem.

In Indian culture, children normally remain very docile in the presence of adults and exhibit little personality in the presence of youth even just slightly older than themselves. In the company of adults they behave as if they have no rights and are very submissive to the unspoken social pecking order. On the other hand, I had taught my son (through the way he saw me react to others in the society) to respect those who proved themselves worthy of respect—and to express his personality.

In Indian culture age, position, caste and gender form the basis for respect. When a boy one year older than my son was bullying him because of his “seniority,” I taught my son to stand up for himself. Once, my son and his friends were playing cricket when a group of older boys chased them off the field and began to play. Upon learning this, I went and rebuked these boys for not respecting

the rights of the younger ones. I did not however repeat their “injustice” by chasing them off. My son watched and then listened in the local language to the discussions that followed among these older boys. Some greatly appreciated my chastening and further admonished the others, but most felt that the little children were not important and maintained their privilege to chase them off. Their beliefs followed from the culture of the home life that had reared them—as did my son’s.

Until the 14th century, the personal rights of the common Western European and common Indian alike were still heavily subjugated to the needs of the community. Thus, the individuality and personal creativity of most remained greatly suppressed. Soon, however, the combined and interactive energies of the European Enlightenment and the Protestant Reformation set in motion forces that began to “liberate” the individual in Europe. In the West, the pendulum began to swing from the priority of community (in moderating one’s own actions) to that of the individual (i.e., from what is best for the whole to what is best for the part). For a time, this brought balance, and was accompanied by rapid advances in Western culture.

Currently in the West the pendulum has swung to a new and far more dangerous extreme. Yet in India (despite the invasion of values from the secular West, community) what is best for the whole still moderates most of the actions of individuals, even in the major metropolitan centers. The vast majority of Indian minds are still shocked by the rebellion of an individual (or group of individuals) against the social order, because such behavior is out-of-sync with community. What they would see as rebellion, we in the West would see as the expression of individuality. Through training my son

to radiate his personality, I had created a negative witness.

A great tragedy today is that much of the WMM work (both past and current) among low caste and no-caste Hindus represents “rebellion movements” against the Hindu social order. Both the Western “protest” mentality (which in the West has made Protestantism itself a movement that cannot be united) and Western imperialistic attitudes have worked together—and are still working together—to build a Church in India that is “liberated” from Hindu society. In some cases directly and in other cases indirectly (unintentionally), Indian Christians are taught to abhor Hindu culture and to treat with contempt what is considered to be the normal social order.

Providing “liberation” is sometimes justified based on a belief in the injustice of the oppressive control and exploitation of the lower castes by the higher. There is no denying that the caste system is unjust and exploitative. The lower class peoples are being subjected to much injustice. However, this justification is in no way in line with the spirit of the early Gentile church. Here is where the dogmatism of the Western Church and the reactive nature of the Protestant movement make it extremely hard for the preconditioned Western Protestant missionary to exercise wisdom. For both similar and different reasons, the same is true to for the Roman Catholic missionary.

The oppressed of the early church were taught by their leaders to accept suffering and loss at the hands of the culture (and its norms) for the sake of their faith and witness. The early church did not challenge many of the evil practices of the day (such as slavery) but taught its followers to be pro-active when trapped in such oppressive circumstances. The real power of their witness lay in their radiance in the face

of unjust suffering; this was the cutting edge of their witness. Martyrdom was common and persecution and oppression were the norm for many in various parts of the early Church.

Focusing on their great status as children and heirs of the creator God, they were thus free to give up their rights for the sake of their witness. They could choose with joy to be true followers of a Master who “like a lamb that is led to slaughter.... did not open His mouth.”

In contrast, the liberation effort in India today is reactive (rather than proactive) and is resulting in the polarization of Christians and Hindus. What the community-oriented Hindu sees as “the social order,” the reactive and rights-oriented Protestant (and Roman Catholic) sees as “subjugation and despotism.” What the Hindu sees as assisting in “rebellion,” the Western and Indian missionary sees as assisting in “liberation.” Because of the present day Western Protestant and Roman Catholic rights-orientation, submitting with joy to unjust oppression is not a viable or even possible option. Consequently, in the face of persecution in India today, Bishops protest and Christians march. Meanwhile the Western Christian community attempts to exert forms of external pressure.

The Hindu, who might have become a seeker, becomes permanently turned off upon seeing such displays. When Western intrusions turn small pockets of the lower castes against the ancient order, the high-caste peoples of a region become appalled. While temporary strides are perhaps being made among those groups being “liberated” by the WMM, the progress of the Gospel is being impeded overall. The expense of winning these intermediate battles (with these small pockets of

people) is losing the war (involving the vast majority).

In some regions in Northern and Central India, where larger pockets of low caste and no castes have been enticed to the gospel through the free provision of money and commodities (and liberation tactics), the regions themselves have become polarized against the gospel. Even many from the same social status as those being liberated are sickened at seeing their own kind separating from and defying the social order under the influence of foreigners (or South Indians). Of equal concern is the faith response of those being “won” under such circumstances. Most are responses to a soft gospel. Such a faith beginning does not often lead to deep commitment.

In a land of one billion, mostly without Christ, the progress of the Gospel needs to be accelerated, not hindered. There is a need both to consider an overall strategy that is appropriate and sensitive to the masses, and to subjugate these “short cut agendas” (that can so effectively win the few for the glory of the WMM) to “reason” for the good of the whole. Because utopia is not for this life, the early church was focused on the liberation of the soul, not the exercise of personal rights. In their spirit of humility, the Roman Empire was rapidly conquered for Christ.

Although we could, we will not take time now to consider the degrading effects of the problem of rights and rebellion on the effectiveness of the Western Church in reaching the West itself. I’ll simply state that, in part because of this very problem, the Western Church (though it is not yet ready to admit so) has lost its cutting edge in its home terrain.

### **III. The Problem of Control**

When I first came to India, I didn’t immediately mix with many Western missionaries, because I wanted to form independent opinions of the culture. However, I did seek some associations. The one I became most fond of was an individual about my father’s age. Over the next several years I came to appreciate this man’s great vision and burden for India. During his tenure—and with almost no Western financial support—he had raised up one of the finest Christian institutions of its kind in the country.

However, as my years of association with this good friend continued, I became convinced that he should have retired much earlier. In time I concluded that his retirement was more than ten years overdue. For the sake of her health, his wife had left the field many years before to prepare for their retirement. I became unsettled when I finally realized that he was never going to join her. Despite a generation difference in age, I began to gently probe this concern with my friend. Eventually, I realized two things. The first was that he could never let go of the institution he has raised up; the second was why.

Besides being a typical Western control-freak, he had raised up an institute that required a Western administrator to keep it going. It was a Western institution running on Western principles. Though he’d already hired a series of Indian administrators to make the institution “look” Indian-run, he still had to remain on site (behind-the-scenes) to ensure its function. Though a man of great faith and commitment, he knew deep inside that soon after he permanently left the scene his work would begin to decay.

His institution was bearing much fruit. But to me it became a symbol and mon-

ument of the failed strategies of the previous generations. Such strategies have resulted in dead-end institutions that can neither be sustained nor replicated. *These only enhance addition (rather than multiplication) in a country which now sees practically the population of Canada added to its ranks every year.*

I began to ponder the reason why so many of us in the WMM (myself included) have remained so committed to strategies that continue to fail in India. This, in time, lead me to come to the following observations.

One major characteristic of the West that distinguishes it from the East is its need for control. The fatalism of the East stands in stark contrast to the aggressive self-determinism of the West. The Western mindset is focused primarily on the need to attempt to control the external—leaving little to chance. We Westerners attempt to control our own environments and time usage, our security and health, our involvements and theology, to the extent that we don't really need God. We analyze Him to the point where He no longer has many mysteries.

By contrast, the Eastern mindset is focused primarily on the need to attempt to control self—leaving the external to chance. For this reason, the culture of the West is far more structured and systematic than that of the East. India, for example, has not chronicled most of its own history. Indians are far more relational, spontaneous and open-ended. Hindu religious practices are far more individualistic and ascetic. By contrast, Westerners are more rigid in most aspects of their lives.

The outworking of both the Eastern (fatalistic) and Western (aggressive-self deterministic) systems have fatal flaws when it comes to faith. Simply stated, in the Eastern Hindu system, little is expected of God and the focus is on

reducing one's attachments to desired outcomes. In the Western Christian system, the focus (despite the rhetoric) is really on self-expectations. Further, in the Western system, the burden for a desired outcome ends up resting (in reality) on the agenda holder(s)—not God. One system teaches people to expect less of God, the other to expect more of self. The end result is the same for both systems: reduced faith. Yet, the intermediate results are very different. In the West, for example, the intermediate result is the propagation of control-centered structures.

These are gross generalizations, and in light of the advance of Western culture and technology into many sectors of the East, certainly lack universality.

The failure of the Western missionary movement to fully (or even partially) appreciate these great fundamental differences between East and West is a major hindrance to the progress of the Gospel in India. This failure helps explain why the West continues to try to establish institutions and movements in India that require their own structured and control-oriented mindset to maintain and why, in most cases, these works fail miserably when turned over to Eastern stewardship. There is also the problem of replication. Most of these works, even if they do provide some success, prove to be ends in themselves.

Fortunately, I see a new breed of Western missionary coming to India that is no longer focused as much on raising up Western institutions.

However, despite all the noise about contextualization and Church planting, I continue to see new ministries springing up that are operating from Western motivations. From the reference point of faith, the “control” emphasis of the West continues to involve degrees of unbelief—especially the emphasis of control through the use of Western financial support.

Today, with the tremendous emphasis placed on church planting in India, Western organizations need to completely rethink their strategies in light of these realities. Time is too short and the task too large for us to continue to invest in structures and methodologies that are foreign to the mental processes and cultural inclinations of the Indian disciple. Continuing down the current paths will only sustain the present marginal “addition” rate of adherents to the faith in a land where a decisive “multiplication” rate is instead needed.

## Solutions

In the previous three sections, we explored some of the less easily perceived reasons why the Western missionary movement has failed thus far to entice the core of the Hindu masses to embrace Christ. Again, because of these and other reasons the missionary movement has fanned the flame of Hinduism and greatly strengthened it. Thus, in many regions of India, the gospel is not making measurable progress.

Though it is important for us to understand the cause and effect sequence that has produced these catastrophic devel-

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opments, it is more important to make the changes that logically follow from this understanding. To have any value, this paper must now investigate not only plausible solutions to the problems outlined briefly above, but must also investigate ways to accommodate some of the Western and Indian cultural tendencies that have served to produce these problems. The alternative approaches suggested below may at first prove hard for the West to implement, but being compatible with Indian culture, they should ultimately serve to accelerate the Gospel in India.

It may be of some comfort to know that the problems we face in India today are very similar to those the Apostle Paul faced during the early days of the Gentile Church. Though Paul's preliminary cultural and religious experience had led him to murder Christians, it was primarily to him that the task of forging the foundation of the European Church was assigned. Not only was he chosen to establish many new paths, he was given the task of spending much of his time fighting the preconditioning of the Jewish Christians. Because of their cultural roots, these brothers had been programmed to believe in the superiority of Jewish Culture and were thus seeking to export their culture—along with their new faith—to those who were responding to the gospel outside of Israel. Some of these Judaizers followed in Paul's wake, attempting to bring the Gentile Christians under submission to the form of Christianity that had been appropriately adopted by the believers in Israel itself.

Had Paul not fought this particular battle so effectively, the churches he established would have taken on many elements of Jewish culture and would soon have become irrelevant to the Great Commission in the localities in which they had been planted. Thus, Paul fought this battle at the top (Jerusalem Council, conflict with leaders), through proper discipling, con-

frontational letters (II Corinthians, Galatians, etc.), and prayer (Philippians). In time, his efforts—combined with the efforts of like-minded apostles and leaders—prevailed, influencing the whole of Christendom. One generation after Paul's death, Mathetes could write to a seeker:

**For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe ... and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct.**<sup>3</sup>

So the Church grew like wildfire in both the East and the West. Everywhere the Way went it adapted to the cultures of the peoples; it did not take on a distinctive culture of its own. Kingdom subjects were to stand out—not by cultural distinctives—but by the fruit of the Spirit and by lifestyles of commitment and character.

Paul had a proper view of culture and of his responsibility to it. He did not judge the cultures of the lands he lived in, nor did he attempt to reform these cultures externally. Instead he lived to regenerate individuals and to train them (as Jesus did His own disciples) “to live in the world, but not be of the world.”

We need men like Paul today, who can and who will stand against the mission sending agencies and missionary educational and funding sources of the West, and convince them to stop mixing Western culture into the agenda of the Western missionary movement in India. Paul viewed it his job to simply let the gospel loose on the people of these cultures, to let it (together with the Holy Spirit) do its work. First it would regenerate. Then in time—God's time—it would reform. His focus was on regeneration, not reformation.

In India, after many fruitful years of reaching high castes, E. Stanley Jones, exhorted the West to let go of its control-based reformation agendas and to again simply unleash the power of the gospel, by letting it go free.<sup>4</sup>

Jones was distressed by the work of his fellow missionaries because he could see the difference between regeneration and reformation. Because most Western missionaries in his generation were not able to distinguish (in their own experience) between what was scriptural and what was cultural, they were hindered in communicating the Biblical Christ. So they, for the most part, proclaimed a Western Christ instead. Without (in many cases) even realizing it, his co-workers—and those who had preceded him in North India—had taken on a job description not given to them: social reform rather than gospel regeneration.

To properly unleash the gospel, one must live in proximity to those people with whom the gospel is to be unleashed. This means living in submission to the culture, not trying to outwardly reform it. With such an approach, the missionary cannot offend. The gospel carried by the missionary may offend, but certainly his life should not unnecessarily offend. Certainly also, the gospel itself will in time reform, but only after it has first regenerated a number of individuals within the culture.

The gospel, together with the rest of Christian truth, work together like leaven in a culture to improve it. In bread batter, leaven starts out slowly, but eventually it thoroughly permeates and transforms the entire mixture. Thus, while regeneration takes place in an individual at the point of first true belief, the reformation of a culture may take many generations. For example, it took the leavening effect of the Gospel over 1800 years to bring the issue of slavery to an honest head in the West. The change came ultimately by majority

consensus after much of the population had been regenerated. But to impose reform on a culture before it has been regenerated is to impede—possibly even kill—the rate of regeneration in a culture.

### ***Proposed Solutions to the Problem of Superiority of Culture***

Earlier we highlighted the impact of Evangelical Protestantism's negative predisposition toward the culture of India. From the dearth of response of thinking Hindus to the gospel, we can only conclude that as long as the Western missionary remains unteachable concerning the virtues of Indian culture and persists in an attitude of cultural superiority, the Hindu world will continue to stumble over Christ. Our rigid spirit in this matter flows from bigotry (cultural bias). The following are suggested ways to help ourselves (and prospective new missionaries) overcome cultural bias.

*First, study the training method Christ used for eliminating cultural bias from His own disciples.*

One year I slowly worked through a complete harmony of the gospels with an Indian scholar in order to look at this topic in depth. To our amazement, we found the harmonized gospels to be a training manual in how to empower others to overcome bigotry in their own personal lives.

For Jesus, the need to overcome the problem of the negative preconditioning (bias) of His disciples in relation to other cultures was paramount. The twelve would soon be called upon to love the Samaritans and later to love the Gentiles of many different cultures. However, at the beginning of Christ's private ministry with these men, their attitudes toward the non-Jew and the outcast were clearly no different (as

shown in the gospel accounts) than those of their countrymen. With the extreme attitudes of bigotry held by the Jewish race toward the Samaritans and Gentiles at the time of Christ, this training effort was an immense task indeed. Yet, if he had not completed it, it is unlikely that a proper vision of Christ would have ever been taken outside the Jewish nation.

We found that, by using a harmony of the gospels, it is possible to observe in detail what Christ did to remove the negative preconditioning of His disciples toward the Gentiles and to make these men perpetual learners in the face of new information. Christ was so successful in this venture that Peter could one day call Paul's difficult writings "scriptures" (II Peter 3:17) and doubting Thomas (if legend is correct) could establish a rigorous Church among the uncircumcised high castes of southern India (which, despite centuries of semi-isolation, has survived to this day). Though we cannot conclusively either confirm or deny the legend of Thomas (even with modern analysis leaning slightly toward confirmation<sup>6</sup>), we can follow the lives of Peter and John into the Gentile world through both the New Testament and the writings of the Early Church Fathers. What comes through in these sources is that Jesus was successful. Using Christ's comprehensive method, we must reprogram ourselves (and others) with the same attitudes the Master imparted into His men.

*Secondly, take time to research and seriously consider a number of counter-facts related to this Western bias. Among those that should be studied in detail are:*

- a. That the past roots of Indian culture are in many ways more righteous than the past roots of Western culture (Roman civilization), and that the present day culture of India is in many

ways more righteous than the godless culture of the secular West today. (For some this may mean taking time to "tune-in" to and acknowledge the real moral condition of the West today.)

- b. The error in the supposition that superiority of technology always equates to superiority of culture.
- c. The error in the supposition that military supremacy or domination always equates to superiority of culture.
- d. The intensity and degree of philosophic development in the Indian subcontinent compared to Europe (and later in North America). Also, the relative sophistication of the philosophies developed in each location (independent of the only authentic source of revelation). One must consider the degree of Indian progress in the absence of the Judeo-Christian scriptures relative to the degree of Western progress helped along by these revelational texts. Not to bias this investigation (but to guide it), one must come to grips with the failure of the West's fixation on "systems" to deliver anything tangible or lasting in the area of philosophy. The "brilliant conclusion" of this process is that no answers can be found. Also, one must consider that modern science is in part (if not more) a baby of the Reformation<sup>6,7</sup> and not the result of a philosophical search that took place outside the influence of Christian truth.
- e. The pure and near perfect logic of the Sanskrit language and

the major technological developments ancient India has provided the world (such as our power of ten based numbering system).

- f. The fact that in community vs. individualism, the West's emphasis on personal rights is now rapidly destroying Western culture, just as the community focus of India has limited personal creativity and the rate of technological advancement there. (Note that both emphases are out of step with the Scriptures and that Evangelicals are essentially following the current Western drift.)

*Thirdly, require all missionaries to focus exclusively on Hindus, not the bigoted Indian Church.*

There are several rationale for this:

- (1) to protect the new Western missionary from being further negatively preconditioned by Indian Christians;
- (2) to prevent the Western missionary from further westernizing the Indian Church;
- (3) to enable the Western missionary to really come to grips with Indian culture; and
- (4) to allow the Indian Church to come to grips with its own culture without the distraction of continued Western influence.

*Fourthly, allow new missionaries to bond to their ministry cultures by shielding them from the oversight of missionaries of the old (negatively preconditioned) school—especially during their first several years in India.*

## ***Proposed Solutions to the problem of Rights and Rebellion***

The Evangelical Protestant “protest” mentality, coupled with Western imperialistic attitudes, has fostered (and is still fostering) an effort to build a Church in India that is “liberated” from Hindu social structure (culture). To the Indian psyche, the priorities of community and maintenance of social structure are absolutes. Thus for the Hindu, displays of arrogance and rebellion against these absolutes are abominations of the highest order. And when these displays accompany the WMM's outreach efforts among the low and no castes, they can only mobilize anti-Christian and anti-foreign sentiments. Regardless of the Hindu reaction (which some can negate as the Hindu's problem only), rebellion aimed at oppression is not justifiable. Though it is in keeping with the protest spirit of the Reformation, it is completely out-of-sync with the spirit of the early church and the example of Christ.

Often the proponents of what I must label “Evangelical Liberation Theology” find their justification in Christ's example of “rebellious” against the legalism of the oppressive and corrupt religious system in Israel in His time. However, I must again encourage aspiring missionaries to take time to work through a good harmony of the gospels on this issue of personal rights and social rebellion to see what He really did. For those so aspiring, let me suggest in advance that one will find quite a different example.

In my extensive study on this issue, I was amazed by the balanced way in which Christ taught His disciples the importance of accommodating their own culture, while not remaining bound to the letter of all its traditions and ways. In doing so, He worked hard to

enable his men to understand the root and spirit of their traditions in light of the priorities of devotion to God and compassion toward man. By His words and deeds, Christ taught His followers not to submit blindly to traditions but to regulate their submission to traditions by the priority of loving God and neighbor. Thus, He slowly stripped away the legalism that the culture's preconditioning had built into His followers, replacing their bigotry with a spirit of love and compassion.

It is important to observe, however, that in the process of stripping away their prejudice and legalism, Christ was not attempting to make social rebels out of His followers. For example, one day Christ asked Peter: “What do you think, Simon? From where do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?” Then in response to Peter's correct answer Christ added, “Consequently the son's are exempt. But, *lest we give offense, go...*” And on the wings of a miracle performed only in the sight of Peter himself, the Master paid their yearly temple tax (even though He Himself was the temple!) There are many other examples of Christ's sensitivity and submission to the culture of the Jews. It is also important to note that the Jewish Christians of Israel remained zealous for their culture and continued to be nationalistic.

The delicate balance that Christ maintained during His training of the twelve enabled Him to strip away their bias and legalism while at the same time empowering them to be appropriately submissive and sensitive to their own culture. The effectiveness of this training is well demonstrated through the follow-up ministries of the Apostles and their disciples.

### ***Additional principles to ponder***

Our job is simply to unleash the gospel by giving people a proper vision of Christ,

not to externally mold people while peddling a Western version of Him.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, if the gospel is to be properly unleashed, one must live near those to whom the gospel is to be given, in submission to the culture, not trying to reform it. This also means engaging the culture in constructive and real (meaningful/practical) ways, not just peripheral ways. By extension this mandates that the aspiring missionary seeking to impact the mainstream of India should come with something other than just ministry skills (and, before coming, should have been able to engage the mainstream of the secular

seems able to shed his tendency for high self-expectations.

In relation to faith, Christ's ministry with the twelve and seventy had at least two simultaneous aims: (1) raising God-expectations and (2) destroying all self-expectations. Because of his fatalism, the Indian starts with (a) low God-expectations and (b) limited self-expectations. Thus, because of his Hindu roots, the Indian disciple only needs his God expectations to be raised. But while the Western mentor rigorously attempts via teaching and preaching to accomplish (1) in light of (a), he inadvertently (either consciously or sub-

Again, the reader is directed to study the life of Christ (using a good harmony of the gospels) to discover the Master's method for imparting faith. However, because of our Western baggage, this can only be a start. In dealing with growing Indian disciples, we will have to resist any temptation to demonstrate and motivate high personal expectations. It is only as our personal self-expectations go down that our God-expectations can rise. "When the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the Earth?"

In addition, let me suggest that the WMM immediately drop all Western

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*In light of the potentially explosive ... social movements currently sweeping through the oppressed classes of India, it is particularly important at "such a time as this" that the Western Christian community and the Indian Church relate in a culturally appropriate manner to these movements.*

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culture of his/her own country, to the point of bearing fruit).

The gospel will revolutionize a culture after (and only after) it has regenerated many within it, but the former takes much longer.

### ***Proposed Solutions to the Problem of Control***

During nearly two and a half decades of study on how Christ built faith into His followers, I have come to see that the current Western models for building faith can only fail in India. I have also come to see that the cultural background of the Hindu makes him more fertile ground for great faith if he is properly disciplined. He has far less baggage than the agenda-centered Western disciple, who, despite much effort, never

consciously) by demonstration serves to accomplish the opposite in relation to (2), thus raising the Indian's self-expectations. And because the power of demonstration is more powerful than preaching and teaching, the Western mentor (with high-self expectations of his own) can only raise the self-expectations of the Indian and cannot accomplish (1). Because of the struggles the Indian disciple faces with attaining high God-expectations (by virtue of his Hindu roots) he ends up with: (I) only moderately raised God-expectations and (II) greatly raised self-expectations. The result is a very legalistic disciple with very little faith. Apart from following Christ's method for building faith, the mix of the Western-trainer and the Eastern-trainee can usually only end in this (I and II).

structures and major on protocols natural to the eastern mindset and culture. For example, rather than planting community churches with mixed castes present, works should be established which expand along extended family lines and are governed within these families themselves (without Western funds and with minimal Western influence). Also, rigorous efforts of labor and prayer should be focused on raising up many Indian prophets with Eastern mindsets (not Eastern philosophy) in different sub-regions and among the various people groups. These must be extremely well-equipped individuals who can serve in an unstructured manner similar to the god-men and gurus of Hinduism, in order to mobilize large people movements.

## *A Tentative Description of Mission Frontiers*

by Ralph D. Winter

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must yet go, beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

### **Conclusions**

Today the population of India is increasing at an absolute rate of approximately 2.3% per year and is already at 1.02 billion. Yet, despite the West's incredible investment of finances and manpower into India over the past two centuries—and the continuing presence of foreign and Indian missionaries today—the absolute growth rate of Christianity in India is still only 2.8%.

<sup>8</sup> If the differential between these two rates were to remain the same, nearly two additional centuries would be required to completely reach India for Christ. Hope lies in the observation that because of the great efforts of the WMM, “most Indians accept Christ as the greatest manifestation of redemptive love.” <sup>1</sup> If we from the West can retool, this grave situation could be magnificently salvaged to the great glory of God.

In this paper I have attempted to identify several of the stumbling blocks facing the Hindu, which the West seems to have trouble seeing. I have also tried to explore the Western mindset at the root of these obstacles in order to help make the offenses more visible. Finally, I have suggested a number of difficult but practical solutions to help minimize these stones of offense, so the Gospel can start to move at high speed through this land of one billion to regenerate and reform its great peoples.

In light of the potentially explosive nature of several of the social movements currently sweeping through the oppressed classes of India, *it is particularly important at “such a time as this” that the Western Christian community and the Indian Church relate in a culturally appropriate manner to these movements.* To fail to do so in the name of “liberation” and “social reform” is to invite an unprecedented backlash from the anti-foreign and anti-Christian forces that are already polarized against the West and its form of Christianity. The leaders of the early Church learned not to bring persecution on themselves by causing unnecessary offense. They did not stand as judges of the pagan cultures of their day, but rather were the well-wishers of those without Christ, even as they were martyred. They sought release for all from the prison of Satan and showed unconditional love to oppressor and oppressed alike. Therefore also, let those who stumble in India, stumble only over the gospel itself—not over snares laid in their paths by the West. **IJFM**

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