

# Hinduism: A Panoramic View for Christian Evangelism

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## Introduction and Background

Hinduism (*Sanatana Dharma*) is one of the oldest religions in the world predating other world religions by far<sup>1</sup>. It is believed to have been begun by several sages about six thousand years ago in the *Sindu*<sup>2</sup> valley, North West of India<sup>3</sup>.

A study of this most complex and diverse major religion is a fitting undertaking because its influence and magnitude cannot be ignored.<sup>4</sup> With a global population of nearly 1 billion (95% of whom reside in India), Hinduism has safely etched a place for itself among the leading global religions<sup>5</sup> thus worth paying attention to.<sup>6</sup> Although it stands different from Christianity (and relatively smaller at the present time), its influence and presence cannot be whiled away in the postmodern global context where cultures are in consistent interaction; consistently fluidly relentlessly intermingling.

This paper is not an exhaustive treatment of the entire religion but an attempt to give an overview of salient key aspects of Hinduism. Thus, the paper does not, therefore, proffer all the intricate details of Hinduism but is limited to the main key

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<sup>1</sup> Though some thinkers argue that Judaism is the most ancient.

<sup>2</sup> Connoting the idea of “beyond the river” or some such rendering.

<sup>3</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>4</sup> This alone underscores the necessity of gospel proclamation among Hindus. The laussane Committee report of 1980 repeatedly states that the Christian Church has hitherto neglected Hindus in gospel proclamation hence the repentance and resolve to intentionally spread the gospel to all without exception including the Hindu. We let they report speak for itself here from page 6: “Although the Christian faith is claimed to have been brought to India in the first century A.D. by the Apostle Thomas, resulting in the formation of a Christian church, it remained introvert and did not spread. In the 16th century, Catholic missionaries, such as Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili, brought the gospel to the Hindus. After them came the Protestants in a flood stream, with various mission societies establishing churches, as people movements spread mostly into the lower category of Hindu community. The emphasis on higher education by Alexander Duff and succeeding missionaries led to a Hindu renaissance giving birth to Hindu Reform Movements such as Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Prarthana Samej. The formation of Hindu Missionary Movements, such as the Rama Krishna Mission followed.”; *What is Hinduism?: Adventures into a Profound global faith* (Himalayan Academy, 2007), Xiv.

<sup>5</sup> Though some school of thought argues that *Hinduism* is not a *religion* per se given its characteristics but rather a *way of life*; a *philosophy*. Others argue that it is both. In this paper, we take Hinduism as one of the major global religions like Islam or Christianity.

<sup>6</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

elements and tenets of this faith. It also offers insights into the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism.

To kick start our exploratory excursion, it is prudent to highlight some salient features and peculiarities of the said religion. Of its multiple distinctives, the following listed below rank high:

First, Hinduism claims to be one of the most ancient of religions, giving birth to as well as absorbing all others<sup>7</sup> including Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> It is vast and complex, with a relative flexibility allowing it to mutate over time.<sup>9</sup>

Second, it claims to be the most tolerant of all religions.<sup>10</sup> By virtue of being extremely broad<sup>11</sup>, continuously evolving and growing, Hinduism allows people with different perspectives to freely operate within its vastly complex vale. In its essential nature, authentic Hinduism does not proselytize<sup>12</sup> or compel others to join the religion, and thus will respect and exist with other religions side by side,<sup>13</sup> although it has occasionally had its radical elements once threatened in its traditional native enclaves or lands.<sup>14</sup>

Third, Hinduism has sacred scriptures compiled over a period of thousands of years.<sup>15</sup> Although the said scriptures may not be in the closed canon form or sense of other religious books like the Qur'an or Bible, it none the less has several scriptures encapsulated in the *Sruti*<sup>16</sup> and *Smriti*.<sup>17</sup> The last parts to be

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<sup>7</sup> Kishor Trivedi, "An introduction to Hinduism," *Duke University* (May 1997):1.

<sup>8</sup> *What is Hinduism?: Adventures into a profound Global faith* (Himalayan Academy 2007), xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *What is Hinduism?: Adventures in a profound Global faith* (Himalyan Academy 2007), xiv.

<sup>11</sup> i.e. not monolithic in nature.

<sup>12</sup> The Laussane Committee on World Evangelism report of 1980 says the following on page 7: "A concept of mission is not one of the main tenets of Hinduism. But Hindu theologians, such as Vivekananda and Aurobindo, by their interpretation of the main teaching of Hinduism, have added this new missionary dimension. The missionary vision of some Hindus is posing a threat to Christian evangelistic activities. We now hear of cases of nominal Christians, as well as Hindu converts to Christianity, reverting to Hinduism. Further, western converts to Hinduism are being sent as Hindu missionaries to some parts of the world. The Hare Krishna Movement has a notable impact in many western countries. This movement has a big appeal to young people. In some western countries it has established centres for the propagation of this movement." This brief excerpt gives insights into the mutating nature of Hinduism in some areas from a non-missionary to missionary religion. This has implications for global missions by that token.

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 8. Names of fanatics like Nana Saheb have been mentioned as leaders of radical Hindus that slaughtered over 1,500 Christians and Missionaries in India, 1857. The Laussane Committee report of 1980; 7 shades further light on the inner workings, dynamics and transitions within Hinduism relating to its various shades and reactions to external threats posed by the established Missionary religions like Islam and Christianity. We quote the said report verbatim: "...modern trends in Hinduism find expression in the Harijan Movement\*, initiated and propagated by Mahatma Gandhi, in the missionary movement designed by Vivekananda, in a secular socialist ideology advocated by Jawaharlal Nehru, and in the militant communal sectarian groups such as Rashtriya Swayam Sevak (RSS)."

<sup>15</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1; Walter T Wallbank, Alastair M Taylor, Nels M. Bailey, George F. Jewsbury, Clyde J. Lewis and Neil J. Hackett, *Civilization: Past and Present*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. (Collins Harper, 1992), 101, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Carrying the idea of "received" These are said to be the primary scriptures and taken to be universally authoritative.

added to the Hindu scripture collections are the *Vendetta* connoting 'the end' or close of the scriptures.

Fourth, unlike other major religions, Hinduism does not have a specific founder but has over time mutated resulting from the many sages and *Brahmins*<sup>18</sup> that have come and gone over time. The Hindu saintly leaders or *gurus* are most venerated in Hinduism whose imperative teachings<sup>19</sup> and practices must be observed. Often their feats and legendary stories are repeatedly recounted within the Hindu religious circles.<sup>20</sup> These are considered holy men, although in a different sense to the Christian understanding.

Fifth, the religion is very strongly localized in India, but in the past several years has spread out, migrated, diffusing right across the world as Indians have transitioned with it. According to Klostamaier (2007: 1), today's Hindu Temples are dotted across the world with some of the prominent holiest Temples located in native India of course, although the largest Hindu Temple is found outside India, in Angkor Wat, Cambodia. According to some sources, the holiest number in Hinduism is 108 in relation to the distances between the earth and moon<sup>21</sup>.

Sixth, *Yoga*, a practice from Hinduism is now almost universally adopted in almost all religions, though expressions differ. Although a key function in one's journey towards reaching the state of *nirvana*, meditation, in the form of chanting, to attain inner peace has become an accepted practice in many contexts including some Christian settings. *Yoga* is of different sorts but it is *Yoga* none the less. The author was startled to discover a *Yoga* centre at a prominent Christian University in the USA at one time. When he worryingly enquired about this (*perceived wrong!?*) presence, he embarrassingly appeared "*out of date with the times*" because *yoga* is perceived as not only good but essential for good health, emotional stability and cognitive cohesion among others. After all,

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<sup>17</sup> Carrying the idea of "Remembered"

<sup>18</sup> These are highly revered or respected teachers in Hinduism who have devoted themselves to study and teach the Hindu scriptures. They are regarded the highest on hierarchical cast within Hindu considered closest to Brahma and highly esteemed in the Hindu culture. The Priests are often found in this bracket.

<sup>19</sup> The key being: Diversity; One universal soul (*Brahman*); Immortal individual Soul (*atman*); Karma; *Moksha*; Belief in *Vedas*; Cyclical time and *Dharma*.

<sup>20</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 18.

<sup>21</sup> An example of such a source is Vivek Pandit (2017) that claims the following for the importance of this number: "*During a puja, have you ever chanted a mantra for ten minutes or 25 times? Probably not! You may recall being told to recite it 108 times. Many Hindus have some form of 108 in their passwords, in their mobile numbers and license plates. Companies have made great marketing plans and logos with 108. But why is 108 viewed as holy? The answer, just like every other answer you will get from your parents, is that it lies in math and science. Vedic sages, pre-dating modern mathematical formulas, had it all figured out! According to Vedic cosmology, 108 is the basis of creation, represents the universe and all our existence. In Hinduism, we believe that outer cosmology should mirror our inner spirituality because our ultimate realization is that we are one in the same. It is said that the number 108 units represent the distance between our body and the God within us. According to Ayurveda, we have 108 marma points (vital points of life forces) in our body. So, this is why all mantras are chanted 108 times because each chant represents a journey from our material self towards our highest spiritual self. Each chant is believed to bring you 1 unit closer to our god within...*" Find the fuller discussion of this matter at: <https://www.hinduamerican.org/blog/heres-how-the-number-108-binds-us-to-the-universe/> where I accessed it on 06/10/2021.

meditation is about simple harmless breathing and mind control techniques, so why the worry? Additionally, Dr Ishwar V. Basavaraddi (2015) states the following about yoga: “Yoga is essentially a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle science, which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science of healthy living. The word ‘Yoga’ is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘Yuj’, meaning ‘to join’ or ‘to yoke’ or ‘to unite’.” Another anonymous source claims that: “Yoga is the world’s most practiced form of spiritual and Physical fitness procedure, originated from Hinduism in the Indus-Saraswati civilization 5,000 years ago...” Yet another authority, Iyengar (2020), asserts the following: “Your body exists in the past and your mind exists in the future. In yoga, they come together in the present.”<sup>22</sup> So, yoga is here to stay, not going away any time soon and thus merits diligent exploration rather than thoughtlessly rejecting!

### Nature of Hinduism<sup>23</sup>

But what is the exact nature of Hinduism? What is it composed of and what are its core tenets? Although not a full treatment, this paper gives a cursory overview of the subject matter. From the outset, it can be safely asserted that Hinduism is expressed in various forms, or comes in different shades.<sup>24</sup> The faith hordes a pantheon, yea, a multiplicity of deities pervading each and every sphere of life, though a number of deities stand out such as *Siva*<sup>25</sup>, *Brahma*<sup>26</sup> and *Vishnu*.<sup>27</sup> These three gods are presently the most popularly prominent today<sup>28</sup> and each is

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<sup>22</sup> Source: B.K.S. Iyengar, Yoga teacher & author of “Light On Yoga”. Access more of this thought at: <https://motherhoodcommunity.com/a-short-history-overview-of-yoga/> accessed on 06/10/2021.

<sup>23</sup> The Laussane Occasional paper 14 of 1980 entitled “Christian witness to Hindus,” gives a helpful background overview though some statistics have greatly changed since then. We quote part of what the paper says about Hinduism:

“The Aryans from Central Asia entered India in the 3rd century B.C. and settled on the banks of the river Indus. Their search for God resulted in the writing of the Vedas. Based on the Vedic scriptures was born the Aryan religion, which evolved into Hinduism. It absorbed everything, covering tribals and Dravidians. Hinduism dominated and built a strong sense of community in the Indian society, stratifying it into different castes. Wherever the Indian was taken, either to serve in plantations or in the British army, Hinduism followed, spreading far and wide. Generally speaking, a Hindu is born, not made. Except for recent trends of conversion to Hinduism, by and large the growth of Hinduism has been biological.”

LOP 14: Christian Witness to Hindus Thailand: *Laussane Committee for World Evangelism* (16-27 June, 1980); 1.

<sup>24</sup> It is widely diverse defying adequate comprehensive definition with only aspects of it described. The Laussane Committee of World Evangelism report of June 1980; 5 acknowledges this fact when it states the following: “There is no one definition which explains Hinduism in its entirety. In fact, it is a conglomeration of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and practices varying from people to people and from region to region.” The said report makes important distinctions as it elaborates the different shades of Hinduism including Philosophical, Religious, Popular, Mystic, Tribal, secular among others on pages 5 and 6. A great read, highly recommended. The report also gives an idea into the theological Missional thinking of the times.

<sup>25</sup> Siva is said to be the destroyer and one related to death and birth.

<sup>26</sup> Bach calls this “The supreme soul or essence of the Universe, immaterial, uncreated, illimitable, timeless. Brahma is conceived as comprised of the trinity-Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.”

<sup>27</sup> Bach calls this “the second god of the Hindu trinity, called “the preserver.”

<sup>28</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

important for various aspects.<sup>29</sup> For instance, *Siva* is said to be the god of destruction, death and life. Hinduism believes that every sphere of life is governed, regulated and affected by some deity. It further teaches that the social structure must be regulated by one's strata in life as dictated by the extant caste system.<sup>30</sup> Hinduism demands that a follower of a particular chosen deity<sup>31</sup> must observe certain standards and practices to earn salvation lest they continue in the never-ending cycle of re-incarnation<sup>32</sup> based on one's *karma*.<sup>33</sup> If they do not, for instance, worship correctly or are considered bad in one life period, this affects what they turn out to be in the next cycle of transmigration. This is called *karma*. For instance, a bad person in this life may turn out to be a frog or some such lower creature in the next life. The reverse holds true. If one was/is good in a given life period then the probability of a better re-incarnation is increased. Past life affects the quality and type of the ensuing one. Because Hinduism is animistic,<sup>34</sup> pantheistic,<sup>35</sup> monistic and mystical in nature, its myriad deities come across as powerful forces affecting one's fortunes. For instance, a cow is most sacred in Hinduism and one dares not kill it.<sup>36</sup>

## Core beliefs in Hinduism

Hinduism holds on to varying beliefs but several shared core tenets exist. The first of such is that of *re-incarnation*, *rebirth* or *transmigration*. The second is *Moksha* or the end of rebirth (*Samsara*; cessation) resulting in a state of *nirvana* or absolute tranquility.<sup>37</sup> The third is that there is only one single Supreme Being (*Brahma*) though expressing or manifesting in several key deities. Some Hindus therefore reject insinuations that Hinduism is polytheistic when in fact it is

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<sup>29</sup> Some sources claim that there are at least four denominations within Hinduism namely; *Vaishnavas* (*Vishnu* worship), *Shaivas* (*Shiva* worship), *Smartas* (text veneration such as *Puranas*, *Ramayana* etc.) and *Shaktas* (*Devi/Shakti*).

<sup>30</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 20. Some schools of thought within Hinduism reject this claim though asserting that it is a later addition and not part of Hindu's core but of an extant culture where it finds itself.

<sup>31</sup> From a plethora/pantheon of them.

<sup>32</sup> Or rebirth cycle in one form or another contingent on the previous life quality.

<sup>33</sup> Or 'fate' typically, '*the law of cause and effect*,' one reaps what they sow in the subsequent existence form derived from a previous life cycle.

<sup>34</sup> Or holds that the present life is directly affected by the invisible spiritual world. People walk around conscious of this reality and ensure they are in good books with the respective deities.

<sup>35</sup> Or the belief that specific spirits of gods live or inhabit localities, shrines or nature around. These deities are very potent with a potential to caste spells, effect omens, destroy or sweeten individual's lives contingent on how they conduct themselves.

<sup>36</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1. This partly explains why some Hindus turn out to be vegetarians, due to *Ahimsa* belief. Although technically, one would argue that even plants or vegetables have life in themselves, with some people from the Scientific community claiming that plants are equally able of feeling pain or some kind of emotion. Hindus claim that they do not actually worship Cows but honour it because it a representation of life. It eats grass but gives out far much more in terms of Milk, meat etc. It therefore deserves veneration. Same is true for other objects, they are said to be mere representation of the divine. In Hinduism, the belief called *Ahimsa* teaches that people should treat all things well including animals because these could be re-incarnations of important people including relatives, friends or monarchs!

<sup>37</sup> In Christian Theology, this may approximate to the eschatological final state of the redeemed.

monistic thus monotheistic, except that this one overarching being comes expresses itself in many ways.<sup>38</sup> Adherents merely worship aspects of this single being in myriads of forms in a ritual called *murti puja*, worshipping the divine being through mere representations of life (i.e. symbolic icons) such as carved idols but not the objects themselves. Hindus also believe that the human soul (*atman*) is connected to *Brahma* much like a river flowing into the sea. If people sooner realized that ignorance (*Maya*) kept them from uniting with *Brahma*, they would speedily be on their way to salvation, reaching *nirvana*, state of blissful tranquility in fewer reincarnation cycles. Bach (1959) summarizes the shared core beliefs of Hinduism as including:

- Identification (ones with the Supreme Being)
- *Karma* (practices determining one's destiny)
- *Reincarnation* (re-birth);
- *Moksha* (end of rebirth)
- Multiplicity of deities which are in fact one essence<sup>39</sup>
- Holy scriptures (*Vedas, Upanishads, Bagahvad Gita* (including the *Ramayana & Mahabrata*) among others (Wallbank et al 1992: 101, 103)

As stated earlier, Hinduism is expressed in various forms and to varying degrees. While having an elaborate layered cast system,<sup>40</sup> the *Brahmins*<sup>41</sup> are at the apex of the hierarchy while the *Shudras*, outcasts, serfs (workers) and untouchables are at the lowest ladder level.<sup>42</sup> Given these ranks and categories, one cannot cross or intermingle, let alone marry a person from another cast. It should however be noted that through the devotion route to salvation, people from different levels can have equal access to salvation<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>38</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Hindus insist that the Supreme Being (*Brahma*) is only ONE but expressing self in a myriad of ways mistakenly perceived as polytheism by Western Orientalists or Hinduologists. So to the Hindu, the charge of polytheism does not hold! All those varied expressions are just *murti puja* (i.e. *image worship*); different perspectives of one single being.

<sup>40</sup> Which include: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sunda: Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 20.

<sup>41</sup> T Wallbank et al *Civilizations: Past and Present* places the *Kshatriyas* (nobles) at the top in earlier generations but later replaced by the *Brahmins*.

<sup>42</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 20; Walter T Wallbank, Alastair M Taylor, Nels M Bailey, George F Jewsbury, Clyde J. Lewis and Neil J. Hackett, *Civilization: Past and Present*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. (Collins Harper, 1992), 102.

<sup>43</sup> Although Leroy Kenton in a You tube presentation ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGj0zOgw5\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGj0zOgw5_Q)) claims that this cast system is a false claim as not part of Hindus' intrinsic nature but a later cultural (and may we say, contextual) addition.

Dr. Timothy Tennent (2017) has highlighted core aspects of the religion as follows:<sup>44</sup>

- *Brahman*: Key quest of Hinduism, ultimate reality in *Sanskrit*.
- *Karma*: Act or deed, one of the eternal rules of cause and effect. Every deed has a corresponding effect into the next life.
- *Moksha*: Release from *Karma* or “salvation”. No longer any more rebirth.
- *Monism*; Non-dualism: Only one ultimate principle of existence or being.
- *Samhitas*: The Four *vedas*; *Rig*, *Artharva*, *Yajur* and *Sama*.
- *Atman*: The soul of the human being, basis of all reality.
- *Samsara*: A flow or turning round and round, ever turning wheel, rebirth, transmigration, reincarnation; in India, time is cyclical rather than linear.
- *Maya*: Illusion or the world is illusory. Makes a distinction between the real world and the other world. *Maya* is false way of looking at the world due to ignorance. This keeps people in the perpetual cycle of life in *samsara*.
- *Yoga*: Meditative techniques, way or path towards liberation to achieve *samka*. It includes breathe control, posture etc. often connected to the word “*Aum*” sound that resounds throughout the Universe.

Tennent mentions that this religion is not monolithic but diverse (i.e. at least six schools of thought) in nature that has stood the test of time. Agreeing with Tennent while slightly adding another dimension, Hopfe (2007), has asserted that Hinduism’s belief system is diverse and thus making it resilient, giving it leverage to continuously mutate thus surviving successfully despite the consistent and rapid contextual, social or cultural mutations. Hinduism easily adapts, being bereft of definitely fixed boundaries, limitations or scope.

### **Salvation (*Moksha*) in Hinduism**

Hinduism does not teach or talk about salvation in the sense and terms that other religions would use. For example, the blood atonement available in Christianity is foreign to Hindu thought or Theology. What then is the way of salvation and *Moksha*? According to Klostermaier (2007), there are basically three ways that a person can get delivered from *samsara* in Hinduism namely;

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<sup>44</sup>Timothy Tennent, (2017), accessible at: <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/essentials-hinduism/timothy-tennent>.

- Through devotion (*Bakti-marga*)
- Through knowledge (*Jnana-marga*) and
- Through works (*Karma-marga*)

Of the three options, naturally, most Hindus prefer the first because it cuts across strata and caste<sup>45</sup>. This path of devotion is arguably the most popular because it is accessible to all classes irrespective of their status within the caste system. Individuals simply devote themselves to a preferred deity to eventually find salvation. On the other hand, the path of knowledge is largely restricted to the upper classes such as the *Brahmins* who study the scripture, recite and pass on knowledge to other lesser worthies. Finally, the good works route, deeds and service are often preferred by those having the requisite wherewithal, financial muscle and ability to do what may be required. This is evidently restrictive for the paupers in many senses.

As may be noted, the Christian faith stands different from this religion because it is by faith through Him that died for them on the Cross. Salvation is by grace alone not by any works that a fallen heart can ever do or commit<sup>46</sup>.

### **Hindu Sacred scriptures<sup>47</sup>**

The Hindu faith has a collection of scriptures whose complete corpus is not easy to exactly delimitate though it does exist. The generally agreed and accepted text is found in the *Vedas* or *Trantras* composed of several parts as given below:

- The *Rig Verda*, believed to be the oldest scriptures. It is composed of the epics of *Mahabarata*<sup>48</sup> and *Ramayana*<sup>49</sup>, the *Brahmanas* (directions for ritual performance), *Purana* and *vendetta*<sup>50</sup>
- *Sama Veda*:
- *Yajur Veda*:

<sup>45</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Romans 3:21; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5-8 etc.

<sup>47</sup> *What is Hinduism? Adventures into a profound global faith*, (Himalayan Academy 2007), 66-67.

<sup>48</sup> Hopfe (2007: 60) states the following about the Mahabharata: "represents a whole literature rather than a homogenous work" It is said to be about the Song of victory. The main characters in the narrative are Arjuna, Krsna Vicitraviya, Pandu, Dhrtarastra and others. The story line is about two sons that take turns at Kingship. The first born, being blind is initially replaced by the younger more vibrant brother.

<sup>49</sup> This is another epic story whose story line includes the following: A prince is destined to take over Kingship from his Biological Father but is prevented by his Step mother, by the advice of an aid (Manthara), places her biological Son on the throne while exiling Rama (the Prince) for 14 years who is followed by his wife Sita daughter of King Janaka. The story ends with Rama being victorious.

<sup>50</sup> The *Vendetta* are said to be the 'closing or end' of the Hindu scriptures.



- *Atharva veda*:

Each *veda* has the following aspects: *Brahmanas*, *Aranyakas* and *Upanishads*, the latter being the philosophical parts<sup>51</sup>.

## Differences between Hinduism and Christianity

Christianity and Hinduism are different in nature and purpose<sup>52</sup>. Although Hinduism claims to be wider and all embracing, categorizing Christianity as one of its elements or caste categories<sup>53</sup>, it does not actually represent the Christian faith in the sense that the Christian faith and world view are different. Whereas Hinduism posits one god with a myriad attributes and expressions (Desai 2021), the Christian faith maintains that God is one in essence and nature though subsisting in three distinct persons, in the economic Trinity<sup>54</sup>. Ontologically, God is said to be one and thus cannot be broken into parts or expressions as Hindus attempt to suggest. The Hindu deity is expressed in over 33 million<sup>55</sup> ways whereas the Christian God is one personal being both immanent and transcendent. Second, salvation in the Christian faith is by Grace through faith not by works, asceticism, ritual or some form of Gnosticism as is evident in Hinduism<sup>56</sup>. The Cross is central to the Christian faith not in the sense that sacrifices are in Hinduism. Third, Christianity argues that salvation is found only in one mediator, the man Christ Jesus<sup>57</sup>, which is absent in Hinduism. Fourth, Hinduism has no definite founder or one comprehensively complete set of scriptures as is the case in the Christian faith. The Christian faith revolves around the Lord Jesus who is the only way to the Father and through whom all are saved by Grace through faith<sup>58</sup>. Further, the Christian scriptures are one whose overall theme is *Yahweh* from both the Old and New Testaments. The Christian canon is complete, closed and not growing or diminishing unlike the Hindu scriptures, though developed over a very long period of time by many sages it continues to mutate and grow as each new *Brahmin* or reincarnated deity comes along once in a while, effecting changes. It can safely be said that the Hindu scriptures are varied with different claims on different groups of people. The *Vedanta*, for instance, means “*The end of*” the Hindu scriptures composed of different parts. Dr. Johnson Philip makes a case that Hinduism and Christianity are different in nature, scope and end despite at times appearing similar. One is divinely inspired

<sup>51</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), .

<sup>52</sup> William P Hedrick, “Hindu worldviews and the Christian Believer” Senior Thesis Liberty University (Spring 2008): 41.

<sup>53</sup> *What is Hinduism? Adventures into a profound global faith*, (Himalayan Academy 2007), 47 & 49.

<sup>54</sup> *What is Hinduism? Adventures into a profound global faith*, (Himalayan Academy 2007), Xvi.

<sup>55</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). Some sources put the number at 330 million rather than 33 million (Mr. Kaushik Desai of Kitwe-Zambia settles for the latter). Ravi Zacharias holds the same (i.e. 330 million deities): *Jesus among other gods* (Nashville Tennessee: WPublishing Group), 4-5.

<sup>56</sup> *What is Hinduism? Adventures into a profound global faith*, (Himalayan Academy 2007).

<sup>57</sup> I Tim 2:3; Acts 4:12.

<sup>58</sup> John 14:6; Acts 4:12.

while the other has its root in the wisdom of men, *gurus* or sages over the years. Fifth, the Hindu world view is different from the Christian in outlook and premise<sup>59</sup>. While both world views argue that the whole of life is to be affected by the divine, the Hindu religion affects all aspects of life in some measurably deeper way such as the dress, food, seasons of performing prescribed rituals or festivals (such as ceremonial washings, bathing in sacred rivers, rites of passage, asceticism and so on), pilgrimages and places to visit etc. Hinduism has the caste system and heavily influenced by *Karma*. One's lot in the present life is determined by the past life and one's destiny is equally influenced by present behavior in this life. There exist a continuous cyclical rebirths and deaths before one reaches *Moksha* (if at all one successfully makes it). The Christian faith is however different because it does not teach re-incarnation but declares that once someone dies, judgment follows into eternity<sup>60</sup>. Many other differences exist between the two which we do not delve into in this paper such as the occult, mysticism, meditation (types) and places of worship among others.

### **The Hindu World View<sup>61</sup>**

To effectively engage Hinduism or any adherent for that matter, there is need to grasp or know certain key things about the religion. Without this, it will prove, humanly speaking, significantly more difficult to penetrate past the multiple layers veiling the eyes of the ardent Hindu follower. The adherent lives in a unique orbit where all sorts of things, beliefs and factors colour or affect their perceptions or/and decision making. Hindus perceive and interpret the world around them in a particular unique way. Thus, they will behave consistent with what they deem right or aspire after as long as it does not diminish their chances of achieving *Moksha*, salvation followed by *nirvana*, a state of perfect bliss. All Hindus aspire morphing into some form of pure deity venerated by others rather than the opposite. They thus do everything within their power to avoid detraction from achieving their goal and may at times turn to extreme ascetic acts including (in some cases) but not only voluntary poverty, abandoning material things, engaging in purification rites, rites of passage, long and perilously hard walks to bath in sacred rivers, at times live as monks etc., all in the quest to attain purity thereby increasing their chances of a better lot in the next life<sup>62</sup>. An interview with Mr. Kaushik Desai (Kitwe, Zambia) revealed that Hindus aspire after saving humanity through prayers, equity, fair play, honesty, working well with others to ensure a good *karma*. He further asserted that Hindus are one and do not have to convert but just practice set rituals including chanting, prayer to achieve the much sought after inner peace. What was startling was the discovery that not all

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<sup>59</sup> We elaborate on it more fully in ensuing sections of the paper.

<sup>60</sup> Hebrews 9:27.

<sup>61</sup> Refer to William P Hendrick, "The world Views of Hinduism and Christian Believer," Senior Thesis, *Liberty University* (Spring 2008): 5.

<https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1035&context=honors>.

<sup>62</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 16.

Hindus were necessarily religious because Hinduism was not a religion per se but *a way of life*. Thus, even Atheistic Hindus existed, as long as they were morally good people. Furthermore, Hindus could be found in every place depending on what deity they chose. In Desai's revelation, a Hindu could thus be found in about every religion as long as they observed good practices, not necessarily converting or exercising faith in another for salvation. By default, Jesus, as Ravi Zacharias rightly pointed out, is one among many gods! The discussion was quite revealing to this researcher. That said, what then is the Hindu world view? What shared features make up this grid through which a Hindu responds or reacts to reality around them?

As earlier hinted at, Hinduism is far from being a monolithic faith, given its vast array and complexity. To achieve our ends, we summon some authorities to aid our argumentation. First, Hinduism is premised (and derived from) on the various scriptures derived from the teachings of the ancient sages. These collected established scriptures give a sense of what Hinduism is about, its history, key figures, epic tales, deities and what one must do to reach *nirvana*. Mr. Kaushik Desai affirmed this fact during a research interview (May 2021, Kitwe). One must accept the scriptures, practice what is prescribed, though select and devote to a preferred route towards *Moksha*. Second, Hindus believe in a multiplicity of countless deities. Apart from being animistic, Hindus strongly believe that the conscious unseen spiritual world has direct impact/bearing on the current. One's portion in life, outcomes or blessing depends on the relationship they have with the spirits. This translates into omens, bad reincarnation or even bad luck, if one is not politically correct. People therefore, spend their entire lives desiring to better their lot now and in the next life, whose cycles is undeterminable. Third, Hindus hold re-incarnation, the fact of rebirth in another ensuing life contingent on their *karma*. For the Hindu, the present life is not the end nor is it the first one because what presently is most likely resulting from one's *karma* in a previous life period. Mr. Kaushik Desai preferred the term "*rebirth*" over reincarnation as it made more sense to him. If, for instance, one is a pauper or a lower creature, it may just be that they did not live well in a previous life, hence the need to make amends in the present whilst in the quest for *Moksha*. A Hindu lives in constant fear or check ensuring that they end up well<sup>63</sup>. Fourth, Hindus believe that one

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<sup>63</sup> Though others claim that Hinduism has joys which outsiders know nothing about. An example is the book *What is Hinduism: Adventures into a profound global faith* (Himalayan Academy 2007),6. It says the following: "Tonight we want to speak on the joys and happiness found in Hinduism, our ancient religion which brings forth the wonderful feelings of a belief in the cosmic processes of reincarnation coupled with knowledge of the laws of karma and the wisdom of dharma in which everyone has his rightful place and purpose in life. It brings the broadmindedness of total acceptance of all other religions as expressions of the One God's creation, the blessing of a complete devotional path revolving around powerful temples, the fulfillment of a profound mystical teaching founded on yoga and brought forth by the seers and saints and gurus, and so much more. Our religion is so strong, so rich and varied that very few can claim to understand it in its completeness. It is immense, an immense religion, so immense that we have difficulty sometimes explaining it to those who hold to a simpler doctrine, especially if they have been subjected to erroneous concepts about our religion promulgated by invaders and missionaries of a score of alien religions. It is time that the world knew of the greatness of Hinduism, knew it as it is. Of course, we cannot explain it in an evening. Mr. Satguru, the great Siva Yogaswami of Columbuturai, would say, "The time is short and the subject is vast. "But we can have a look at some of the aspects of Hinduism that bring such joys and happiness to over a billion devotees around the world. Each Hindu's belief in reincarnation is so strong that it totally eliminates the fear and dread of death. No true

must aim to become divine at some point in future. Every effort should be made to escape the cycle of life into the eternal blissful state. While in Christianity, people aspire after unending life, Hindus prefer the end of the life cycle! In short, each of us is inherently divine, if only we discover and cast off ignorance (*Maya*). According to this faith, humans are inherently pure and good but affected by circumstances, context or (bad) decisions. These (vices?) defile the person thus messing up their bliss prospects. Fifth, Hindus do not believe they should proselytize because within its vale, Hinduism gives room for various expressions, assuming that all other faiths are expressions of this one complex philosophy of life; Hinduism. Desai, in commenting about the sharply declined numbers of Hindus in Zambia (from 15,000 to about 5,000 indigenous Hindus), stated that Hindus do not believe in converting anyone as Hinduism was voluntary and not coerced. He was thus not really worried about the reduced numbers (although he would have loved a growth in numbers too) which he attributed to emigration to the Western world in recent years. Once children (progeny of Hindus) went off to study abroad, they rarely returned leading to a decline. He however stated that a myriad other Hindus had migrated to Zambia in the intervening period, in a sense compensating for the loss of the indigenous. Chances are (as earlier alluded to) that that which comes across as potentially different is but an exaggerated expression of what already exists within the faith. Perhaps more attention must be given to the supposedly “new” deity from among the 33<sup>64</sup> million+ pantheons of gods around the world. At one-time Buddhism caused quite a stir but in time was considered a component of Hinduism. Mutation and accommodation did the trick for the latter religion. Furthermore, Hinduism seems to be consistently morphing, evolving, expanding and acquiring new traits over time, after all, its’ very scriptures are not a closed canon, so some argue. This attribute allows the religion to acquire many faces and expressions though with one shared core. This gives leverage for the accommodation and toleration of different beliefs within one cohesive religion. Another aspect true to the Hindu world view is that it is an intensely social faith with prescribed rituals performed together at carefully selected times in relation to astrological indicators. Hindus perform many rituals, ceremonies, festivals (such as *Diwali*), offer sacrifices continuously pacifying deities as prescribed. Done as individuals in the privacy of their home shrines or as a community at the Temple, Hindus venerate their gods with unquestioned loyalty. Their idols are cleaned, fed, sacrificed to, preserved and jealously guarded from any perceived attacks or danger. During worship, these idols receive repeated adoration, through chants, incense burning or prostration as the case may be. Given the social nature of the religion, Hinduism sits well in a collective communal culture where honor rather than individualistic aspects are highly prized. So, if one is to connect, they should know that to the adherent, the

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*Hindu really fears death; nor does he look forward to it. The word death in the vocabulary of the Hindu holds a different meaning. He does not take death to be the end of existence; nor does he look upon life as a singular opportunity to be followed by eternal heavenly existence for those souls who do well, and by unending hell for those who do not. Death for the Hindu is merely transition, simultaneously an end and a new beginning. Over two thousand years ago, Saint Tiruvalluvar wrote, “Death is like falling asleep, and birth is like awakening from that sleep” (Tirukural 339).”*

<sup>64</sup> Some like Ravi Zacharias & Kevin Johnson (2000; p 4-5) places this at around 330 million.

social standing, favorable perception by spirits or gods as well as the destiny into the next phase of life in a cyclical religion is very important. Time goes in circles rather than linearly for the Hindu. The past, the present and to some extent, the future is critical, though not in the same sense a western mind would ordinarily perceive things. A final related thought to Hindu world view is that adherents wish to connect with the divine pure spirit called *Brahman* within an individual. Thus, to the Hindu, God is impersonal, incapable of feelings, emotions or some such attributes true of frail humans. He/it is pure, transcendent and can only be connected to by meditation, at times on nothing but focusing on the inner being. This can go either directions including soul travel, ability to perform extra ordinary feats or some such which connects one to the divine energy resident in the Universe<sup>65</sup>. In a sense, we could say that Hindus are agnostically deistic though they claim to be gods themselves in their spiritual nature. There is need to first peel off these layers, connect and then present the Gospel of Christ, though the gospel has inherent power to demolish all strong holds blinding the unregenerate (Romans 1:16-17).

### **Areas of concerns in Hinduism for the Christian**

As evident from what we have thus far highlighted, Hinduism is a different world altogether for it perceives and reacts to the world in different ways, though some things are shared with Christianity. Hinduism is an intensely social religion thriving on intricate complex relationships among people (doing good works, or ascetic kind of fasting-*karma*), doing ones' duty (*dharma*), devotion to gods (*bhakti*), meditation (*yoga*), development of spiritual knowledge (*jnana*), purification rites (e.g. ceremonial washings or bathing in certain sacred rivers for cleansing such as in the Ganges.) and to the scriptures<sup>66</sup>. Given its "open" and continually expanding nature, Hinduism defies exact firmly fixed boundaries by which to define it<sup>67</sup>. It continuously evolves acquiring attributes thus allowing it to fit easily in every and any context. No wonder adherents dub their religion '*The Eternal Teaching*' because it is consistently mutating, expanding and growing<sup>68</sup>. Hindus carry their religion as they migrate around the world, apart from being found in one of the most densely populated countries in the world, India. Unlike Christianity or Islam, dogmas in Hinduism exist<sup>69</sup> but not of the exclusive nature as found in the former or latter religion(s)<sup>70</sup>. This gives Hinduism the singular comparative advantage because, in its essential and traditional nature, it is not a *missionary religion* and may exist relatively peacefully and quietly alongside other religions for ages. It seems to have, within itself, an inbuilt DNA for sustainability,

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<sup>65</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 14.

<sup>66</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 6.

<sup>67</sup> Thus, we cannot claim to fully or totally explain it in this treatment. It is very vast, complex and varied. We touch only some key components in our treatment of it.

<sup>68</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 5.

<sup>69</sup> Though Kishor Trivedi claims Hinduism has no dogmas at all and thus encourages freedom of thinking unhindered by a fixed canon: "An introduction to Hinduism" *Duke University* (May 1997):4.

<sup>70</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 5.

pragmatism, an alternative to health or soul peace (i.e. meditation etc.) prosperity (or even omens) as well as at least three paths to achieving *Moksha* status, contingent on one's preference and ability. Like Islam, Hinduism is a works based religion. Desai (2021) repeatedly confirmed this during our research interview with him. From the foregoing, the Christian notes that Hinduism syncs well with postmodern thought, has wormed itself into popular thought and even affecting the Scientific community unawares! For instance, it is from Hinduism that we derive thoughts like a *multiplicity of Universes*<sup>71</sup>, living other lives (re-incarnation), (Soul travel?), avatars among others. A further concern for the Christian is that Hinduism has spread all over the world now albeit relatively thinly, even in places where it once scarcely could be found like the Western world. Hindus are increasingly found everywhere with trade mark temple or Hindu halls as is the case in the Zambian scenario, although Desai claims that the indigenous (not immigrant) numbers have declined in recent years on the Zambian context. Although Hindus may modify their dress, their thinking and practices remain essentially the same. I recall many years ago as a young College student, I had a good Taxation subject instructor. The course was dubbed a "killer" course but this fine instructor, of Asian origin, ably managed it exceptionally well. He helped myriads to safely navigate their way through the troubled, muddied tax waters to safety and success. Whoever went through his class, of course rightly applying themselves, excelled without much ado. Though desiring to pass the lethal course, I was curious what religion he held and whether he was heading for Heaven. An opportunity once afforded itself one afternoon where, whilst teaching, he casually referred to his "god" at home. That remark caught my attention and impulsively publicly asked him what type of god it was that he worshipped. The unsuspecting elder man swiftly and delightfully responded that it was a curved image placed at a special shrine within his house, to which I instinctively sharply retorted that his idol was no god at all but an empty fable of human imagination! The man was stunned and conveniently ignored me, though my classmates were shocked at my candidness, given our polite African culture. After class, I walked up to him and requested to see his god but the horrified man vehemently refused to allow me. He instead feared for me (lest an omen befall me!) but again, I declared that the idol was worthless. Isaiah 46:5-10 was actively flowing & burning within my veins! From that day, the man kept his distance from me but remained amazingly fairly cordial towards me. I respected him a lot but not his idol. All to say, Hindus carry their religion where ever they go. Another point of note is that Hinduism seems relatively more "user friendly" compared to other faiths, allowing diverse views if not, from a non-regenerate perspective, apparently relatively more inclusive. This sharply contrasts with Christianity or Islam. Added to the inherent need to do social good in the quest towards attaining *nirvana* through *Moksha*, Hinduism can easily suck and sweep away unsuspecting people into its mold. The increasingly loud mantra today is "interdependence," "pluralism," "tolerance" or working together minus

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<sup>71</sup> Some refer to it as *Multiverse*. As an example, readers are encouraged to refer to this source for further insight: <https://www.livescience.com/multiverse>, accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. Although comes across as Scientific, its root thoughts match well with Hindu theology or thought.

'dangerous' dogmas, Hinduism fits the bill perfectly well and likely to garner a following with time (Zacharias & Johnson 2000; 4-6). An example will do. If a number of us are selling same goods in the same market space where terms around pricing or quality are the same, customers end up where they prefer but could easily switch to a competitor since goods/pricing are the same. However, if say three of us suppliers sell the exact same good but at differing prices or terms (including after purchase support, guarantee etc.), chances are that the one with the most favorable terms or lower pricing will carry the day, because customers want to maximize utility value at very optimum competitive terms. Hinduism, in our present physical humanistic context, is that entity with the lowest prices, "best quality" and extremely flexible terms and therefore poised to generate huge demand, if people cease to think logically or linearly. What customers do not realize is that there is a hidden "catch" to these great potent offers. The Christian therefore must work extra hard to make unbelievers notice that Christianity is not comparable to Hinduism and its offering uniquely different. It is differentiated in the sense that it offers hope for now and eternity with no endless cyclical re-incarnations. In Christianity, a person once lives, dies, judged and finally consigned to an eternal state of either bliss or torment<sup>72</sup>. Salvation (i.e. deliverance from sin and its consequences) is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). This alone takes time to effectively communicate to the lost or spiritually blind, given their depraved nature (Ephesians 5:8-9; Romans 1:21-25; I Corinthians 1:18-21). Spiritual darkness blinds them to spiritual realities<sup>73</sup>. Yet another point of concern is that Hinduism is communal rather than individualistic. As it spreads, in its path, we may increasingly see communities set up where the previously heralded principles of individuality, freedoms among others, may be eroded or at best altered<sup>74</sup>. Honour cultures have a way of compelling conformity or else penalties result<sup>75</sup>. Although one could argue that this particular argument is weak because cultures differ from the religion itself, it is safe to say that what one believes plays out in practice, behavior or decision making. Honor cultures rarely make individual decisions because their every move impacts on the rest of the clan. Well, there could be other areas worth musing over but these should suffice for now.

## How Christians Can or Should Engage Hindus

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<sup>72</sup> Hebrews 9:27.

<sup>73</sup> Ephesians 4:17-20; II Corinthians 4:4.

<sup>74</sup> Not that I necessarily favor individualism (or egoism) over communal life view, far from it!

<sup>75</sup> "honour culture" used not in the standard sense where even violence can result as retaliation for offence or self-preservation. Hinduism may not be in that class but has built such influences around adherents compelling them to conform or else suffer shame. The Lausanne Committee on World Evangelism, pages 11 & 12, touch on this critical honor issue, albeit indirectly when it handles the "hindrances to Evangelization of Hindus" point (ix). Repercussions follow once one converts to an alternative faith; another source directly confirms our assertions: Atul Y. Aghamkar, Partnership in Evangelizing Global Hindu Diaspora *EvangelicalInterfaith.org* (May 2015):7.

<http://evangelicalinterfaith.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Partnership-in-Evangelizing-the-Global-Hindu-Diaspora.pdf>.

How then should Christians engage Hindus? In my example earlier alluded to, my Business Taxation course instructor<sup>76</sup> instantly closed up when I challenged or declared his curved image a worthless idol. Was my approach correctly brave or did I shut a golden opportunity unawares? This is somewhat difficult to determine but I could say that had I known the things I now know, I probably would have found a better way of connecting and sustaining a lively conversation<sup>77</sup>. He probably would have still rejected the Christian faith any way, though with due respect, decorum and grace. Equally, he could have been won over to the crown<sup>78</sup> rights of Jesus for in the gospel is the power of God. In my thinking, Christians need to know certain things about Hinduism and then carefully engage while presenting the claims of Christ well. Additionally, in my view, Hinduism is somewhat philosophical in nature and syncs well with the *New Age Movement* premised on postmodern thought. Ravi Zacharias and Kevin Johnson, in their book *Jesus among other gods* make an interesting case for Christianity, having himself (i.e. Ravi) hailed from the same background. Ravi states that Hindus think in a particular way with their chief goal to attain divinity in *Moksha* or at worst, re-incarnate into something better in the ensuing life cycle contingent on their immediate past *karma*. He tells of how as a youth, he applied himself towards that end until he fell very ill when questions bugged his mind (Zacharias & Johnson, 2000: 3-5). Later, moving to the West, Ravi imbibed the Christian faith. This is a good moving narrative but not all Hindus travel this same exact trajectory. I give some pointed suggestions on how best to engage:

First, as early suggested, Christians need to have an intelligent grasp of Hinduism, its tenets and how adherents think. Second, Christians must take a genuine interest, expressing sincere love in & to their Hindu neighbors as kindness and consideration makes a huge difference<sup>79</sup>. Our interactions with Hindus confirms this thought. Both Mr. Desai and the Priest Pathak were extremely helpful and delighted once engaged in a cordial way. This left a memorable impression on the researcher's mind. He recalled how many years before, growing up in the Lusaka suburbs<sup>80</sup>, the immediate Hindu neighbor was most kind and gracious. Both these behavior patterns are consistent with authentic Hindus. It is necessary to be somewhat 'incarnational' and sensitively empathetic. The Christian evangelist must wisely and visibly practice Servant

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<sup>76</sup> A Mr. Sakhar, old but wise Hindu man. Very smart too at tax matters.

<sup>77</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 7.

<sup>78</sup> Laussane Committee on World Evangelism, 1980; 8 brings some insights and tensions that a native Hindu context culture born evangelist faces as they propagate the gospel. The paper says: if "...*Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became flesh within an Asian context. During the days of his flesh, he lived within a Hebraic cultural framework within this Asian context. He was poor. He walked among the villages and wept over the cities. He accepted social rejects and understood the fluctuating fortunes of leadership within a tangible human society. The Hindu can understand him. Before such an understanding can be effected, however, Jesus Christ must be made known to the Hindu. In this effort to communicate Jesus Christ to the Hindu, the Indian Christian faces the tension between being faithful to the content of the Bible, and relating this content to the theological, philosophical, and religious context of the Hindu.*" These are very helpful nuggets for Hindu Evangelism.

<sup>79</sup> Laussane Occasional report, "LOP 14: Christian Evangelism to Hindus" Thailand: *Laussane Committee of World Evangelism* (16-27 June, 1980): 12.

<sup>80</sup> i.e. Rhodes Park, Lusaka.



leadership as encapsulated in John 13:14. This is a unique skill which for many may be a steep learning curve, given our 'chief mentality kind of culture,' but essential. If you find yourself in a position to witness for Christ, be gracious and never condescending as much as possible. Hindus themselves will appear gracious though expecting reciprocal behavior from the Christian. For instance, they may visit your and my Church once or twice but expect a reciprocal visit, in a cordial way of course. Though Temple regulation differ, Hindus think Christianity or Islam are but one of the many sub religions of Hinduism<sup>81</sup>. This repeatedly comes out when interacting with Hindus, although not in a dogmatic fashion, explaining why Hindus have absolutely no problem with any other religion existing side by side with it. Third, the Christian should know how to reason both cyclically as well as linearly. Cyclical religions tend to be animistic as well as treasure history or historical events. Christian be aware. Fourth, Christian be careful when you do what and when for Hindus circumspectly follow astrologically determined rituals and ceremonies. Fifth, know how Hindus perceive Christians or Muslims. They consider themselves (Hinduism) more gracious and tolerant unlike missionary religions<sup>82</sup>. Prove them wrong by genuine sincere concern though focused on evangelism. Benson (1988: 5) asserts that philosophical arguments are of little worth, more or less what Paul urges Timothy albeit in a different context (I Timothy 6:3-5). Rather we need to point them to the power and efficacy of Christ and His gospel. Sixth, help them see that the worship of countless deities is meaningless for there is only one true God, *Yahweh*. Some will agree with you that there is heno-theistically only one God for sure but then add that this same Supreme Being manifests or expresses himself in 33 million ways!<sup>83</sup> This is classic monism. In one breathe they dogmatically agree with you on monotheism but in the next claim that this one being has millions of expressions! You need to know your doctrine of God really well. Seventh, present the gospel of salvation to them, pointing to the claims of Christ, his passive and active obedience on the cross. Let them see that rituals, ceremonial washings or sacrifices cannot appease a thrice Holy God but only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Granted, the substitutionary atonement idea will not make sense to them because their religion is works based which the individual must perform to get a slot into *Moksha* divine route (Desai, 2021). The gospel of peace frees one from human made bondages allowing one to live life to the full<sup>84</sup>. Abundant life is found only in the finished work of Christ and available to all people without distinction and not exception. These are the claims of the Christian faith holding promise for both the life that now is and the one to come, to paraphrase scripture. Our lives now are real, not imagined or an illusion (i.e. *Maya*) and thus must be lived well<sup>85</sup>. In as much as Hinduism claims that humans are inherently good but simply mistaken or

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<sup>81</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 9.

<sup>82</sup> Ian E. Benson (1988:10) makes an interesting claim that though Hinduism is tolerant to other religion, it however prohibits them.

<sup>83</sup> Our interview with Hindus have affirmed this belief. Though they agree to the multiplicity of deities, they none the less claim that there is only one Brahman with millions of expressions, Jesus being one of these.

<sup>84</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>85</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 16.

ignorant, the Christian faith asserts that all are inherently sinful and prone to sin, they can be delivered, set free and elevated to sainthood if only they bow the knee to the savior in repentance and faith (Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23). The Holy Spirit is the one that regenerates bringing about spiritual life for the glory of God not man (Titus 3:3-8). Hindus need to hear this and who knows, they may turn from idols to the living God as was the case for the Thessalonians centuries ago!<sup>86</sup>

## **What Others have Said or Written About Hinduism**

Drs. Philip Johnson and Cherian have written a potent document that highlights the differences between Hinduism and Christianity. In the said work, they state that what may at face value seem to be typical similarities between the two faiths in fact does not equate to them being the same. They argue and warn Christians to beware of deceptions that have been taking place in India, leading to ecumenism in some cases. Their write up is truly insightful. Bach (1959) has equally written a good summary of Hinduism giving the key insights into the religion in only a few pages, a good read for the Christian. Klostermaier's (2007) monumental, if not legendary work on Hinduism is a master piece for a person desiring a deeper understanding and appreciation of Hinduism. Although not a Christian per se, this academic gives excellent insights into the religion, its origin, development and effect on domestic and public life in places where the religion is dominant. Hinduism has its supporters and opponents within and without the faith but suffice to say is that it has weathered the storm and has kept mutating to a point where it keeps marching on.

## **Lessons Gleaned from Hinduism Considerations**

There are many lessons that can be gleaned or learnt from Hinduism. The lessons are so many but for now, we highlight some of the key lessons and implications in point form:

1. Hinduism is a very vast, complex, non-monolithic, diverse and increasingly wide spread religion in a global context. It has been exponentially spread, thanks to Globalization and migration of people (Wallbank et al. 1992: 104).
2. The religion is perceived to be the most tolerant, flexible and accommodating since it does not seriously have a standard agreed fixed canon. It evolves with the times. By that token, it potentially can out-grow other religions. In our view, contingent on context, we dare say that Christians should carefully watch Hinduism even more than Islam because of its close nature to postmodernism and its "helpful" fluid nature.

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<sup>86</sup> | Thessalonians 1:9.

3. Although external people (i.e. orientalists etc.) perceive Hinduism as a “*religion*” akin to all others, adherents object claiming that it is a *way of life*, a philosophy of life rather than a religion with set fixed dogmas (e.g. Desai in 2021 interview). Interviews with Hindus strongly brings this assertion to the fore.
4. Although some claim that Hinduism is monotheistic or henotheistic, it is in fact polytheistic<sup>87</sup> with deities approaching 33 million (Bach 1959). Hindus worship these deities curved in different forms as representations of the divine<sup>88</sup>.
5. Because of its nature, Hindus hold dear all creatures especially Cows that are taken to be divine<sup>89</sup>. As such, the Christian seeking to evangelize to Hindus may opt to avoid eating beef, for this, akin to pigs to Muslims, is highly offensive and may slam the evangelism door<sup>90</sup>. The belief in *Ahimsa* deeply affects Hindus.
6. In Hinduism, various world views find accommodation. Among them is syncretism, postmodernism, agnostic, spiritism, evolution, atheistic, animism among others<sup>91</sup>.
7. By its nature, Hinduism is able to survive in a fluid context. As hinted at within this paper, it is consistently in flux and thus fits well in a postmodern world, tolerant to varying and may we say even opposing views. That explains why it survived the Buddhism threat in ancient times. All it did was mutate and absorb the threatening faith. In short, Hinduism is a mixed melting pot accommodating nearly all faiths although still remaining distinct.
8. Being flexible, Hinduism finds fertile ground to flourish in a postmodern context. This gives it advantage over Christianity, Judaism or Islam that have fixed canons. This alone may cause it to overtake the other religions in time, given that it is now spreading its tentacles right across the world with the migration of Hindus to the West and other far flung places of the earth.
9. In its essential nature, Hinduism does not promote evangelism or proselytism because the religion does not believe in conversion from ones’

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<sup>87</sup> Though some authorities are far more comfortable with *monistic* rather than polytheistic.

<sup>88</sup> *What is Hinduism? Adventures into a profound global faith*, (Himalayan Academy 2007), 92 & 93.

<sup>89</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), ; Wallbank et al, *Civilization: Present and Past* (Harper Collins, 1992), 102-104.

<sup>90</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 11; Laussane Ocasional report, “LOP 14: Christian Witness to Hindus” Thailand: *Laussane Committee on World Evangelism* (16-27 June, 1980): 11.

<sup>91</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), .

- religion. That explains why militant Hinduism has arisen, to fend off proselytizing religions like Islam and Christianity<sup>92</sup> (Hofpe 2007).
10. To effectively engage Hindus, one needs to know their default world view. This is important because it is through these grids that a Hindu interprets the world around them.
  11. When interacting with Hindus, ensure you clarify the meaning of common terms such as “God”, “sin,” “life,” “scripture,” “holiness,” “man,” “salvation,” “born again,” “spirit” or some such terms. God is some form of universal force (i.e. *Brahman*), energy or process around which everything revolves or an impersonal force (without will or emotion) rather than personal. Hindus attach different meanings to what you may intend to communicate and vice versa<sup>93</sup>.
  12. It must however be stated that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has inherent power within itself, able to bust past the artificial grids transforming any soul, including the Hindu with their many layers of animistic beliefs (Romans 1:16-17).
  13. Christianity and Hinduism differ on many points including the cyclical nature of Hinduism with respect to life and rebirth. For the Christian, after death is Judgment not rebirth. For the Hindu, transmigration takes place at death into another bodily prison, unless one attains *Moksha*.
  14. The Christian God is different from the Hindu pantheon of gods<sup>94</sup>. *Yahweh* is said to be personal while in Hinduism, some gods may not necessarily be personal in the sense that Christians understand God as “Father”, the caring and loving one. The Hindu religion is pantheistic in many senses.
  15. For Hinduism, several routes to salvation can be explored and used. This includes devotion, knowledge and works<sup>95</sup>. The Christian faith knows only one Savior accessed by faith in Jesus Christ<sup>96</sup>.
  16. As hinted at earlier in this discourse, both Christianity and Hinduism have scriptures but of different forms and nature. The Christian faith has a fixed complete and closed canon while Hindu scriptures are diverse with varying levels of authority. This includes the *Gita* (with attendant *vedas* and *sanscrit*), *Brahmanas* or *Ramahin/Ramayana* (Wallbank et al 1992: 102, 103).

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<sup>92</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 9;

<sup>93</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 14; Laussane Occasional report, LOP 14: Christian evangelism to Hindus Thailand: *Laussane Committee on World Evangelism* (16-27 June, 1980): 12.

<sup>94</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 12.

<sup>95</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 14.

<sup>96</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), .

17. Christians should never be deceived by the apparent similarities on some aspects between Hinduism and the Christian faith. The two systems are poles apart and point in different directions.
18. Although the practice of 'suttee' appears to be within the Hindu culture, it is nowhere promoted in their scriptures, if not condemned. *Suttee* is the burning of the surviving widow together with the body of the husband on the funeral pyre. This practice was opposed by the Christian Missionaries like William Carey alongside other Hindu *Brahmins* and thus eventually outlawed<sup>97</sup>. Cremation is normal in India and now steadily spreading across the world.
19. *Vishnu* is said to be the god of preservation and believed to occasionally incarnate to sort out a problem. Several *Brahmins* are believed to have been incarnations of *Vishnu* destined to bring about change and then leave. The late Mahatma Gandhi could be considered as one such incarnation.
20. Hinduism is believed to be the oldest religion spanning over six thousand years.
21. The *Aryans* or noble ones arrived in the Indus valley and conquered the civilizations in the Indus valley (though some argue to the contrary). They brought with them a pantheon of gods that includes *Indra* the thunder god, *Agni* the fire god, *Varuna*, the god of order in the cosmos and *Yama* among others. Later other gods such as *Vishnu* and *Shiva* became prominent among the Hindus (Hopfe, 2007; Wallbank, 1992).
22. *Manu* is believed to have been the first human being from whom all humans originate. This goes counter to the Hebrew scripture narrative that points to Adam and Eve. The Law of Manu on the other hand are social ethical standards developed among Hindus between 300 BC and 400 AD (Hopfe, 2007).
23. Hinduism has been the source of several religions spawned out of it and later absorbed back. Examples of religions that have their origin in Hinduism include Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and probably a few others. At one time, Buddhism nearly took over India but was fought back largely by the inclusive nature of Hinduism that tends to absorb all others<sup>98</sup> (Wallbank et al 1992: 104).
24. Some of the champions that Hinduism has had includes: *Shankara*, often called the "Aquinas of Hinduism" as he vehemently opposed Buddhism

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<sup>97</sup> Kellsye M. Finnie, *William Carey: by trade a Cobbler* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications 1986), 141.

<sup>98</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), .

and thus preserved its power in India; *Ramayana* (1056-1137), believed that the human and divine soul were united and yet separate. He was a potent philosopher; *Mahhva* (1199-1278)-; Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), often called “The Father of Modern India”; *Vivekanada*, often called the “first Missionary to the Modern world”. He was a prolific speaker who after spending time in ascetic seclusion in the Himalayas went on to become a serious proponent of Hinduism (Hopfe 2007).

25. Wallbank et al. (1992:102) suggest that there are at least four caste classes namely; Nobles (*Kshatriyas*), Commoners (*Vaishyas*), Priests (*Brahmins*) and Workers/serfs (*Shudras*). These have cemented over time and do not interact across classes, share things or even intermarry. Wallbank et al further asserts that over time, these classes begun to further subdivide into numerous sub-castes, each having special social, occupational, or religious character. A persons’ name betrays their status within the caste system (Wallbank et al. 1992: 102). Desai (2021 interview) gives further helpful insights around the cast system claiming that it is more cultural rather than taught by scripture. He however acknowledged that the cast system affects how people interact, perceive one another or even the social structure. Rather than being an oppressive system, the system graduates people into casts relative to their roles not necessarily their worth. Pressed to explain how Hindus behave or interact outside the Hindu dominant contexts, he acknowledged the differences in practice based on hind orientation, again still consistent with the diverse nature of Hinduism. Having been born and bred in Zambia, his (i.e. Desai) Hindu perceptions and perhaps practices sometimes was at variance with the typical indigenous Indian Hindu though they agree around the cores. A further insight from Desai was that the caste system was not necessarily strong outside the Hindu dominant context. For instance, the Desai’s were the Overseers/Business sort while the Patel’s held another role in the traditional Indian context but not necessarily so outside. To Desai, given the diverse nature of Hinduism and its immense flexibility, Hindus easily dwell with other faiths including Islam or Christianity. The occasional fights are the exception, according to Desai and Hindu Temple Priest Pathak.
26. Hinduism has at least two very popular epic stories namely *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. These stories aim to teach principles in Hinduism in a very interesting way that captivates all whether Hindu or not.
27. Some writers like Benson have argued that Hinduism is a pessimistic religion in the main but the gospel of Christ offers an antidote to all that bequeathing life, peace, tranquility and security in this life<sup>99</sup>. In Hindu thought, life is something one escapes from rather than enjoys. One desires the state of *Moksha* over re-incarnation.

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<sup>99</sup> Ian E Benson (ed), *Evangelising Hindus and Buddhists* (Shrophire: The Missionary Training Service, 1988), 17.

28. Although not directly asserted, Hindu thought and theology is growing by the day. It is nearly all pervasive, affected many areas of life including Theoretical science and social perspectives or practices. Examples will do: First, the idea of multiple universes is believed to have emanated from Hinduism. Second, some ideas found in science fiction like “the Force” in the epic motion picture Star Wars is derived from Hinduism, so some claim. Third, Hindu culture and world view is actively being disseminated and propagated everywhere through various avenues including soap operas, movies, social media etc. Fourth, yoga (and some forms of meditations) has its roots in Hinduism but almost universally practiced today. It is perceived a harmless helpful health therapeutic exercise with immense physical benefits. Simple breathing techniques with some concentration would turn the tide for one’s mental tranquility or health woes. These and many other points need noting because we may have been influenced unawares.

## Conclusion

It should be noted that Hinduism is a dynamic, potent and resilient religion that will live on for generations to come, as long as the earth stands. With over a following of over a billion people at the present time<sup>100</sup>, it is destined to grow even more, if postmodern thinking and approach to life continues. In our view, Hinduism has great potential to grow possibly over other religions given its nature and the thinking of the times. The Christian faith must take note and prepare accordingly lest it be overtaken by Hinduism or Islam respectively.

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<sup>100</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

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