Religious Movements in Hindu Social Contexts:
A Study of Paradigms for Contextual "Church" Development

by H. L. Richard

Introduction[1]

The study of religion in India is in flux, and scholarly consensus is lacking even on rather fundamental issues like the definition of "Hinduism." I would like to introduce this brief outline of three important Indian religious movements with recent comments by scholars in the field. In their introduction to a collection of papers focused on the interaction between charismatic leadership and canonical scripture, editors Vasudha Dalmia, Angelika Malinar and Martin Christof write that

> We still need to gather a vast amount of data before we can begin to compile anything resembling a history of Indian religions. (2001:2)

David Lorenzen, introducing a study of religious movements in South Asia from 600 to 1800, comments similarly that

> The historical study of religious movements that flourished in South Asia before the year 1800 has not yet received the attention it deserves. (2004:1)

This paper is by no means an attempt to contribute to the need for historical studies of religion in India. Rather, it uses data currently available to trace aspects of the development of religious movements in order to question the paradigms employed in the spread of Christ-centered movements in India.

Lorenzen goes on to discuss problems with both the terms "religion" and "movement":

> Religion is notoriously difficult to define with any precision…It is much more difficult, especially in a South Asian context, to specify what we mean by a "movement," since the degree and style of organization of popular religious groups varies enormously. Some are so loosely structured that they are perhaps better described as religious currents rather than movements. Their followers are difficult to identify and have no formal ties to other members of the group or to its leaders. Other groups have more defined and limited memberships. (2004:3)

The issues of identity and membership are important in the context of this paper, although rarely addressed directly. So it is important to note at the outset that contextually there are a variety of approaches to this issue.

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One more comment from Lorenzen is appropriate in light of this paper:

> Since the beginning of the Common Era, Hinduism has been dominated by religious devotion or *bhakti* to the various forms and avatars of the gods Vishnu and Siva and their divine wives, consorts and associates. (2004:16)

Thus, when in this paper three *bhakti* movements are introduced, this is keeping with the mainstream of developments within Hinduism, and in no sense involves a selective ignoring other trends.

1. Virasaivism or the Lingayat Movement
Introduction
Virasaivism (the name suggests "heroic, ardent worshippers of the god Shiva" (Schouten 1995:1)) is a devotional movement that developed from the life and teaching of Basava (or Basavanna or Basaveshwara, 1105-1167) in south India in the area presently known as Karnataka. Basava was a Brahmin and his family was devoted to Shiva, but he revolted against the Brahminical orthodoxy of his day.

Basava is best remembered for his *vacanas*, of which some 1400 are attributed to him (Zvelebil 1984:3). Zvelebil discusses the characteristics of *vacanas*, which are a literary form that predated Basava:

> Though *vacanas* are not, strictly speaking, verse, it is possible to arrange them according to certain patterns in lines of varying length, and they certainly exhibit structure … *Vacanas* were supposed to be uttered or sung on the spur of the moment, on the spot, here and now. They were the reflection of spontaneous experience–the poets' varied experience of nature, life and religion. (1984:1-2).

Note this example of the non-stylish *bhakti* of Basava's *vacanas*:

> I don't know anything of prosody,
> of time-beat or metre,
> nor do I know the count of rhythm
> and of tone.
>
> I don't know this variety of feet or that.

> O Lord of Confluence,
> since nothing will offend you,
> I shall sing to the tune
> of love. (#493, Zvelebil 1984:72)

Referring to Shiva as Lord of the Confluence, or Lord of the Meeting Rivers, was Basava's standard "signature" on his *vacanas*; it was a name for Shiva adopted from a temple where he spent some of his early years and where he later died.

Distinctives of the Lingayats
K. Ishwaran outlines four aspects of the religious reform and revolt that Basava pioneered:

The Lingayat ideal is "one community" for the enlightened … which does not recognize or practice caste.

> In the first place, the Lingayat tradition rejects without reservation the Brahmanical socio-economic-cultural order of castes and sub-castes. Secondly, it rejects their doctrinal and theoretical basis–the Vedas. Thirdly, it rejects categorically sacrificial ritualism. Lastly, it rejects just as categorically the magico-religious practices. (1983:109)

Basava introduced a spirituality centering on Shiva and distinguished by each individual wearing on their person a small linga as the focus of their devotion. The linga was originally a phallic symbol, but none of this association carried over in the Lingayat movement. The personal linga (*ishtalinga*) was originally wrapped in cloth and tied around the neck or upper arm or head; presently it is kept in a silver box and is worn on the upper body with a string.

J. P. Schouten highlights four aspects of the progressive social teaching of the Lingayat movement. Most remarkable is the radical rejection of caste

distinctions, which lies behind each of his other three emphases. His second point is the dignity of labor in the Lingayat movement; here occupations are not hierarchically ranked, and none are considered unclean. Thirdly, Schouten highlights the elevation of women in Lingayatism. Finally, education and learning are stressed for all peoples rather than being the preserve of the high castes.

"Conversion" to Lingayatism
Especially in its rejection of the social order based on caste there are many parallels between the introduction and growth of the Lingayats and that of Christianity. Virasaivism was a confessional movement that called for the renunciation of caste and caste-ist practices. A Basava *vacana* strikingly makes this point:

> There is one earth under the street of the untouchables and under the temple of Siva;
>
> One water to use in the latrine and to sip;
>
> One community for those who know themselves;
>
> One result of liberation through the six philosophies;
>
> And there is only one abode for those who know you, O Lord of the Meeting Rivers! (Schouten 1995:27; cf. Zvelebil 1984:118)

The Lingayat ideal is "one community" for the enlightened, a new, confessional community which does not recognize or practice caste. This was also the ideal that dominated (and dominates) most Christian movements in India. A detailed analysis of this ideal cannot be attempted here, but there was a rapid breakdown in Lingayat practice, and the record of Christian movements in this area is not strikingly better.

Later Developments
Schouten suggests that the truly radical approach to caste was perhaps only practiced among the Virasaivas for as little as seven years:

It is not surprising that such a controversial style of community life could not persist for a long time. Probably it lasted for only about seven years; then the experimental community collapsed after a conflict with the king about caste rules (1995:283).

Schouten points out how the persecution which followed this royal conflict led to the widespread dispersion of Lingayats across south India, and so to the spread of their new ideology.

But already the immediate successors of Basava wavered on caste. Basava's nephew, Cannabasava ("the organizer of the community as the successor of his uncle" (Schouten 1995:14)), wrote a number of *vacanas* that reflect traditional concerns related to impurity (see Schouten 1995:41-44). In one he defines a waiting period for new initiates based on caste:

A Brahmin should be observed for three years;

A Kshatriya should be observed for six years;

A Vaisya should be observed for nine years;

And a Sudra should be observed for twelve years;

Without such observation one should not receive initiation. (Schouten 1995:43)

The historical development of the Lingayat movement in its early centuries is almost impossible to trace out. But in the fifteenth century there was something of a revival of Lingayatism under the patronage of Vijayanagar kings. A compilation of *vacanas* called the Sunyasampādane was prepared at this time. Schouten comments on a noteworthy aspect of this compilation:

The compilers seem to have omitted deliberately almost every text that could refer to the revolutionary social ethics of their community in the initial stage (1995:64).

In modern times, the Lingayat "movement" has become a caste rather than a confessional community that transcends caste. This reality was obvious already

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in the colonial period, as summarized by Schouten:

The Lingayat community had become a caste just like the others. And the members tried vigorously to attain as much caste status as possible. Internal solidarity was sacrificed to this aim. Actually, the Lingayat community consisted of a conglomeration of castes which differed profoundly in status. In particular recent converts from lower background were not at all regarded as equals by the more established Lingayat groups. (1995:284)

The Anthropological Survey of India agrees with this assessment, defining twenty-four Lingayat communities and reporting that

the existence of social divisions such as clans (17), sub-castes (4) and sects (2) are reported among them. Six communities even recognize the varna system, of which five claim to belong to the Sudra order and one community is referred to as Vaishya (Singh 1998:1985).

Concluding Comments
Virasaivism is the classic case of a confessional movement turning into a caste. This process will be commented on later in this paper, especially to point out the dangers of generalizing from this Lingayat experience to other phenomena. The multiple Christian movements that dot Indian history cannot be easily compared with the Lingayats; but there is room to at least seriously question the basic ideology of attacking the caste system and seeking to establish an entirely new society on a radically different basis. No Christian movement can claim to have succeeded much further than the Virasaivas did in eliminating caste even from their own confessional body, let alone from India as a whole. Yet there certainly has been a significant contribution to the social transformation of India through these and other anti-caste movements.

2. The Vārkaris of Maharashtra
Introduction
It was my desire to attempt some measure of comparison between Vaishnavism and Christianity as a part of this paper. But the vastness and diversity of Vaishnavism made this almost impossible, so I sought a smaller and more easily defined *sampradāya* within Vaishnavism.[2] The final choice of the Vārkaris of Maharashtra was mainly biased by my desire to do more study on this noteworthy movement.

Pilgrimage
A Vārkari is by definition a person who regularly undertakes pilgrimage to the sacred city of Pandharpur in southern Maharashtra, singing devotional songs to Vishnu or Krishna in the form of Vitthal or Vithoba. The legend of Vitthal in Pandharpur is widely known, and I summarize here from Philip Engblom:

The story goes that Pundalik, after a self-indulgent youth during which he horribly mistreated his parents, repented and became thereafter a model of filial respect and loving-kindness. One day, as Pundalik was massaging his father's feet, Vitthal came to visit him and required hospitality from him as any guest would. Pundalik paused only long enough, out of the fervour of his devotion for his father, to throw a brick over his shoulder for Vitthal to stand on. This act of such absorbing filial devotion so pleased Vitthal that he decided to stay in that spot forever; and there he still remains, standing upright on his brick in the main temple at Pandharpur. (1990:12)

The historical roots of the Vārkaris go back to Dnyaneshwar (or Jnanadeva), traditionally dated from 1275-1296. Dnyaneshwar's commentary on the Bhagavad Gita in the local Marathi vernacular began a tradition of poet-saints that defined not only the

Marathi language but perhaps also the Maharashtrian psyche. (Cf. Engblom:

> It is, after all, the single richest treasury of traditional Marathi literature and culture, and its great poetry especially pervades Maharashtrian society at all levels (1990:4)).

Dnyaneshwar himself seems to have begun the tradition of pilgrimage to Pandharpur from his residence in Alandi.

The first account of the Vārkaris to appear in English was from the missionary Murray Mitchell, and missionary translations of writings of the poet-saints of Maharashtra remain in print to this day (particularly the work of Justin Abbott). In recent times a number of studies of pilgrimage in Hindu traditions have taken note of the Vārkari pilgrimages, which have many distinctive features.

Annually, or even twice or three times each year, the Vārkaris are to go to Pandharpur; the two main pilgrimage routes are from Dnyaneshwar's home of Alandi and from the home of Tukaram in Dehu, but from all parts of Maharashtra pilgrim groups go on the road. The pilgrims travel by foot in groups called *palkhis*. A *palkhi* in fact is a palanquin (a covered sedan chair), and there is a palanquin with wooden sandals representing the feet of one of the poet-saints at the head of each *palkhi*. Within the various *palkhis* are sub-groups of *dindis* who stay together for practical reasons.

Being a Vārkari

There is a simple initiation to the Vārkari Panth, but beyond that there is no sectarian mark, no central organization, no particular creed or sacraments (Deleury 1994[1960]:3f.). There is only the pilgrimage, with its central focus on *bhakti* (devotion). All along the pilgrimage route the devotional songs of the Maharashtrian saints are sung. But the basic unit of pilgrimage, the *dindi*, often exists outside of the pilgrimage itself. Deleury describes the Vārkari and the importance of the *dindi*:

> The Vārkaris are not professional pilgrims, they are ordinary men-of-the-world. The *dindi* is really the basic unity of the procession, an organic cell in the body, and its members are united together not artificially and for the short time of the pilgrimage only, but organically and for life. It is the practical aspect of this "community of Saints" which is so important a characteristic of the Vārkaris. The pilgrim goes on pilgrimage to benefit by the constant presence and the teachings of his *guru*. He finds in this daily and familiar contact a new impetus for his spiritual life because he can compare himself with the example of his master. (1994[1960]:104)

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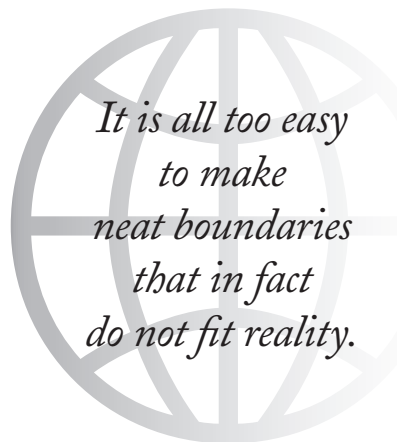
There are no caste restrictions on Vārkaris, although the main temple in Pandharpur was only opened to Dalits in 1947 (Deleury 1994[1960]:51). The openness of the *sampradāya* is seen in that non-Vārkaris are also welcomed into the pilgrimage, as seen in authors Deleury (1994[1960]:xi) and Mokashi (1990:60). It needs to be noted, however, that the lack of caste restrictions in the Vārkari Panth is not so absolute as the theoretical teaching would indicate. Deleury comments on this at some length:

> On the level of the *palkhi* one can say that this [caste-less] ideal is realized and it is a characteristic seldom found in other religious sects in India. The *palkhi* is composed of members of all castes, Brahmins, Marathas, Craftsmen, Kunbis and even Mahars. But one point must be made clear at the same time. The members of the various castes are not mixed together but the members of each *dindi* belong to one caste only.

> However, this is not in opposition to the ideal above mentioned: it is on the contrary a solution of the problem of the distinction of castes and of their life together. The idea of a group composed of individuals coming from various castes with different cultures, traditions and customs could only be an artificial juxtaposition and not a true community: this idea can exist only in the minds of idealists who have lost contact with human and social reality. The Vārkari solution is a happy compromise between the reality of the distinction between castes and the ideal of a social community to unite them. (1994[1990]:105)

Deleury comments further on the caste and social make-up of the Vārkari movement:

> Who can become a Vārkari? Theoretically everybody, without distinction of caste or race. Everybody is admitted in the midst of that spiritual family, and history shows that many of the holy men or saints respected by all were of low caste origins…Now, as before, the Vārkaris come mostly from the countryside, being farmers, Brahmin landlords or petty officers, craftsmen, and traders. Few of them are from towns and although some wealthy townspeople are found among them, they are mostly shopkeepers and traders…(1994[1960]:5)

Broad Comparisons

Defining and categorizing the complex developments in Indian religiosity is a hazardous enterprise. It is all too easy to make neat boundaries that in fact do not fit reality; it is equally unacceptable to consider everything a confused mass that cannot be analyzed. A standard, albeit rather vague, terminology often used of movements like the Vārkaris is "popular religious movement" or "popular Hinduism." Lorenzen offers a definition of a popular religious movement:

> By this I simply mean that most of their followers (though not necessarily their leaders) come from middle- and lower-class groups and not from elite sections of the population" (2004:4).

The Vārkaris are clearly a popular religious movement, and presum-

ably (historical data is not so clear) the Lingayats were as well. But the Lingayats acted on their anti-caste theology and became a separate community, nowadays a very influential community ("progressive and dynamic" (Singh 1998:1984)) that clearly is one of the dominant castes in the state of Karnataka today.

The transition of a spiritual movement or *sampradāya* or sect into a caste has been suggested as one of the common ways that castes developed in India. Louis Dumont in his famous study of caste presents this (*Homo Hierarchicus*, 1967:184-191) and Lorenzen refers to many others as well (2004:11f.). But Lorenzen severely objects to this theory:

> What makes this idea of the transition from sect to caste curious is the fact that it bears almost no relation to the empirical evidence of South Asian history (2004:11).

Going into more detail, he suggests that

> If we look at the relation between Hindu castes and Hindu sects from a more empirical and historical point of view, we find…most major Hindu sects–whether Vaishnava, Saiva or Sakta–have followers who come from a wide range of castes. The vast majority of such sects have shown no significant tendency to evolve into either endogamous castes or self-contained groups of castes. Examples include the Srivaishnavas in the south, the Chaitanyas in Bengal, the Vallabhas in western India, the Varakaris in Maharashtra, the Ramanandis in the north, and the Prananathis in central and west India. (2204:13)

Sociologically, therefore, the Vārkaris fit the general pattern of Vaishnava movements. It should be noted, however, that theologically the Vārkaris are unique to the point that many question whether they should be considered Vaishnavas at all! This aspect of definitional complexity will be dealt with in the next section of this paper.

Christian movements in India, considering their relationship to caste and Indian society, have generally followed the Lingayat pattern rather than

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the pattern of the major Vaishnava *sampradāyas*. As Vaishnavism is a broad conglomeration of movements that defies easy analysis, so also is Christianity in India. Yet Christianity in India has been far more at odds with Indian social realities than the Vaishnava *sampradāyas*. How far this reality has helped or hurt efforts to develop Christian popular religious movements will not be addressed at this point.

3. Kabir and the Kabirpanthis
Introduction
"Kabir is one of the best-known and most revered names in Indian tradition" (Vaudeville 2001[1993]:11). So Charlotte Vaudeville begins her analysis and translations of the life and work of Kabir (1398 or 1440?-1448 or 1518?).

Modern scholarship is probing many aspects of the Kabir legend and legacy, and many fundamental issues remain far from resolution. There are three standard collections of writings attributed to Kabir, as analyzed by Linda Hess (1987:111ff). The striking differences in these collections raise many questions.

Traditionally Kabir was seen as a synthesizer of Hindu and Muslim traditions, and this view is still commonly met. P. D. Barthwal gives a good summary:

> The basis for the common ground on which both the Hindus and the Moslems could amicably meet was supplied by the Vedanta of the Hindus and the Sufism of the Moslems, the latter being but the former with a passionate colouring. The new point of view [*nirguna bhakti*, see below] found its full expression in Kabir, who, though born of Moslem parents, had spent much of his time in the company of the Hindu sadhus and had learnt his lessons in Vedanta at the feet of Ramananda and those in Sufism in the association of Saikh Taqi. In him both Vedanta and Sufism joined hands to proclaim

that God is one and imageless, that He is not to be found in rituals and forms which are but veils of falsehood hiding Him from us, but is to be realized as one with us being enshrined in our own hearts, and forming the substance in all that exists. (2004:265)

This broad perspective, as well as many of the details mentioned, are rejected by other scholars. Hajarprasad Dvivedi presents an alternate interpretation:

> Kabir Das, having shown great courage in rejecting all exterior religious *acar* [ritual], appeared on the field of religious practice…With unswerving confidence, he established his own path of love…What do the people who consider Kabir Das to be a reformer who ecumenically harmonized the Hindu and Muslim religions have to say about this? It is hard to imagine. Kabir's path was very straightforward. He was not one who harmonized by bowing down to both. He was a revolutionary who destroyed all the snares of *acar* and bad concepts. (2004:285)

This brief introduction will obviously not even attempt to solve the complex problems involved in the history and interpretation of Kabir.

Nirguna bhakti
Kabir is one of the key figures in the Sant tradition of *nirguna bhakti*. The *nirguna-saguna* distinction is fundamental to Hindu philosophy. The *gunas* are qualities or attributes, particularly *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (darkness) as described in the Samkhya philosophy. The Vaishnava tradition emphasizes that God appears to us in *avatārs* ("incarnations") and *murtis* (images/idols), so that the deity is clearly *sa-guna* (with *gunas*). The Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Sankara stresses the limited nature of *saguna* manifestations and points to *nirguna (nir-guna*, without attributes) *brahman*, beyond all names and forms.

Nirguna brahman, beyond all names and forms, is beyond speech and comprehension, and surely also beyond *bhakti* (devotion)? But despite the quibbling of linguists and philosophers (ala Staal 1987), Kabir is one of many exponents of *nirguna bhakti*. Most noteworthy among the Sants (*nirguna bhaktas*) is Guru Nanak, as the Sikh religion developed out of Nanak's *nirguna bhakti*. (The Granth Sahib, Sikhism's holy book, contains a considerable collection of Kabir's work and is one of the three fundamental sources for Kabir referred to above.) The Maharashtrian poet-saints who inspire the Vārkari movement are also Sants, but are less purely *nirguna bhaktas*; they focus on the image of Vitthal in Pandharpur, yet also constantly point beyond all names and forms, thus the debate about their status as Vaishnavas referred to above.

Lorenzen points out the minority status of *nirguna bhakti*:

> Since the latter part of the fifteenth century, *bhakti* religion in North India has been divided into two major streams or currents—*nirguni* and *saguni*—ostensibly on the basis of a theological difference in the way of conceptualizing the nature of the divine being that is the object of worship. Those who prefer *sagun* ("with attributes") *bhakti* constitute the majority. (1996:1)

The differences are only "ostensibly" theological because there are important sociological factors as well. The Sants were strongly opposed to caste and idolatry, and the former point especially (and obviously) resonated with many from the lower castes. This sociological aspect becomes obvious in considering the *sampradāya* that adopted the name of Kabir.

The Kabirpanthis

Kabir is widely known and quoted by peoples of all theological and sectarian and caste associations. The movement that adopted his name, the Kabirpanthis, moved far away from his teaching on one of the most basic points. Vaudeville summarizes their teaching in this way:

Kabirpanthi sectarian literature, on which, as we have shown, most modern popular biographies of Kabir are based, presents Kabir as an avatar of the supreme Being, *"Sat Purush"*: the latter is supposed to have successively taken birth in each one of the four *yugas*—and Kabir, or Sat-Kabir—is the name he had assumed in the present *Kali-yug*. (2001[1993]:51)

Lorenzen traces out sociological issues that were determinative in the development of the Kabirpanth:

> The basic hypothesis of this paper is that the strong element of social and

A strong case could be made that Christianity in India is most comparable to the Kabirpanth.
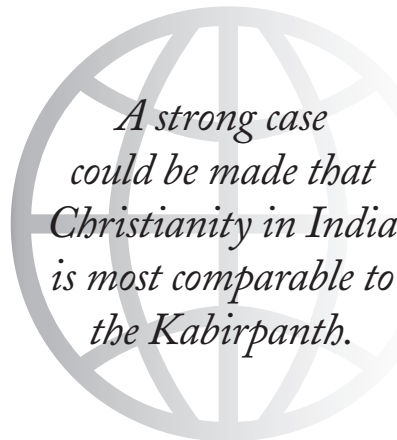
> religious dissent in Kabir's teachings, whatever its original intent and function, has been used by the adherents of the panth—mostly marginal groups such as Shudras, Untouchables and Tribals—to express their rejection of certain aspects of hierarchical caste ideology, at the same time that their membership in the Kabirpanth has fostered their actual assimilation within that same society. (1987:283)

Lorenzen later comments that "the monks of the Kabirpanth have Hinduized and Sanskritized the panth so that today it is flatly a Vaishnava Hindu sect" (1987:294).

Concluding Reflections

This very brief introduction to three important Indian religious traditions should at least demonstrate that Hinduism is not a religion about which one should make facile generalizations. The focus of these brief introductions has been on the development of religious movements in relation to Indian

society, for the purpose of questioning how disciples of Christ should relate to organizations and society.

A strong case could be made that Christianity in India is most comparable to the Kabirpanth. Jesus, like Kabir, is very widely and very highly esteemed. Yet few Hindus ever give a passing thought to joining sects considered as odd and marginal as the Kabirpanthis or the Christian denominations.

Christianity seems to have desired, and largely still to desire, to follow the sociological model of the Lingayats, separating from caste society completely. But it is almost inconceivable that such an approach could result in anything but the birth of another, actually many, new castes and communities. Is this really a viable model for new Christ-centered movements?

It has been suggested that Christianity is rather like Vaishnavism; broad and diverse yet with some core similarities uniting the various sects. But Christianity is a minor factor in Indian life compared to the massive appeal of Vaishnavism. Might it be preferable for Christ-focused people to become comfortable within their sociological communities, as seen in the Vārkari Panth and other Vaishnava *sampradāyas*? Is it possible that the future shape of Christ movements in India will be less separated from Indian society, more incarnational, yet still opposed to hierarchical caste ideologically and (as far as is viable) in practice?

There are no simple answers to such questions, and history often takes turns that no one anticipates or plans. But the issues raised in this paper are worthy of reflection, and thoughtful proponents of the way of Christ in India need to at least be open to alternatives to the traditional pattern of radical critique and rejection of traditional social structures. This traditional pattern is in complex relationship with the reality that most Christian movements in Indian history have been Dalit movements. (That is, is this pattern a cause, or a result, or both, of Dalit interest in Christianity?) But the foreign-ness of Christianity in

India is certainly related to this pattern, and remains a massive problem in communicating the way of Christ to Hindus. Thus those who wish to re-think the way of Christ in the Hindu world need to address this aspect of prospective Christ-centered movements in India. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] The assumptions of this paper are perhaps as important as its statements. The primary assumption is that "Hinduism" is a complex amalgamation of phenomena that cannot possibly be sensibly understood as "a religion." At the very least, various "religions" need to be recognized within the complexity of "Hinduism." Working from that assumption, three great religious movements within "Hinduism" will be briefly introduced.

A second assumption introduces the primary purpose of this paper. That is, followers of Jesus Christ who wish to make their faith relevant in the Hindu world need to make serious efforts to see the world as it appears from within the Hindu context. Specifically, this paper will make introductory comparisons of Christianity in India to three important indigenous Indian religious movements.

To compare and analyze the gospel in the Hindu world from a Christian standpoint is to violate the very definition of contextualization. From within the context, in this case the plurality of Hindu contexts, one must learn to understand and communicate the truth and way of Christ. By comparing Christianity in India with three important indigenous religious movements, it is hoped that valuable lessons will be learned for the future. The traditional practice of importing ecclesiastical structures from the West must be abandoned, and new patterns must be developed that learn from and adapt to (both positively and negatively) indigenous religious patterns. Just what form(s) contextual "churches" should take in India, just what paradigms should mold the development of Christ-centered movements in the Hindu world, are the prime questions that motivate this study.

Having stated some preliminary assumptions, and having introduced the goals and purpose of the paper while doing so, it also is necessary to emphatically state some disclaimers. The first disclaimer is against any suggestion that this paper is definitive. It is rather exploratory; and if it stirs thought and discussion, even without definite conclusions, it will have accomplished much.

This paper is also, quite necessarily, rather superficial. Three major Indian religious movements cannot be adequately introduced in one paper. But at least those three will be presented truthfully, with reference to other publications for those who desire to probe more deeply. The most superficial aspect of this paper will lie in its treatment of "Indian Christianity," which though surely not as diverse as "Hinduism" is nonetheless far from a single entity. Perhaps a detailed comparison of three "Hinduisms" and three "Indian Christianities" would result in a paper more in line with high scholarly standards. But as the paper is intended for a Christian readership, subtle distinctions among differing expressions of Christianity will need to be understood and applied by the reader.

[2] The proper terminology for "movements" or "religions" or "sects" or "denominations" within Hinduism is complex and controversial. The indigenous term *sampradāya* is probably best; the root meaning is tradition, or a body of teaching passed down from one teacher to another.

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T o compare and analyze the gospel in the Hindu world from a Christian standpoint is to violate the very definition of contextualization.