

Defending Dharma: Handling the Christian Challenges

by
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FOREWORD

by **Stephen Knapp**

This booklet especially deals with the arguments that Christians use most often to criticize and demean the Vedic tradition, or discourage others from being Hindus or followers of Sanatana-dharma. Herein you can find the means to help yourself and others Defend Dharma by using logic and common sense, and the counter arguments that can be used against the criticisms from those who simply do not understand it, especially Christians. This also helps you recognize the lapses in logic (known as "philosophical fallacies") in their own arguments. Thus, everyone should awaken to the realities of what Christianity has done to decent humans in the past, and how their conversion tactics are still performed with the mission of Christianizing the world.

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PREFACE

Not too long ago, I came across a book written for Christians who plan to "convert" members of other religions to Christianity. This book dealt with other religions' beliefs, and had a handy guide for pointing out the so-called "weak points" in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, etc. Of course, Christians have a right to practice their own religion, *but their rights end where others' rights begin*. It is a matter of record that certain Christians, particularly some "fundamentalist" Christians, have an agenda for "saving" the "heathens". Certain well-known evangelists on television beg for funds so that they may send missionaries to India, to save the "devil worshiping Hindus". At the same time, they target Hindu youth here in America for conversion tactics. There is a publishing company in California which produces anti-Hindu comic books which teach that Satan (in Christian mythology, the supreme spirit of evil) created the Hindu religion. Realizing how important the family and community is to Hindus, religious bigots use "zoning laws" to prevent the establishment of temples (as typified in the struggle to build a temple near Sydney, Australia in early 1991), or to close them altogether (as is the case of two Hindu temples in England).

Another disturbing trend is the increase in blatant Christian fundamentalism in politics. The popular Col. Oliver (Ollie) North speaks out on the importance of his view of Christian values, as does the "former" Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, an admired politician from Louisiana who had plans for the White House. In the same way, the 1992 Republican Presidential candidate Pat Buchanan is a columnist for the *Christian American* newspaper, which is published by the "Christian Coalition", whose stated purpose is the promotion of Christian values.

Furthermore, consider the popular TV evangelist Pat Robertson, who ran for the Presidency in 1988. In one of his books, "The New World Order", at the bottom of page 218, he mentions his campaign pledge to bring only Christians and Jews into the government with him, and he states quite clearly that he believes that those who follow the Judeo/Christian value system are more fit to govern America than are Hindus. But before you write him off as a harmless crackpot, remember that he did win some states in the Republican primaries that year.

There are also more personal attacks on Hindus. There have been reported many instances of Christians leaving threatening messages on Hindus' answering machines. Or the incident mentioned in the *Dallas Observer* newspaper, which described "Christians" aggressively taunting a Gaudiya Vaishnava *sankirtana* party, thrusting raw meat into the faces of the devotees.

Then there are blatant examples of outright physical violence. I personally witnessed an attempt by a Christian who tried to attack the Deities in a Gaudiya Vaishnava temple in Detroit in 1973, complaining of "idol worship". Three fourths of the Vaishnava temple in Fiji was destroyed by a gang of Christian youths on October 15, 1989. On September 20, 1991, a 77-year old priest was attacked on the altar at the Siva Subramaniya Swami temple in Fiji, by a young Christian man who told him to "stop worshipping idols and go to church and pray to Jesus"... while kicking the old priest in the head and smashing his face on the concrete floor. These are just a few examples.

Of course, it may be argued that these last few instances are committed by members of the lunatic fringe of Christianity. That is certainly a valid point. But it is also important to note that such activities certainly seem to be endorsed in the Bible itself. For example, in Christian mythology (and related in the Old Testament, Exodus 32:19-20), there is an episode in which Moses, carrying the stone tablets which contain the "Ten Commandments", comes across some "idol worshippers". Seething with raging fury, he attempts to destroy the "idol" by hitting it with the stone tablets. Such a story, as well as the Christian history of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the witch hunts of Europe and America, can breed a climate in which physical attacking of "heathens", "pagans", and "idolaters" is encouraged.

Many Christians are tolerant and respect the rights of others' religions, cultures, and beliefs. Some examples of tolerant groups include the Unitarians, Quakers, Amish, Episcopalians, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. Groups such as Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and the Mormons are fairly tolerant. But there are groups that have developed a reputation for intolerance, such as the Baptists, Adventists, southern Pentecostals, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In fact, some of the members of these groups are even intolerant of other Christian sects, what to speak of other religions! Such groups are known as fundamentalists; that is, they believe the Bible is perfect and flawless, and is the *only* valid scripture in the world.

Since most Bible fundamentalists have no respect for the authority of other scriptures, it is practically useless to counter their Biblical sayings with Vedic or Buddhist truisms. For this reason, in this booklet I show how you can easily defeat their arguments using logic and common sense, and recognizing the lapses in logic (known as "philosophical fallacies") in their own arguments. Therefore, this booklet will not only be useful to Hindus, but to Buddhists, Jains, and Taoists as well.

Most people use the word "bigot" in an ethnic or racial sense, but the dictionary defines bigot as "one blindly intolerant" to the views of others, especially in matters of religion or race". The source of bigotry is ignorance. By using this booklet, you can gently educate the narrow-minded, and thereby tear down

the walls that separate one culture from another.

INTRODUCTION

There are two key causes for the inimical attitude that many fundamentalists hold towards Hinduism. The first one is their mistaken and chauvinistic belief that only their scripture is valid. And the second cause is their gross misunderstanding and ignorance of the actual teaching concerning other religions.

Concerning the first point (the supremacy of the Bible), I will bring forth many arguments that cast considerable doubt as to its validity. It may be argued that many of these arguments could be used against the Vedic scriptures as well. For example, it is practically impossible to absolutely prove that the Vedic scriptures have divine authorship. But there are also several important differences.

First, even educated Christians themselves do not claim that the Bible was written by God, or divinely transmitted to man. They say that the Bible was written by men, but *inspired* by God. This is why the Bible is considered (by biblical scholars and Christian theologians) to be so open to interpretation. But it must be pointed out that just because something is "inspired" does not mean that it is the Absolute Truth. For example, a man may be inspired by loving sentiment for his wife or girlfriend to write a poem about her, but that does not mean that his words are true, nor does it mean that his lover even approves of what he has composed.

And as for "interpreting" the scriptures, it is worthwhile to mention that Hindus consider God to be "Adhoksaja", or the One who is beyond the mind and senses. As such, it is impossible to speculate accurately on the ultimate nature of God. Our senses, our minds, and all of our tools (computers, microscopes, etc.) cannot give us perfect knowledge about even our own limited material world, what to speak of God, who transcends the material world! Therefore, the only way to acquire knowledge of God is through the descending process of knowledge, i.e. receiving knowledge of God from God Himself. If God exists, and He wants us to know about Him, He will surely give us the way to learn about Him. This is the formula to acquire knowledge accepted by followers of the Vedic tradition.

The Christians attribute the authorship of the books of the Bible to "traditional" authors. This is interesting, because most of the books of the Bible are truly anonymous. There are very few "signature" verses ("this book was written by...") as is customary in Hindu scriptures. In the Appendix of this work, I give a listing of modern scholars' educated opinions as to the true authorship of the books of the Bible. These are not blind speculations, but their best scientific opinions resulting from carefully weighing all the available evidence. In many cases, I have listed the evidence the scholars used, giving a type of archeological "detective" story. It is intriguing that so many Christians tend to quote scholarly assumptions on the questionable sources of other scriptures, but minimize (or ignore altogether) the opinions of Biblical scholars on their own scripture!

Finally, the "burden of proof" lies entirely with the Christians. According to the rules of logic and debate (as well as the rules of law), when one attempts to condemn a different core belief, the burden of proof is on the accuser. After all, Hindus do not attack other religions, there is no need. If a Christian fundamentalist approaches you, the burden of proof is on him to prove his case.

Moreover, there is the problem that many Christians totally misunderstand other religions. This is due entirely to ignorance. One example of gross misinformation occurred during a radio talk show in Chicago. A Christian preacher was a guest on the show, and he was promoting his new book which shows how Saturday morning cartoons, which are aimed at children, are "contaminated" with New Age, Satanism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (note how they tend to group Hinduism and Buddhism with Satanism). At one point, he was challenged to cite his knowledge of the "evils" of Hinduism. He responded: "The goal of Hinduism is to worship your self. And that, according to the Bible, is a trick of Satan. Satan caused Adam and Eve to fall from the Garden of Eden by first having them worship themselves, instead of God." This is a gross misconception.

I often use the following example to show Christians how easy it is to misunderstand other religions. In Christianity there is a sacrament known as the Eucharist, in which the blood of Christ is symbolically drunk (in the form of wine or grape juice) and the body of Christ is eaten (in the form of a wafer). But if a person heard that "in the Christian ceremony they drink the blood of Christ and eat his body," he could easily think that Christians are vampires and cannibals!

In the same way, many people misjudge Hinduism, dismissing it as "devil worship" or ignorant superstition. They consider the adoration of the Self as narcissism; the worship of the Deity in the temple as idolatry; esteem for the cow as animism; respect for Mother Earth and other life forms as pantheism; and they ridicule the noble concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence towards other life forms) as impractical sentimentalism.

It is important to show compassion for those who persecute our Hindu religion and Vedic culture. And the proper way to show compassion for them is to gently enlighten them. This booklet will show many examples of ways to answer their criticisms.

This booklet will also show examples of "philosophic fallacies", or lapses in logical thought. The existence of a philosophic fallacy renders the argument invalid. Here is an example of such a fallacy, known in Latin as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, the "Argument from False Cause": "America is an overwhelmingly Christian country. America easily defeated Iraq, a Muslim country. Therefore, God is clearly on the side of the Christians." As you can see, this fallacy is committed when one erroneously attempts to make a cause-and-effect connection. Following this "logic", one may point out that the mighty USA was unable to defeat the overwhelmingly Buddhist Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Does this mean that God is on the side of the Buddhists and against the Christians?

Philosophic fallacies are sometimes unintentionally committed, but it is important to watch for them and point them out when detected. Actually, when first heard, the fallacy may seem to make sense; but upon reflection, the flaws show themselves all too clearly. Philosophic fallacies also permeate nationalistic and political propaganda, as exemplified in catchy slogans. The nationalistic rallying cry, "America... love it or leave it!" is a popular one. It implies that citizens should blindly follow even immoral or unethical behavior on the part of the government. We should be grateful that the individuals who fought against slavery in the 1800's were willing to question the government's policies.

When engaging in a debate, and especially in a debate of a religious nature, it is vitally important to keep cool and calm, which is difficult to do when your religion, your culture, your homeland, and even your family is being vilified or blasphemed. But no good can come from becoming angry. In fact, it is difficult to think logically when you are in a state of mental agitation. It is important to remain in a state of emotional equilibrium, setting an example for others. As the prose work *Desiderata* recommends, "Speak your truth calmly and clearly. And listen to the dull and ignorant, for they, too, have their story."

There are exceptions, of course, but proselytizers are generally, more often than not, insecure. Because they actually have doubts about their own religion, by preaching to others, they are actually preaching to themselves. Because they have so many doubts, they are constantly debating themselves (in their own mind) why they believe the way they do. In this way, they become proficient in their evangelism. And if they are able to convert anyone else, it reinforces their faith. On the other hand, a person who is genuinely firm in his faith and secure in his religion will often forget the reasons why he practices his own faith, since he no longer has internal debates with himself. It is my sincere hope that this book will assist others in fending off the unwelcome intrusions into the peaceful and gentle practice of our own religion, Sanatana-dharma.

CHAPTER ONE: THE BASIS

As I mentioned earlier, the very basis of the Christians' self-proclaimed religious elitism is their claim of the infallibility of their scripture, the Bible. They claim that it is the only valid scripture on Earth. This is similar to the philosophy which prompted a Muslim general to burn down the library of Alexandria long ago, which housed an immense treasure house of ancient knowledge. He allegedly reasoned, "If these books merely restate what is in the Koran, then they are unnecessary. If they say something other than what is in the Koran, then they are pernicious. Since all these books will either say something that is already in the Koran, or they will say something that is not in the Koran, then this means that all of these books are either unnecessary or pernicious. Therefore, they should be destroyed." This type of "reasoning" is a type of philosophic fallacy in which one does not consider the other

alternatives available. This is a type of "either this or that" mentality, viewing all problems in black-or-white terms, while ignoring the many shades of grey in between.

There is another problem in logic which arises when one considers the doctrine that only one scripture is the only valid law book. Any argument to support this must come, therefore, from that same law book. This is the logical fallacy known as the "circular argument", which is committed when one presents evidence from that which one is trying to prove. In the same way, if you ask a fundamentalist Christian to prove the validity of the Bible, he will usually start quoting verses from the Bible! Here is a mundane example of this fallacy: A thief was dividing up some ill-gotten booty, some jewels, with his two partners in crime. But he kept most of the jewels for himself. "Why is your share of the jewels larger than ours?", asked one of his partners. "Because I am the leader", he replied. "Why are you the leader?" his partner queried. To which he responded, "Because I have more jewels."

This principle of accepting only one authoritative scripture is unknown in Hinduism, which requires a checks-and-balances system of *guru-sadhu-shastra*. A bone fide authority must be approved by one's spiritual master (the guru), by recognized holy men (the *sadhus*), as well as the existing recognized scriptures (the *shastra*).

As I have previously mentioned, there is great doubt as to the authorship of the different books of the Bible. The compilation in the Appendix of this work is compiled from various reputable sources and respected encyclopedias such as Encyclopedia Britannica, Collier's Encyclopedia, and Funk & Wagnall's Encyclopedia. And these encyclopedias gathered their information from academically acclaimed biblical scholars. These scholars carefully considered the different evidences concerning the authorship of the books, and made their very best professional, erudite opinions. Fundamentalist Christians tend to completely belittle these arguments, yet they are unable to produce enough evidence (or, in many cases, any evidence) to sway the findings of the scholars. Faith is one thing... but blind faith is another. And blind faith will not prove helpful to distinguish truth from fiction.

As the Appendix relates, most of the books of the Bible are anonymous. This in itself is very significant. How can a book be considered inspired by God when the author is completely unknown? If you don't know who the author is, how do you know he was divinely inspired?

There is also the question of the character of the author. This question is raised not only in the anonymous books, but also in the books where nothing is known of the author except his name. Was the author a saint or a sinner? We don't know. Yet we are expected to cast our own beliefs aside and put our souls in the hands of this book.

One of the tests of whether or not a hypothesis is valid is to look at who is presenting the hypothesis. After all, you would not seek financial advice from a pauper. Yet, Christian theology teaches that we should take the spiritual advice of a completely unknown person.

And then there is the disturbing fact that many of the books of the Bible show evidence of tampering. There were modifications and additions. It is fairly certain, then, that there were deletions as well. The question arises, "Who did this?", and more importantly, "Why?" What were their motives? There must have been something in the original that disturbed someone enough to make them want to change it. What was it? These are deeply troubling questions.

There is also the matter of the Biblical canon itself. After all, ancient Israel and the early church knew of many more religious books than the ones that were compiled and now constitute what we now call the Bible. For example, there were 50 gospels in circulation at the time, yet only four made it into the New Testament! Who decided which of the books would become part of the Christian scriptures, and again, "Why?" Who decided, "This book belongs... this book doesn't"? What were their reasons? What were their motives? There are reports that some of the books that didn't make it into the canon contain references of reincarnation and *ahimsa* (nonviolence), as well as references that mention that Jesus traveled to India during the middle part of his life to learn about spiritual truths.

The fact is, there are no clear records available which document the church's process of determining which books were acceptable and which books were unacceptable. The general consensus of opinion among scholars is that the decision was based on whether or not the book agreed with prevailing theological thought at the time. In other words, the only books accepted were the ones that maintained the "status quo".

This means that the fundamentalists' religion is not based on the Bible, as they so fervently claim... but means the Bible was based on the prevailing religion! This, in itself, is another example of the "circular argument" as related earlier.

Another way you can judge something is to look at its results it brings ("the proof of the pudding is in the tasting"). If you purchase and follow a car repair book, and the result is that your car runs even worse, you would have good reasons to doubt the validity of the book.

So let us glimpse at the legacy of many of the followers of the Bible. Let us take a look at the misery which follows people assuming an air of spiritual elitism. The history of Christianity is one of the bloodiest and with some of the most hateful incidents in all of human history. It may be argued that the following atrocities were committed not by "true Christians", but by misguided zealots. Yet, as pointed out earlier, the Bible certainly sets examples for such actions.

First, let us look at the Crusades, a series of eight major military expeditions (and many more minor campaigns) during a period lasting almost 300 years, for the purpose of "rescuing" the "holy" land from the "heathen" Muslims. The Christian Crusaders massacred virtually every man, woman and child in Jerusalem in 1099. The Children's Crusade of 1212 resulted in many children dying along the way, the others sold into slavery. The Crusades created death, disease, and misery for millions of Christians and non-Christians alike. Yet, even today, a favorite song in Christian churches is "Onward, Christian Soldiers!"

There is also the infamous Inquisition, a series of quasi-judicial institutions of the Christian church which began in 1231, and not abolished until 1820. The primary purpose of the Inquisitions was to punish heresy (holding a belief that is not part of the Christian dogma). Those convicted were either burned alive, fined, had their property confiscated, or were imprisoned. Torture against the accused (not just those found guilty!) was approved by Pope Innocent IV in the mid 1200's. The Spanish Inquisition, a government branch established with papal approval, was primarily targeted against Jews, and became synonymous with terrorism.

Typical of the heresy trials is the history of Joan of Arc in the 15th century, a heroine of the Hundred Years War. She was captured by the English in 1430 who turned her over to an ecclesiastical (church) court, charged with heresy and sorcery. Her interrogations lasted 14 months. She was found guilty of: 1] dressing like a man and, 2] heresy (she believed that she was directly responsible to God, rather than to the Church). She was burned at the stake.

The "witch" hunting of Europe from the 11th to the 17th centuries (and in the United States in the latter part of the 17th century) resulted in the torture and execution (usually by fire) of thousands of persons by devout, well-meaning Christians, with the blessings of the Church. An instance of drought, an epidemic, a baby or a farm animal dying during birth would be enough to start a hysterical witch hunt. People were encouraged to inform on each other, children against their parents, and spouses against each other. Just having a birthmark would be enough to make one suspect. Witnesses were paid to testify against the accused. Confessions were forced by both inhuman tortures as well as promising pardon in return (although pardon was seldom granted). Professional witch hunters were paid a fee for each conviction.

The destruction of the Incan, Mayan, and Aztec civilizations in Central and South America from the 16th to the 19th centuries was impelled by greed, of course, but also with the blessings of the Church, who saw it as an important missionary activity. The drive for the Spanish conquest of the New World came from Queen Isabella, who was such a fervent Christian that she became known as "Isabella the Catholic". She is well known for her activities in starting the Inquisition, and expelling the Jews from Spain. It is ironic that the money that funded Spain's military/missionary endeavors were obtained by the confiscation of the Jews' property during the Inquisition. The end result of these endeavors resulted in vast numbers of South and Central American Indians being killed, not only in combat, but by the diseases brought over by the Europeans (smallpox, syphilis, plague, etc.).

It is also ironic that the United States, which was originally founded by people who were fleeing religious bigotry in Europe, engaged in the subsequent persecution of the Native American Indians. This uniquely American concept was called "Manifest Destiny", which proclaimed that the United States had divine sanction (!) "To overspread the (North American) continent allotted to us by God for the free development of our multiplying millions". This concept was used as justification for the United States' endeavors in destroying the indigenous native Indian civilizations. This doctrine of "Manifest Destiny" was later modified to justify the annexation of various Caribbean and Pacific islands.

The issue of the American attitude towards slavery of blacks is also worthy of mention. It is certainly true that many Christian groups started the struggle to abolish slavery, most notably the Quakers. But many Protestant sects split over the question of slavery. Some Christian groups were in favor of enslaving other human beings, others were opposed.

As you can see, this attitude of Christian superiority resulted in *tremendous* amounts of human suffering. But this pales in comparison with the suffering brought to the Earth and man's fellow creatures. This is the result of the Christian doctrine of "anthropocentrism", the belief that man is the center of the universe. All other life forms, including the Earth herself, exist *only* for man's enjoyment and amusement. Couple this with the fact that Christianity is an apocalyptic religion (i.e., the belief that the violent end of the world is very close at hand), and you have a philosophy of utter rape of the Earth and her ecosystems. It is for this reason that, when confronted with an "environmental or economic development" issue, many fundamentalists loudly proclaim, "Who cares about the environment? Jesus is coming!"

It is this very cavalier attitude towards the environment which led the renowned Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki to remark about Christianity: "Man against nature, nature against man. Strange religion." Contempt for the Earth is in direct opposition of the Hindu and Buddhist concept of "deep ecology."

Christianity also maintains a disturbing, species oriented philosophy which claims that only man has a soul... animals are simply "chemical reactions". Accepting this twisted doctrine, truly unspeakable horrors are committed to millions of other living entities daily. For the sake of the satisfaction of the tongue, animals are routinely slaughtered. For the sake of vanity, for the sake of smelling pretty, animals are tortured in laboratories to test the lethal dosages of colognes and perfumes. For the sake of fashion, animals are killed just for their fur or skin.

Contrast this with the doctrine of *ahimsa* (nonviolence). In the Buddhist scripture, the *Dhammapada* (129-130), the Buddha says, "All beings fear death and pain, life is dear to all; therefore the wise man will not kill or cause anything to be killed." And in the Hindu scriptures, the *Padma Purana* proclaims, "*Ahimsa paramo dharma*": Non-violence to other living entities (*ahimsa*) is the highest (*paramo*) duty (*dharma*).

CHAPTER TWO: CHRISTIAN CRITICISMS... ANSWERED

What follows is a compilation of dialogs I have had with Christians. The statements in *italics* are the criticisms of the Christian, and what follows is my response.

"Hindu scriptures contradict each other, whereas the Bible is harmonious."

Let us examine the first part, "Hindu scriptures contradict each other." If you ever hear this comment, ask the person, "Please cite an example of a contradiction in the Hindu scriptures." As of yet, I have never heard anyone give me an example. This is good evidence that the person never studied the Hindu scriptures himself... he was simply told to say this when preaching to Hindus. Keep pressing him to cite an example.

Of course, there are apparent inconsistencies, but they only appear to be a contradiction to one who does not understand the purposes behind the Vedic literature, which is to gradually uplift the living entities to the topmost perfected stage. There are people in different qualities of existence: persons in the mode of goodness (*sattva-guna*) are inclined to introspection and have a philosophical, spiritual aptitude. Those in the mode of passion (*raja-guna*) are inclined to improve themselves economically and sensually, and have a creative aptitude. Those in the mode of ignorance (*tama-guna*) are inclined to laziness and intoxication. It is extremely rare to find a person in one mode only... they often share their attributes between these three modes, yet one mode is always predominant.

Different parts of the Vedic literature are targeted to these different classes of people. For instance, a person in the mode of ignorance would not be inclined to follow the injunctions meant for someone in the mode of goodness. So certain sections of the Vedic scriptures are targeted at his class, so he may gradually, at his own individual rate, purify himself, and eventually be elevated to the mode of pure goodness (*suddha-sattva*).

This process of gradual purification is expressed by the Lord Himself in the *Bhagavad-gita* (12.8-12): "If you can't do this, then do this... and if you can't do that, then do this... ". Only for those who are confused do the Vedic scriptures appear contradictory.

Now let us examine the second part of the criticism: "The Bible is harmonious." As was mentioned in Chapter One, any harmony in the Bible is purely intentional. When the Christian canon was chosen, only those books that reflected the current philosophical thought were included. Books that went "against the grain" were discarded. The Bible is harmonious because only harmonious books were allowed to be included in it.

Christians also point out the similarities in the "Gospels", the four quasi-biographical books that make up the first four books in the New Testament. But as will be elaborated upon in the Appendix, the Gospel of Matthew is based on the Gospel of Mark, and all four Gospels draw heavily upon a collection of the supposed sayings of Jesus, called "Q". And, again, only four of the over 50 gospels in circulation at the time were included in the Christian canon, which would be those that agreed with each other.

Yet, even discounting the question of the Biblical canon, there is still a nagging question: "If the Bible is so harmonious, then why are there so many different sects of Christianity... each one claiming to be the purest representative of the Truth?" For example, Christianity is basically divided into three major schools of thought. There are the Roman Catholics, the Protestants, and the Eastern Orthodox. And the Protestant Branch is divided up into many different sects: the Adventists, the Amish, the Anglican Church, the Apostolic Faith, the Assemblies of God, the Baptists, the Brethren, the Christian Church, the Church of Christ, the Church of God, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons), the Church of the Nazarene, the Congregational Christian Churches, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Congregational Church, the Friends (Quakers), the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Lutherans, the Mennonites, the Methodists, the Pentecostal Churches, the Presbyterians, the Salvation Army, the Unitarians, the United Church of Christ, and about 66 other sects!

And that does not count the different denominations (sub-sects) of the different sects! For example, the Baptists have the following denominations: the American Baptist Convention, the Southern Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Association, the Baptist General Conference, the Bethel Baptist Assembly, Inc., the Christian Unity Baptist Association, the Conservative Baptist Association of America, the Baptist Church of Christ, the Free Will Baptists... and about 19 other denominations. And there are not just "minor differences" between these sub-sects. For example, the Southern Baptist Association was formed in 1845 in large part because of disagreements concerning slavery. And today, there is discord between the sub-sects in important matters such as whether or not to believe in the infallibility of the Bible.

The other Protestant denominations have also been broken up into different sub-sects: the Methodists have 23 different sub-sects, the Mennonites 15; the Presbyterians 9; the Mormons 3; etc.

And again, each sect and sub-sect claim to possess the infallible truth of the Bible in its purest form... and each sub-sect quotes verses from the Bible to prove it! Therefore, little can be said for so-called "harmony" in the Bible.

Another argument is: "*The concept of ahimsa (non-violence to other living entities) is impractical and unworkable, because even the simplest action can result in the death of millions of other living entities (germs, insects, etc.).*"

This is another form of the fallacy known as the "black or white" fallacy, that is, the only solution to the problem are at the opposite ends of the two extremes. In other words, what they are saying is, "Because we cannot prevent the unintentional deaths of other living entities, therefore we should not even try. We should kill other life forms with willful abandon."

This is true demoniac mentality. This type of "philosophy" justifies the killing or exploiting of other life forms for the sake of personal gratification. For example, holding a "pigeon shoot" to raise funds for a charity, destroying a rainforest to clear land for grazing beef cattle, mowing down a meadow to make

room for a shopping mall, subjecting animals to cruel testing procedures to ensure the safety of perfumes so that users may enhance their sexual attractiveness, or participating in so-called "sport" hunting so that a father and son may "bond"; all these activities, based on the exploitation of other living beings, deepens our implication in a life separate from our relationship with God and all of His creation.

Yes, there is an inevitable, unavoidable, and unintentional death of millions of life forms as we go about our daily business. *But the purpose of ahimsa is to minimize killing, not to stop it.* By being a vegetarian, we prevent the unnecessary slaughter of innocent creatures. By refusing to wear leather or fur, we diminish the suffering in this world. By refusing to use cosmetics or other products that have been tested on animals, we send a message to their manufacturers.

But the flesh-eater says, "You vegetarians aren't minimizing killing. You're just transferring it. Instead of killing animals, you're killing plants. In fact, a vegetarian kills more plants than a meat-eater kills animals! How many wheat plants had to be killed just to take the place of a pound of meat, which is just a small fraction of a cow?" This is an interesting point. The person who says this undoubtedly thinks of himself as an intelligent individual, carefully weighing the pros and cons of every argument, and comes to a conclusion by the use of careful logic and deductive reasoning. He also probably sees himself as open-minded, level-headed... a practical, yet compassionate person, but doesn't understand that wheat plants are already dried up when they are cut and harvested.

You will soon see, however, that his open-mindedness and his judicial "weighing of the facts" will go right out the window as soon as he sees that his sense of gratification is threatened. In other words, his compassion ends where his taste buds begin. Educate him concerning the facts: You have to feed 16 pounds of grain and soybeans to a cow to produce one pound of edible beef. In other words, to produce 500 pounds of meat on a 700 pound cow requires that the cow consume 8,000 pounds of grains and soybeans. And you can feed many, many more people with 8,000 pounds of grains and beans than with the 500 pounds of beef. So, the killing of a cow entails not only the cow's death, but the death of all the plants that the cow ate during her lifetime. Therefore, if this person was truly sincere in his desire to minimize killing, even the killing of plants, he would become a vegetarian!

This "16-to-1" ratio concerning the wastefulness of meat production is a widely accepted fact. No one can deny it. Any beef producer will admit that he buys (or grows) far more pounds of feed for his cattle than what he sells as meat. Meat production is horribly wasteful. Meat feeds a few at the expense of many. Futurists predict that, as the population of the world grows, vegetarian diets will be the norm, since the limited resources of the planet will be unable to supply the demands required to produce meat. This is a major reason why India is able to grow its own food (and even export the excess)... because so many Indians are vegetarians. If they took to the wasteful American meat-centered diet, they would not be able to produce the grains and beans required to feed livestock destined for slaughter.

The above argument (concerning the wasteful 16-to-1 ratio of meat production) is a key argument in the ethical, ecological, and environmental arguments against meat-eating. In environmental matters, for instance, the largest culprit against the environment is the farm industry. Because it takes 16 times more food to feed cattle than what we receive in return, that means we are using 16 times more land than is necessary to produce food. And this land is mostly cleared forests and drained wetlands, which are growing in short supply, and are essential for the biological diversity of nature. While the US condemns Brazil for the destruction of the rainforest (at 60 acres a minute) for pastureland for beef cattle, the US is losing 12 acres of forest a minute, primarily to agriculture. The largest polluter of rivers, lakes, and underground aquifers (for water wells) is not the manufacturing industry, but the agriculture industry, by the runoff from chemical fertilizers, manure and pesticides. If farmland presently engaged in the production of livestock was reduced to 1/16th of the current usage (by switching to a vegetarian diet), everyone would still be fed, and the reduction of pollution would be enormous.

Furthermore, there is the shortage of water. In drought-stricken California, they are concerned about the lack of water. In fact, the mighty Colorado River no longer reaches the ocean... it is used up before it gets there, primarily for irrigation of grains and soybeans... to feed beef cattle. According to the US Department of Agriculture, more than half of the water that is used in the United States is used for livestock production.

This is an era of dwindling natural resources, especially fossil fuels (petroleum). It is such a concern that the US was willing to engage Iraq in war to preserve America's access to the oil in the Persian Gulf region. It is interesting to note the findings of the US Department of Commerce: 33% of all raw materials used in the US are devoted to the production of livestock. Again, this is not just for raising livestock, but includes the growing of grains and beans to feed the livestock. It is estimated that it takes 2 calories of fossil fuels to produce 1 calorie of protein from soybeans. But it takes 78 calories of fossil fuel to produce 1 calorie of protein from beef. If only one fifth of the people in the US were vegetarian, the US would no longer need to depend on imported oil. Although many Christians will say that a vegetarian diet is "un-American", the fact of the matter is that a person who is sincerely concerned for the United States (in other words, a true patriot) would become a vegetarian!

The powerful meat industry has a feeble "response" to this damning data. Here it is: "The food that is fed to the animals is not fit for human consumption." This is true, but it is not the whole truth. It is a clever way of misleading the public. It is not fit for human consumption because of the way it is processed after harvesting, with no sanitary measures. Once it is bought for animal feed, it is processed differently. But the crops in the field are certainly fit! 95% of the oats grown in the US are fed to livestock. Are we to naively believe that only 5% "meets the grade" for human consumption?

And then consider the ethical argument: it is estimated that 20,000,000 people per year die of malnutrition throughout the world. Yet if Americans would just reduce their intake of meat by only 10%, the amount of land, water, and energy freed could produce enough vegetarian food to feed 60,000,000 people annually.

Last, but not least, meat is unnecessary. There is no nutrient in meat that is not found in a vegetarian diet. The medical community constantly reminds us to cut down on meat intake. In fact, the only persons encouraging the increase of meat consumption is the American Meat Industry Board. Why do you think that is?

After presenting these arguments, you will soon see how open-minded your debate opponent really is. If meat is 1) wasteful, 2) unethical, 3) hazardous to health, 4) detrimental to the environment, and, most of all, 5) completely unnecessary, how can one justify its use as a foodstuff? If one engages in such activities, simply to gratify his own senses, and these activities inflict pain on other sentient life forms, one can be sure that this is a prime example of demonic mentality. "Those persons with the mentality of demons do not know what is to be done, and what is prohibited. They ignore proper behavior as well as truth... these foolish persons engage in useless, unbeneficial activities meant for the pain and destruction of the world." (*Bhagavad-Gita* 16.7,9)

"Hindus say that the world is an illusion."

This is preposterous. This is a classic case of misunderstanding, similar to the misconception I related earlier concerning Christians being mistaken for vampires and cannibals. Here the misunderstanding is in the definition of the word "illusion". The confusion is in thinking that the word "illusion" means the same thing as "hallucination" or "delusion", i.e., a figment of the imagination that has no basis in reality whatsoever. But when the Hindus use the word "illusion", they are using the word with the same meaning as is given in any dictionary: "a mistaken perception of reality."

The classic example to illustrate this is the example of a rope lying on the grass. One may think that it is a snake. That is an illusion. But the rope exists. The illusion is not whether or not the rope exists. The illusion is that one mistakenly *perceives* the rope to be a snake. So when Hindus speak of the material world as an illusion, they are not saying the material world does not exist. They are speaking about the mistaken perception of the world as separate from God. The material world may be a temporary manifestation, but it certainly exists.

"Hindu doctrine says that all religions are the same."

This is a complete fabrication. Hindus do not say that all religions are the same. What Hindus do say is that there are many paths to God, although some are longer or more tortuous than others. Or that Truth is the same, though called by many names. And some religions are different gateways on the same path to Truth, some farther down the trail than others. Actually, all living entities are on the path back to Godhead. Not only are they on different paths, but the individual entity may occasionally take a few steps backward, or even stop for a while.

Of course, this concept of "many paths to God" would bring arguments from many fundamentalist Christians. They claim that the *only* path to God is Christianity (and, as I pointed out earlier, many believe that only their specific sect or sub-sect is valid... even other Christians are destined to hell). They point out that the fate of even the most upright Hindu or Buddhist is as dark as that of an unrepentant sinner, such as a murderer or rapist. Hinduism disagrees wholeheartedly with this elitist attitude. We believe that God is a God of justice, mercy, and compassion. The Christian view is that one should fear God, because He is a jealous god. But jealousy is born of insecurity... does this mean that God is insecure?

There is a mistake in thinking that there is a Christian God, a Muslim God, a Hindu God, etc. God is one, although He is known by many names. And the perception of Him is different, too. As a mundane example, consider a policeman. Store owners on his "beat" consider him a well-wishing ally; his co-workers consider him a good friend; his children think of him as their father; his parents' think of him as their son; his wife thinks of him as a loving provider; and criminals on the street see him as a threat. He is the same person, yet perceived in many different ways.

In the same way, different people of different cultures perceive God in many different ways. The Judeo/Christian tradition perceives God as jealous ("for I the Lord thy God am a jealous god", Exodus 20:5), and vengeful and vindictive ("vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord", Romans 12:19). The Christians proudly proclaim themselves "God-fearing people", as if to stress that God is to be feared (as their "fire and brimstone" revivalist sermons attest).

In contrast, the Vedic tradition perceives God as *karuna-sindhu* (the Ocean of mercy and compassion); *patita-pavana* (the Friend of fallen). "I am the Shelter and the most dear Friend", says Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-gita* (9.18). The perfection of life, according to the *Bhagavata* theology, is *prema*, or pure, unadulterated love of God. Pure love cannot exist where there is fear of retribution.

"The Hindus are idolaters."

Christians are fond of quoting this specific passage of the Bible: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or likeness of anything, that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them, for I the Lord thy God am a jealous god." (Exodus 20:3-5) This is part of the famed "Ten Commandments." Although this portion of the Bible certainly has dubious authorship (see the Appendix), for the sake of argument we will suppose that it actually is valid. It is quite obvious here that God is referring to "other gods." So, once again, they are thinking that the Christian God is different from the Hindu God.

Besides, they are attempting to judge one culture on the basis of their own culture. Certainly the Bible contains many pearls of wisdom, but Hindus do not consider it to be a revealed, authoritative scripture. The Old and New Testaments are *yavana-shastras*, or the scriptures of the flesh-eaters. Hindus consider the Bible to be their law book as much as Christians follow the *Manu-samhita*. If one does not recognize the validity of another person's scripture, it is useless and a waste of time to hurl quotes and verses back and forth.

"Hindus worship the cow."

Again, this is an attempt to judge one culture by the standards of another. But there is no "cow goddess" in any Hindu pantheon. They probably get this idea from seeing travelogues about India, and seeing the cows freely wandering the streets. Hindus have reverence for all forms of life; the cow just stands out in these scenes because of its large size. It is somewhat similar to the American habit of dogs running loose in the cities and parks of the US. What with this, and dog shows, sections of the supermarket devoted to the family dog, and the outrage from the typical American when he learns that some Orientals actually *eat* dogs... why, you would think that Americans worship the dog!

The cow and bull do have a special place in the hearts of Hindus. Because the cow gives milk, she is considered to be one of the mothers of man (along with the natural mother, the nurse, Mother Earth, etc.). And because the bull (and ox) plow the fields and thereby help produce food grains, he is considered to be one of the fathers of mankind.

"The Hindus worship many gods and demons."

This is another misunderstanding. As for "worshiping many gods," the Mayavadi school of Hinduism says that the different gods are different aspects of the Supreme Absolute Truth, Brahman (God). On the other hand, the Bhagavata school teaches that the different gods (demigods, actually) are empowered living entities that serve God in different capacities, and are subordinate to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There are sections in the Vedic literatures that recommend worship of specific demigods for specific benedictions. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the Vedic literature is to gradually elevate the living being to the perfected stage of love of God. So, for one obsessed with material desires, he is encouraged to turn to the demigods. But as stated in the *Bhagavad-gita* (7.20), "those deprived of knowledge, impelled by material desire, turn to the worship of the demigods," but "the results are limited and temporary" (7.23). Therefore, demigod worship is not recommended for the ultimate benefit of the living entity: loving surrender to God is.

One would think that the Christians worship "many gods," with their worship of the Trinity (the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost). And Satan seems to be regarded on a god-like level, since many Christians consider him to be all-pervading.

And regarding the "worship of demons," this is truly a misunderstanding to the highest degree. Hindus do not worship any demons. There are fierce forms of Kali who represents material nature, as the destructive power of *kala*, or the time factor. But she is the personified external energy of God, and therefore His obedient servant. Then there is the fierce form of Narasimha, an incarnation of Narayana, who appeared in the form of a half-man, half-lion in order to protect the child saint Prahlada Maharaja, offer salvation to the demon Hiranya-kashipu, and fulfill the promise of Brahma. The ignorant may consider these awesome forms as "demoniac", but that is not the case.

"The Hindu attitude towards suffering in this world: since people are just suffering their own "karma", there is no reason to help one's fellow man."

It is true that the material world is a place of misery, and the cause of our suffering is due to our past misdeeds. No one suffers unjustly. But there is great stress in the Vedic scriptures that one should help improve the lives of others: "It is the duty of everyone to dedicate his life, intelligence, wealth, words, and his work to benefit other living beings." (*Bhagavata Purana* 10.22.35)

Material welfare work is always welcomed and encouraged. But the Vedic literature also makes it clear, in no uncertain terms, that the best welfare work is not just compassion, but *enlightened compassion*. And what is enlightenment? Enlightenment means realizing that we are different from the material body, which is certain to be destroyed in due course of time. Our actual nature is pure spirit. Action for the material body gives only temporary results. For permanent results, we need to benefit our spiritual natures.

If a person falls overboard off of a ship, you do not claim the rescue a success if you manage to save only his clothes. This is exactly the situation when mundane philanthropists are concerned only with the care and comfort of the external covering of the soul (the material body).

A somewhat similar sentiment is expressed in the Bible, Matthew 26:7-11... Certain individuals were complaining that valuable oil was given to Jesus, instead of being sold, with the proceeds being given to help the suffering of the poor. Jesus said that "the poor will always be here. I (the spiritual teacher) won't."

Real, enlightened compassion means teaching people about *dharma*, about knowledge of God. It means instructing them about the ultimate cause of their suffering (their previous sinful activities), and how to prevent future suffering. Any compassionate act towards the body must be coupled with compassionate acts towards the soul as well. This is why when Hindu temples regularly feed the hungry, they are not just distributing vegetarian foodstuffs... they distribute *prasada*, sanctified foodstuff, which, by consuming, one performs acts of devotion to God and by so doing elevates the consciousness which is the primary objective of human life.

Another problem here is that many Christians confuse "service to God" with "service to man". There is a gulf of difference between the two. Those who serve man attain the nature of man, those who serve God attain to His nature and kingdom. One type of service is noble, with temporary results; the other type of service is infinitely nobler, with eternal results.

"Hindu's believe that Satan does not exist."

We do not believe in the existence of *anything* as being separate from God, or in the existence of an "anti-God" or supreme spirit of evil. In the Vedic literature, there are references to "*asuras*", or demons, which refer to individuals who, blinded by ignorance, fight against *dharma* for their own twisted, selfish interests. But one of God's names is "Vishnu", which means "He Who pervades everywhere." God exists within every atom as well as in the hearts of everyone... even the "demons". There is a historical account found in the *Puranas* concerning the powerful demon Hiranyakashipu. He hated Lord Vishnu so much that he was determined to kill Him. By using his mystic powers, he even traveled to other planets in search of God. But the *Bhagavata Purana* (8.19.0) relates that God was "hidden in the very last place Hiranyakashipu would have thought to look... in his own heart."

Interestingly, this "God vs. Satan" concept brings up a paradox in Christianity: Satan is considered to be the enemy and arch-rival of God. He works against God, and brings misery upon the Earth. If God cannot stop Satan, then He is not all-powerful, although He may be all-good. But if He can stop Satan, then He is all-powerful, but since He chooses to not stop him, therefore He is not all-good. With this strongly dualistic philosophy, which has its roots in Zoroastrianism, *God cannot be both all-good and all-powerful.*

Zoroastrianism, founded around 500 years before Christ, basically believes in two Gods: Ahura-Mazda, the Deity of light and good, and Ahriman, the Deity of darkness and evil. They believe that the Evil One created the material world... and also misleads mankind. But Ahura-Mazda sends a Savior to lead the people back to the Light. As you can see, there are a number of similarities between this and Christianity. Not only in the Satan/Savior conflict, but also the doctrine that nature is intrinsically evil.

This concept of having an "Evil One" like Satan for a scapegoat is often used as a cop-out to escape personal responsibility. After all, one could easily blame one's own shortcomings and failings on the pretense of "the Devil made me do it."

Furthermore, the belief in the existence of the Devil is used to promote ideas of separatism, an "us-against-them" mentality. For example, a hurricane damaging a Hindu temple is viewed by many Christians as "the wrath of God Almighty upon the heathens," but if a lightning bolt were to hit a Christian church, it is "the work of the Devil."

"Hindu's believe in the concept of the non-existence of evil."

Again, the concept of evil is deeply rooted in dualism. What is perceived as evil is in reality ignorance. In fact, the more "evil" one is perceived to be, the more that person is ignorant of his actual constitutional position (his relationship with God). In such an "evil" state of mind, one can commit truly abominable actions in his own selfish interests (desire for wealth, power, etc.). It is as simple as that. It would be irresponsible and irrational to try and blame it on the unseen influences of diabolical powers.

"Only Christianity has a solution for the problem of sin."

This is intriguing. Although Christians believe that the individual soul did not exist before its conception in the womb, they still maintain that all men are born into sin, tainted with the "original sin". Although Jesus exhorts people to "be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect," they say that man is inherently a sinful creature, and that Christ's death on the cross paid for all of our sins... all we have to do is acknowledge that sacrifice. Furthermore, many Christians believe that there is no need to stop sinning, as long as you have faith in Christ's sacrifice for your sins.

Hinduism maintains that sinful activities are due to ignorance. And Hinduism does indeed have a solution to the problem of sin, which is, through the acquisition of knowledge, understanding that the ultimate cause of sin is material desire. All sinful activity, and the resultant suffering, is due to material desire. A simple look at the world and you can see that practically everyone is in a mad rush to exploit the Earth and other living entities (including his fellow man) in the desire to enjoy. The very motto of civilization is "Enjoy! Have a good time! Entertain yourself!" Human society runs on desire. Even our economy, and particularly the marketing industry, heavily depends on people being full of lust for material pleasure. Greed sells.

Desire is the cause of sinful activities. And sinful activity is the cause of suffering. Fully 100% of man's inhumanity to man is due to desire. The desire for wealth breeds crime and mistrust. The desire for adoration results in envy and arguments. Desire is actually an entangling web, with desire feeding desire.

The basis of Hindu and Buddhist thought stresses the importance of controlling desire. The *Bhagavad-gita* (3.37) calls desire the greatest enemy of the world. By even contemplating desire, one can fall down from the spiritual platform (2.62-63), and desire is one of the three gates leading towards a future hellish existence (16.21). But by conquering material desire, and desiring only the exclusive satisfaction of God, one becomes peaceful and serene.

Although Jesus clearly instructed that "ye cannot serve both God and Mammon (cupidity personified, i.e., desire)", it is quite evident that Christianity never addresses the issue of the role of desire at all. Why? Because instead of understanding the necessity of purifying and transforming one's own consciousness (as a requisite for salvation), they believe that salvation is a "reward" for their faith. Incidentally, this is a major reason for the growth of Christianity (especially in India). One of the main tactics most Christian missionaries use is to teach Hindus that there is no need to follow their religious restrictions. Just as long as they believe in Jesus, they can eat meat, drink alcohol, and make merry... and still go to heaven! They are taught that disciplining the mind and controlling the senses is unnecessary, or even unhealthy. The *Bhagavad-gita* teaches that sinful activities are like fire, and desire is the fuel that feeds the flames. You cannot extinguish fire by pouring fuel onto it.

In short, the Christian tactic to end sin is to try to smother the fire... but the fire soon returns. The Vedic and Buddhist strategy is to cut off the fuel supply to the fire.

CHAPTER THREE: DIALOGS WITH CHRISTIANS

What follows is a compilation of dialogs I have had with Christians. The statements in *italics* are the comment/question of the Christian, and what follows is my response.

"Do you accept Jesus Christ as the son of God?"

Of course we do. It is stated in the *Bhagavad-gita* (14.4) that God is the Father of all... even of insects and plants, as well as the human beings. Therefore we are all His sons, which, of course, includes Jesus.

"But do you accept Jesus as the only begotten son of God?"

Is God so limited that He can beget only one son? In the *Bhagavata Purana* (10.90.34), we find a partial list of other begotten sons of God: Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Diptiman, Bhanu, Samba, and others.

"But Jesus was special. He died for His people. Did Pradyumna die for his people?"

No. Pradyumna is described to be just like His father... He is *sac-cid-ananda-vigraha*, that is, eternal, full of knowledge and bliss. He has no material body, and can never die.

"If He never dies, then where is He?"

Sometimes God manifests Himself, and sometimes He is unmanifest (not visible to our eyes). He is like the sun... when the sun sets, does it die? No, it is just invisible to our material eyes. It is beyond the horizon, but it is still there.

This concept of Jesus "dying for his people" is a philosophic fallacy known as "argumentum ad misericordiam", or "appeal to pity". This is committed when one appeals to another's pity rather than giving evidence to support a conclusion. Besides, many people die for their people, or for a cause, or for their country, or for their religion. Soldiers give up their lives for their people. Does that make them a divine savior?

"Jesus' suffering and death on the cross is hardly an 'argument to pity'. ...it is an expression of the love of God for the world. 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)"

That sounds nice, but it does not answer the question. God is all-powerful. He can easily deliver everyone in an instant, if He so chooses. He has no need to send His son to his death.

Furthermore, death does not exist for the soul, so there is no question of one "perishing". We have always existed, and we will always continue to exist, says the *Bhagavad-gita* (2.12).

It is important to understand the role intelligent thought has in our search for God. Emotional fervor can get in the way of common sense and logic.

Also, it is apparent that the supposed "miracle" of the resurrection is supposed to instill faith amongst the Christians. This is one of their main claims as to the "specialness" of their religion. Yet, what value are miracles in instilling faith? If you point out a miracle in Christianity, you say that it is the work of God. But if someone points out a miracle in another religion, you immediately brand it as "a trick of Satan."

"But only Christianity has a solution to the problem of sin: Adam the first man sinned. Man, down to the present day, inherited this sin at birth. In other words, man is born in sin, and he is destined for an eternity in hell. But, just by having faith in Christ Jesus, you can be saved. This is an expression of the love and mercy of God Almighty."

Threatening someone with an eternity of torment in hell is hardly an expression of love and mercy. We Hindus believe that God is a God of justice. No one is more just than God. This concept of "man inheriting the sins of Adam" does not speak of a God of justice. If a government were to arrest and punish citizens for their distant forefather's crimes, we would be outraged at such an exhibition of lawlessness and utter disregard for the most basic of human rights. Yet you ascribe this to God? How is that a "solution to the problem of sin"?

"But God makes it easy to be free. Just have faith in Jesus. Jesus' grace is not earned, it's freely given. All we have to do is accept it. Those who don't are lost forever."

It is becoming more and more obvious of the huge gulf of difference between the Christian conception of God and the Hindu perception of God. We believe that God is not only a God of justice, but also a God of unfathomable mercy, compassion, and love. Christians believe in an eternal hell of intense torment and pain. What value is punishment if there is no hope of it ending? What value is there in this, if the soul does not have a chance to mend his ways, and to apply the lessons he has learned? Such a concept of eternal punishment is not a concept of rehabilitation, but is a concept of pure, unadulterated vengeance. These are not the acts of a God of love, mercy, and compassion. Living for only a few, short years on this planet, and all of eternity depending upon these few years? And consider the inequity in this world: one child may be born in a comfortable home in a small town in America. Another may be born in a squalid crime-infested ghetto. One child obviously has the deck stacked against him, being born and raised in a climate of sin and hate. Are both judged equally? And what criterion is used to judge a person after death? Does a person who is 51% sinful and 49% pious burn in hell as much as a person who is 99% sinful? There are many, many inequities to the concept of endless punishment and eternal damnation. And that is not the hallmark of a God of justice.

"You Hindus and Buddhists believe in reincarnation. So what is the value of reincarnation if you can't remember your past lives? There is no rehabilitation there, either."

The ultimate purpose of reincarnation is not for punishment (although the embodied soul certainly receives his due share of miseries from his embodied existences). The soul transmigrates to other bodies simply because that is the soul's desire. God is very kind. If we want to live with Him, that is, if we truly desire to live with Him, we will be liberated from *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death. But if we want to remain here in the material world, trying our best to squeeze every possible drop of enjoyment from this world, trying to make a kingdom of God without God, then we will be given our desire... another material body. But, even when we receive another material body, we are given chance after chance to mend our ways and pursue our real self-interest... redeeming our relationship with God.

And after many, many millions of lifetimes, a wise person will begin to understand that no matter what material endeavors he makes, the results are finished at the time of death. He cannot take his wealth with him to his next body. Being materially exhausted, he can finally begin spiritual life. It is wrong that one can become serious about spiritual life only when he is materially frustrated. So, even material miseries can actually be a blessing in disguise. There is a Hindu saying that "if God likes you, He will give you everything, but if He loves you, He will take everything away." In this way, by showing His special mercy, the living being quickly realizes that our relationship with God is the only thing that really matters.

"But just look at the bounty with which God has blessed America! Surely that is a sign he favors us Christians."

If that was the case, then God must really favor the Muslims, since many oil-rich Arab states have the highest per-capita income in the world. You cannot equate material happiness with God's blessings. Tyrants and ruthless kings have lived lives of luxury. It is important to understand that material wealth is not always in the living being's best interests. He may come under the spell of illusion, thinking, "The material world is not so bad. Who needs God?" Real wealth is spiritual wealth.

By the way, it is questionable to consider the United States "blessed". Drug use is rampant and crime haunts both the cities as well as the countryside. Millions of abortions are performed every year. In addition to these murders of the un-born, 45,000 adult murders occur each year on the street, in schoolyards and in private homes. Although Christianity has had a strong foothold here in the United States since the very beginning, it is still glaringly obvious that something has gone awry with the social fabric. And yet Christians criticize third world countries "backward ways" and want to export Western culture there? Even in your own Bible, Jesus admonished the sanctimonious hypocrites, saying, "Before you can remove the speck in your brother's eye, first remove the log in your own."

In Hindu's homes around the world, the center of the home is the family altar, where spiritual values are shared. In America, the center of the home is the family television set, where the favorite fare is sitcoms, where anti-social skills are learned (the favorite source of "humor" in sitcoms is usually insult and sexual innuendo).

It is the goal of every devout Hindu to visit the different places of pilgrimage (especially after retirement), such as Varanasi, Vrindavana, Badarikashrama, and great holy places of worship such as the temples of Venkateshwara, Jagannatha and Ranganath. In the United States, the places of pilgrimage are either Reno, Atlantic City, or Las Vegas, the Mecca's of gambling, meat eating, intoxication, and prostitution.

"So if you say God is a God of love, why doesn't He take away everyone's opulence?"

It depends upon the individual's spiritual evolution. Taking away someone's opulence is beneficial only for the person who is ready to surrender to God. Other people would become angry and bitter at their misfortune.

"If a person believes in reincarnation, he will think. 'Oh, I can enjoy this time... in the next lifetime I will become serious about God.'"

Yes, he might think like that. But he may not be in a position next time around to become serious about God. If he has been extremely sinful in this life, his next body may be that of an animal or a flea... or even a bacterium inside the bowels of the flea. This human form of life is actually very rarely obtained. Instead of pursuing sense gratification, which is so easily obtainable in other life forms, we should fully utilize this human form of life for God realization.

"So this concept of reincarnation in other species of life is related to your concept of non-violence and vegetarianism. But animals have no souls. According to Genesis in the Bible, man was given dominion over all the animals. So there is no sin in killing animals. Animals are here for our enjoyment."

As for man being given "dominion over the animals", look in the dictionary for what the word "dominion" means. It means "authority or control". A man has "dominion" over his children, but that does not give him the right to kill and eat them! And as for the pernicious doctrine that "animals have no souls", there is absolutely NO place in the Bible where it is stated, or even hinted, that animals have no souls. This doctrine is not found in the Bible at all, but is derived from the speculations of Aquinas and Augustine who preferred meat eating. Animals feel pain, we feel pain. We fear death, animals fear death. Animals seek pleasure and warmth, and so do we. Even the ancient Greeks, such as Plato, observed that animals dream (as evidenced by dogs barking and twitching in their sleep).

"But humans are extremely intelligent. That is what makes them special, that is evidence of their soul."

A baby child has less intelligence than a dog. Does that mean the child has no soul? What about people in a degenerative mental state or the retarded? Do they have no soul?

"But if all life forms have the same quality of soul, why are not animals as intelligent as humans?"

Because they can express themselves only through the body they are in. Here is an example: suppose an expert computer programmer has to program two separate computers. One computer is an 8-bit, 1 MHz microcomputer, and the other is a 32-bit, 50 MHz mainframe. In this example, the programmer represents the soul, and the computers are the brains of the different bodies the soul may inhabit. If you were looking at the output of the two computers, you would see the output of the mainframe is much faster and more efficient than that of the smaller computer. So you might assume that the programmer of the mainframe is much smarter than the programmer of the micro-computer. But, in reality, it is the same programmer! He is just limited by the capacity of the computer he uses. In the same way, one may think that a human soul is different (and much more advanced) than an animal soul.

By the way, this analogy is also useful when explaining the results of brain injuries. After a brain injury, a person may act confused, or lose his ability to control his emotions, etc. But the soul is undamaged. It is just that the soul's mechanism for expression (the body and brain) has been damaged. Just as a computer with a faulty keypad would seriously hamper the computer's efficiency, even though the programmer is unchanged.

The *Bhagavad-gita* explains it in this way: some embodied souls are compared to smoke-covered fire. These are the souls encased in human bodies, where a dim glimmer of God consciousness can be perceived. Other souls are compared to dust-covered mirrors, which are the souls in animals... the spiritual nature of these beings is almost imperceptible. And, finally, other embodied souls are compared to an embryo encased in a womb, which represents the souls in plants, where consciousness is so covered that it is imperceptible.

"So the injunction to not kill other living entities seems important to you. Then why is it not mentioned in the Bible?"

It is mentioned, in Exodus 20:13, where the list of the Ten Commandments is given: "Thou shalt not kill."

"We interpret this to mean, 'Thou shalt not murder (another human being).'"

"Interpret", according to the dictionary, means "to explain in familiar terms that which is obscurely worded". The sentence "thou shalt not kill" is hardly obscurely worded. It is crystal clear, and needs no such "interpretation".

"But, that's part of the Old Testament. We, as Christians, are mainly concerned with the New Testament, and the teachings of Jesus. Why did Jesus not say anything against meat-eating?"

Actually, Jesus made the commandments even stricter. In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus quotes the commandment "thou shalt not kill", and then said that even one who is angry is in danger of jeopardizing his salvation.

Besides, how do you know that Jesus did not speak out against meat eating? Jesus lived for 33 years, yet the Bible only speaks of his childhood, and the last three years of his life. All of the Jesus' speeches in the Bible would take less than an hour to read. After 33 years, only one hour's worth of speeches? Some scholars believed that Jesus was an Essene Jew, many of whom practiced vegetarianism.

"Well, maybe only an hour of his speeches was recorded, but everything we need to know that is important is there in the Bible."

That is an audacious thing to say. Remember, Jesus never compiled the books for the New Testament, nor did he choose which books were going to make it into the canon, nor did he even write any of the books. Other people did, and they were guided by unknown motives.

"If Jesus was so concerned about animals, why did he multiply the loaves and fishes? Why not just loaves and vegetables?"

Jesus told his disciples to bring whatever was available, and they replied, "We have only these five loaves and two fish." But, even if this really happened, that does not condone animal slaughter. If you live in a place like the Middle East, that is one thing. But to slaughter animals when the grocery shelves are full of grains, fruits, and vegetables is another thing altogether. To cause any sentient living entity to suffer needlessly is a great offense.

"Speaking simply from a practical, realistic standpoint, if we did not eat the animals, they would overpopulate the Earth."

This is nonsense, a truly narrow vision. Farm animals are forced to reproduce, especially by artificial insemination. To encourage the breeding of livestock, and at the same time, saying, "We have to eat them, or they will overrun the Earth" is truly demonic thinking.

"But what about wild animals? With the animals' natural predators gone, their populations must be curbed. Human hunters take up the ecological 'niche' left behind by the disappearance of the predators."

Human hunters hardly fill the ecological "niche" of the natural predators. Natural predators attempt "easy" kills, so they will automatically attack only the weak or the sickly prey, which leaves only the fittest and strongest of the preyed species to survive, passing on their genes for the benefit of the species. Human hunters, on the other hand, will invariably go after the "trophy", the biggest and strongest member of the herd. Thus they do not weed out the sickly members of the herd that a natural predator would target. This is entirely contrary to the laws of nature.

If hunters were truly sincere in their claims that they are doing this to help restore nature's balance, they would immediately stop their slaughter of the natural predators, and help restore areas for wildlife to flourish.

"It seems to me that you Hindu's worship the creation and not the Creator."

Both respect for the creation and the creator go hand in hand. It is said, "those who abuse the creation heap contempt on the Creator." How can you claim to worship someone if you scorn his creation? If you were to vandalize your landlord's property, what value is your claim that you respect and admire your landlord?

"There is enough human misery in this world. Why waste the time and energy being concerned for animals? First, let's take care of our fellow man, and then we'll worry about the animals."

First, it takes no time or energy to stop our abuse of animals. Second, this material world will always be a place of misery. You can attempt to minimize the suffering, but there will always be suffering here. So to say "wait until we have solved mankind's problems" is irresponsible because it will never happen. Third, it is quite clear that our use of animals for food is responsible for a tremendous amount of human misery (starvation, disease, etc.) Fourth; our abuse of our fellow creatures is also hurting us. For instance, wetlands are important in flood control (by acting as a giant "sponge" to absorb excess rain, and then slowly releasing the excess). By destroying the wetlands, we are only hurting ourselves. Man's tampering with nature only hurts mankind in the end. And finally, there is the subtle law of karma. Man's malicious treatment of other living entities will revisit him in the form of sinful reactions in the future. Therefore, anyone truly sincere in his desire to alleviate the suffering of his fellow man will avoid causing unnecessary pain to his fellow creatures.

"How do you know your scriptures are valid? We say your scriptures are useless. And, apparently, you think our own Bible is worthless as well."

Speaking for myself, I can say that following the Vedic principles has made me a better person. As for the Bible, we do not accept the Bible as a revealed scripture, but we most certainly do not consider it useless. It was valuable to help elevate the people of that ancient time and place to a higher level of consciousness. Basically, the Bible instructs, "Be good. Don't kill or steal. Worship God. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

But we believe that our own scriptures, the Vedic literature, being divinely transmitted to man, places us on a more direct path to God, on a higher level of consciousness, and on a far higher ethical and moral plane.

It is like the science of numbers: First you have arithmetic; then you move up to mathematics. Still higher is algebra, and higher still is calculus. The existence of calculus does not negate, contradict, or even minimize, the importance of basic arithmetic.

In the same way, Vedic scriptures are on a higher spiritual plane, they are the "calculus" of the spiritual realm. But that does not negate the lesser scriptures. They, too, have their place. And this concept of higher planes of God consciousness is reflected in the Bible itself: Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." (John 16:12)

APPENDIX: Who Really Authored the Bible?

The following section explains authorship, if known, of the different books of the Bible, according to the learned opinion of most modern biblical scholars. This information can be found by looking in any encyclopedia. The scholars base their conclusions by carefully weighing the evidence... there is a reason why they feel the way they do. Although many Christians (and especially many fundamentalist Christians) try to minimize or even ignore these scholarly conclusions, the fact remains that they are completely unable to counter these arguments by any evidence whatsoever. Although they are quick to accept archeological data that verifies a piece of biblical history, and they are quick to accept scholars' conclusions on the questionable nature of the scriptures of other religions, they completely downplay a critical, unbiased study of their own supposedly "infallible" scripture, the Bible. Which is ironic, since their entire claim to spiritual superiority rests on their premise that the Bible is perfect, flawless and infallible.

In the following analyses, it is important to watch for the references to "editing", "rewriting", and "additions" to the books of the Bible. These changes to the Bible might make one wonder, "Why did someone find it necessary to change this scripture? What was their motive? What was the original scripture lacking? Or what did it say that someone felt necessary to change? And who did the changing?"

After reading this section, the obvious question that comes to a thoughtful persons mind is, "How can someone base their faith and life, while simultaneously *condemning other religions*, on such an imperfect scripture?"

THE OLD TESTAMENT

It doesn't take a scholar to realize that *autobiography is very rarely found in the Old Testament*. It is mostly written in the third person ("he said", or "she said", rather than "I said"). Scholars say that the vast majority of the Old Testament consists of stories that were handed down via the unreliable method of oral transmission before they were finally written down. There was a long journey from the creation of these stories until the time they were compiled... and this journey involved storytellers and editors.

It is also important to note that almost none of the books in the Old Testament have "signature verses". Christians and Jews maintain different "traditional" authors, although they have little or no evidence to support these claims. There is also a common misunderstanding among many Christians that the books are by individuals, rather than about individuals. For example, many Christians believe a man named Job wrote the book in the Old Testament. But, in "The Book of Job", here, as elsewhere, "of" means "about", and not "by". This is quite clear in the very first verse of that book: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job..." (Job 1:1)

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy: These first five books of the Bible are known as the "Pentateuch", and tradition ascribes these books to have been written by Moses. This is highly unlikely since these books tell of the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5)! In reality, these books are actually anonymous and composite works. In these books there are two and different accounts of Creation, of the "flood", and of the plagues of Egypt. Scholars have overwhelming evidence that Genesis was compiled from several different sources. They also feel that Exodus and Leviticus were written by members of the priesthood in the 5th or 6th century BC.

Joshua: Scholars maintain that this book is drawn from a number of different sources. The oldest passages of the book date from the 10th century BC, but were rewritten around the 7th century BC by members of the Deuteronomical school. Around the 5th century BC, persons motivated by priestly matters added to or rewrote altogether the entire second half of the book.

Judges: The traditional author of this book was Samuel. However, scholars believe that it was written after the death of Samuel; chapters 2-16 are believed to be written by members of the Deuteronomical school, and chapters 17-21 are considered to be an addition by priests in the 5th century BC.

Ruth: Nothing is known about the author or when it was written. Scholars point out that certain references in the book show that it was written sometime in the "post-exilic" period, probably sometime between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC.

Samuel (1 and 2): Scholars concur that these books are clearly composite works. Some scholars maintain that the books were composed from an "Early Source", which dates around the time of the reign of Solomon (961-922 BC), and the "Late Source", which dates from around the 7th century BC. Other scholars believe that there were three sources, known as "J", "L", and "E". In both theories, it is interesting to note that the Early Source (or J and L) favors the establishment of the monarchy as divinely willed. Yet the Late Source (or E), clearly disapproves of the concept of a monarchy, saying it rejects the role of God as the true king! This is an example of one of the many contradictions of the Bible (even though so many fundamentalists claim the Bible to be "harmonious").

There are other inconsistencies as well. For example, in 1 Samuel 17, David is credited with killing the giant Goliath. But in 2 Samuel 21:19, Elhanan, son of Jaareoregim, is credited with the act. Another point to mention is that if you look in the popular King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, and turn to 2 Samuel 21:19, you will see "the brother of" (Goliath) in italics. This italic print means that it was an embellishment of the editor of the KJV in an attempt to cover up this inconsistency (by making it appear that Elhanan killed the brother of Goliath, as opposed to Goliath himself). But if you look in a reputable version of the Bible, such as the New English Bible, you will see the original rendition: that Elhanan killed Goliath. Any italic print you see in the KJV is a modification by the editor of that book.

Kings (1 and 2): The traditional author is ascribed to be Jeremiah. However, modern scholars have determined that it was actually composed by at least two anonymous authors. The earlier author wrote his portion sometime before the death of Josiah, the king of Judah, in 610 BC. The second portion is thought to have been written around 60 years later. They reason this by noticing that the last historical event mentioned occurred around that time, and no mention at all was made of the fall of Babylon in 539 BC, a significant historical event that certainly would have been worthy of mention. Both authors, however, certainly seemed to have been motivated by a nationalistic fervor in the cause of Israel.

Chronicles (1 and 2), Ezra, Nehemiah: Almost all scholars agree that these four books were written by the same author(s). Internal evidence suggests that he (or they) was a member of a priestly tribe, probably a Levite. Nothing is known about the author, neither his name, nor his character. Like most books of the Bible, the author was anonymous.

In Chronicles 1 and 2, the author refers to other books, but scholars are uncertain as to which are genuine references, and which are embellishments of the author. Most scholars agree that these books contain many later additions, and that the entire work took from 332 to 167 BC to complete.

It is also obvious that the author used specific references from the books of Samuel and Kings (which scholars say is less inaccurate), significantly modified to suit the author's point of view. The writer attempted to find answers to such troubling questions as "Why do good people sometimes suffer? And why do

the unjust sometimes flourish?" In attempting to answer these questions, it is notable that the author rejected source material which did not further his aim. Also, although fundamentalists consider the entire Bible harmonious, there are many inconsistencies with the book of Chronicles and the book of Kings.

Esther: This book is not even mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Because the mood of this book is hateful and vengeful, with nationalistic overtones, and completely secular in nature, early Jewish scholars were reluctant to include it into the Bible. But, bowing down to popular demand, it was eventually included, but not until AD 90! *It is interesting to note that the Greek version of this book contains over 100 additional verses that were not in the original Hebrew version!*

Job: Modern scholars say that not only was this book written anonymously, the author used, as his sources, an Israelite or Edomite folktale.

Psalms: This is one of the few sections of the entire Bible which contains signature lines. 74 or the psalms are attributed to David, and 32 to other authors... but all of the remainder are of unknown authorship. Christians and Jews have always attributed the authorship of this entire book (or at least the editorship) to David, but in reality, this book is a collection of psalms that took almost 800 years to compile.

Proverbs: Traditionalists attribute this book to Solomon, but scholars point out that it was probably written around 600 years later (by an unknown person) because it is clear that the author(s) were heavily influenced by Greek philosophical systems of thought, such as Epicureanism and Stoicism.

Song of Solomon: You would think that this book would be written by Solomon, but scholars believe that it was composed 400-600 years later, and that it was obviously influenced by cultic and pagan rituals.

Isaiah: Traditionally ascribed to Isaiah, but scholars maintain that the first 36 chapters were of his teachings, and the rest were the teachings of his disciples.

Jeremiah: One of the very few books of the Old Testament that contains first-person references (although this is only a part of the book). Other sections are third-person accounts, probably from the students of Jeremiah. The rest clearly shows the influence of the Deuteronomistic school. The entire book shows evidence of tampering in the form of editing.

Lamentations: Traditionalists say that the author was Jeremiah, but educated scholars say that it was composed by different anonymous authors. Chapter 5 is clearly a later, edited addition to the book. Actually, the ascription of the book to Jeremiah is the result of a misunderstanding of 2 Chronicles 35:25, which says that the lamentations of Jeremiah for the king Josiah "are written in the lamentations". But the book of Lamentations never even mentions Josiah.

Ezekiel: This is one of the very few books where the majority of the book was probably written by its namesake. But the last nine chapters are believed by scholars to have been a later edition by the disciples of Ezekiel.

Daniel: This book is traditionally ascribed to Daniel (who lived in the 6th century BC). In this book, he tells of his kidnapping by Babylonians from Jerusalem. But since there is absolutely no historical record of a Babylonian attack on Jerusalem until about 400 years later, the actual date is estimated to have been in the 2nd century BC, by an anonymous author.

Although the traditionalists tend to categorize this book with the other so-called "prophetic" books, it is important to note that this book is not even mentioned in the directory of famous Hebrew writings, the "Wisdom of Sirach" (200 BC)!

Also, although the traditionalists ascribe this book to one author, a significant portion (2:4 through 7:28) is written in another language, Aramaic (the remainder of the book being in Hebrew). Furthermore, historians note numerous historical inaccuracies mentioned in this book (when compared against other historical records of that time, as well as other books of the Old Testament).

Hosea: Again, traditionally ascribed to Hosea. But scholars believe that portions (1:10-11 and the latter half of the second chapter) are later additions. In is interesting to note that these two additional sections are verses which describe the "specialness" of the Jewish people.

Joel: Absolutely *nothing* is known about the author, except his name (Joel).

Amos: Traditionally ascribed to Amos, but scholars believe that this was written after his death. They also point out that the end of this book (9:8-15) differs so dramatically from the rest of the book that it must have been an even later addition, which deals with the people of Israel, the favorites of Jehovah, being spared the divine wrath.

Obadiah: The traditionalists say this book was written by Obadiah. But biblical scholars question the unity of the book, and maintain that more than one author wrote it (one of which *may* have been Obadiah). Aside from that, absolutely nothing is known about this Hebrew prophet. Regarding the question of unity of this book, it is interesting to note that this entire book is only 21 verses in length!

Jonah: Tradition holds that this book was written by the prophet Jonah, who, according to Judeo/Christian mythology, lived in the 8th century BC and was swallowed by a giant fish. But scholars point to evidence that this work was written anonymously about 300 years later, in the post-exilic period. Among their evidence, they point to 1) the later form of Hebrew used by the author(s), and 2) the familiarity of the author(s) with other post-exilic works.

The traditionalists say this, and so many other books of the Bible, are autobiographical works. But even a casual glance at these books show they were written by another (unknown) person. Using this book as an example, let us examine chapter 1, verse 17: "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights." This is clearly a third-person account. A first-person account would read, "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow me up. And I was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights."

What evidence do the fundamentalists produce in supporting their claim that Jonah is the author? *Absolutely none*. There is nothing in the book that even suggests a signature verse.

And remember, I am just using this book as an example. The exact same case could be made against the vast majority of the so-called "autobiographical" books in the Bible.

Micah: Again, the traditionalists say that this book was written by Micah. But, again, scholars say that it is a composite work. Chapters 1-3 seem to have actually have been written by him, except for the 12th and 13th verses of the second chapter, which appears to have been a later addition. These last two verses speak of the restoration of the tribes of Israel, probably to bolster the Zionist effort. Scholars maintain that the contents of chapters 4 through 7 reflect circumstances that occurred long after Micah's life. Therefore, Micah could not have been the author of these chapters.

Nahum: Traditionalists believe this book was written by Nahum. Scholars have found no evidence to disagree with this. Of course, the traditionalists have no evidence that it was written by Nahum... this is a type of philosophic fallacy wherein a conclusion is "proven" true on the basis that it has not been proven false.

Habakkuk: Scholars believe that the first two chapters were actually written by Habakkuk, although absolutely nothing is known about this person. But the rest of the book is considered to be a later addition by an anonymous author. The scholar's strong, irrefutable evidence: there was no reference to that part of the book in the Habakkuk Commentary of the Dead Sea scrolls.

Zephaniah: Tradition attributes it to the prophet Zephaniah, but scholars say that chapters 2 and 3 were added later. And the end of the third chapter was an even later addition. Again, this later addition speaks of the Jews regaining their homeland.

Haggai: Although traditionalists believe that this was written by the prophet Haggai, scholars doubt this, pointing to the impersonal third-person references to him as "the prophet".

Zechariah: Tradition holds that this was written by Zechariah himself. This may be the case, in the first eight chapters. But scholars point to the last six chapters, which differ significantly from the first eight, in language, style, theology, and other matters. This dramatic difference leads the scholars to believe that this section was composed over a century later than the first part of the book.

Malachi: Early Jewish commentators believed that this book was written by Ezra, but scholars believe that it was written later.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Before discussing the authorship of the New Testament, it is important to remember that much of the justification of the New Testament is due to the supposed fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. But, as is clearly shown above, the authorship and the authenticity of the Old Testament is highly doubtful. *You cannot build a sturdy house on a flimsy foundation.* Similarly, you cannot have a sound argument when your premise for your argument is a weak, shaky presumption.

The philosophic "center" of the New Testament is the first four books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), which are known as the "Gospels". The rest of the New Testament is, for all practical purposes, an elaboration on these four books. Many Christians believe that these four Gospels were written by the direct disciples of Christ, but, as you will see, this is hardly the case. So even the beloved Gospels are not free from the nagging doubt of dubious authorship. Christians cite the similarity of the Gospels as "proof" of their authenticity. But the similarities between these four books are due to the existence of an alleged collection of the sayings of Jesus called "Q". The compiler of Q is unknown. Christians place enormous faith that this unknown person(s) did not 1) fabricate his own sayings to suit his own agenda, and 2) use sayings from questionable sources.

Also, as I noted earlier, there were over 50 different Gospels in circulation at the time the New Testament was compiled. Since the persons choosing the canon used only books that were, more or less, harmonious, it is reasonable to conclude that the results would be... harmonious books!

For example, one book that did not make it into the New Testament was the "Gospel of Peter I", because the book does not consider the Crucifixion as an act of atonement. Similarly, the "Acts of John" was not included because of its subversion of traditional Christian teachings (such as denying the reality of Christ's physical body). It may be argued that these (and many other books) were not included because of "questionable authorship", but the authorship of these books is no less questionable than other books that have been included.

Another significant, disquieting fact concerning the New Testament is the widely used literary tradition at that time of pseudonymously ascribing new works to a venerated personage of the past in order to give the new concoction credibility! This has, indeed, serious implications for the entire New Testament.

Matthew: Traditionalists believe that this is the earliest of the four Gospels, and was written by St. Matthew, one of the 12 apostles. However, most modern scholars believe that the Gospel of Mark was earlier, and that the author of the Gospel of Matthew drew upon the Gospel of Mark for material. This is significant, because the Gospel of Mark is indeed of highly questionable authorship (see below). They base these beliefs on internal and external evidence. And this evidence also casts strong doubts that St. Matthew wrote this book. They have narrowed down the date of the writing of this book between 70 and 80 AD.

Mark: Traditionalists believe that St. Mark wrote this book. And many Christians believe that St. Mark was one of the 12 apostles, but that is not the case. The very earliest evidence concerning the authorship of this Gospel comes from the 3rd century, from a church historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, who in turn quotes a writer who lived a hundred years earlier, whose name was Papias... who in turn quotes a still earlier person called only "the elder". This quote refers to the author, Mark, being an interpreter of Peter, whose name was John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas. But there are reasons to doubt this. Because the most early Christians linked this Gospel to Mark, the "elder" did his best to at least try to link the author with a man named "Mark" (Peter's interpreter). The conclusion by most scholars is that the author was an otherwise unknown man (named Mark), who drew on a large number of traditions to compose this work.

It is also interesting to note that many Greek manuscripts end with the eighth verse of the 15th chapter. Yet the Bible today ends with verse 20! Most scholars believe that the final 12 verses were added by a 2nd century monk or scribe to make a more satisfying ending.

Luke: Attributed to St. Luke, although very little is known about St. Luke, except that he may have been a traveling companion of St. Paul. And, like Paul, there is no record or mention of St. Luke even meeting Christ. Therefore, even if this gospel was written by St. Luke, it would clearly be at best a second-hand account of the biography of the savior of the Christians, and was written 40 or 50 years after Christ's death. Modern scholars agree that the Gospel of Luke is clearly based on the earliest Gospel (Mark), and that the author used two major interpolations (Luke 6:20-8:3, and 9:51-18:14) from the collection of supposed sayings of Jesus, "Q", and from a large body of oral traditions (commonly referred to as "L").

John: The authorship of this book has created heated controversy since the 1800's. Although traditionalists have always believed that the author of this book was St. John the Evangelist, in actuality there are four candidates for authorship: 1) it was written by a person known as "the elder", as mentioned in the Epistles of John; 2) it was written by a student of St. John the Evangelist; 3) it was written by Lazarus of Bethany; or 4) it was written by an anonymous person in Alexandria a hundred years after Christ's death.

Also, scholars generally agree that the entire 21st chapter is a later addition. This chapter deals with Christ's supposed resurrection.

Acts of the Apostles: Traditionally believed that the author was St. Luke, but, since there is no reference to this within the book itself, there are many doubts to this. Many scholars contend that it was written by someone who had acquired the diary of a traveling companion of St. Paul. Scholars point out that it was written around AD 62-90, and was written in Greek, instead of Hebrew.

Romans; Corinthians (1 and 2); Galatians: Attributed to Paul.

Ephesians: Traditionally attributed to Paul, but it is doubted by many modern scholars because of the extreme differences of tone, vocabulary, and writing style as compared to authentic letters of Paul.

Philippians: Attributed to Paul.

Colossians: Although traditionally ascribed to Paul, many scholars have strong doubts about this because of the differences of vocabulary used (as compared to genuine Pauline writings).

1 Thessalonians: Attributed to Paul.

2 Thessalonians: Attributed to Paul, although, based on internal and external evidence, many scholars tend to doubt this.

Timothy (1 and 2); Titus: Traditionally attributed to Paul, but most scholars believe otherwise due to the fact that the style and vocabulary differ in significant ways from authentic works by Paul. Also, historical events as reflected in these works do not fit into any known situation of Paul's life. The scholars believe that these books are by an unknown author(s) who used the name of Paul to give it an air of authority. This is important because in the book of Timothy, Paul condemns those who say to abstain from eating meat: "In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to... [the] doctrines of devils; speaking lies... and commanding to abstain from meats..." (1 Timothy 4:1-3) Christians are fond of quoting this verse to show that vegetarianism is the doctrine of the Devil. Yet this is a book of extremely doubtful authorship.

Yet, even for the sake of argument, let's assume that Paul did indeed write this book. What justification does Paul have in saying such a thing? There is no place in the Old Testament or in Jesus' sayings which equated vegetarianism with the "doctrines of devils." It is fairly safe to say that whoever wrote Timothy was displeased at the idea of giving up his precious animal flesh.

Philomon: Traditionally ascribed to Paul.

Hebrews: Practically all modern scholars doubt this was written by Paul (as the traditionalists claim). Actually, even the early Christian Church itself had strong doubts about Paul's authorship of this book! Scholars point out that the vocabulary, grammar, and style are dramatically different from known works by Paul. But the most damning evidence is that the author(s) of this book quote from the Greek versions of the Old Testament (instead of the Hebrew originals, as Paul would have done)! Therefore, it is clear that this book was not written by Paul, or any other apostle. This is deeply significant, for in this book contains the cornerstones of the fundamentalists' beliefs: 1) that Jesus died for everyone's sins (chapter nine and ten); and 2) that the doctrine of faith alone is sufficient for salvation (chapters 11 and 12).

James: This book is traditionally ascribed to St. James, the apostle. Most scholars doubt this because of the expertise of the author in the Greek language. Therefore, they feel that it was written by an unknown Greek Christian.

And many Christians themselves have their doubts about this work. Even Martin Luther, the founder of one of the three main branches of Christianity (Protestantism), called it "an epistle of straw". One reason why he may have said this was because of a verse in James (2:20): "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" The Protestants believe that faith alone is sufficient for salvation. The Catholics believe that it is important to do good works as well. This one point was a major factor in causing Protestantism to break away from Catholicism. And this one verse devastates the fundamentalists' argument. This is completely contradictory to Paul's exhortations of "justification by faith" in Romans and Hebrews. So much for so-called "harmony of the Bible", as the fundamentalists claim (as proof of the Bible's validity).

Peter 1: Although attributed to Peter, it is widely doubted by most scholars on the basis of the fact that the author of this book cites Greek translations of the Old Testament instead of the Hebrew originals. This questionable book contains the fundamentalists' slogan "born again" (1 Peter 1:23).

Peter 2: This book has even more doubtful authorship than Peter 1, so much so that it was delayed entrance into the New Testament's canon. It is generally believed that it was written by an unknown scribe around 150 AD.

Epistles of John: Traditionally ascribed to St. John the Evangelist, but many scholars disagree. Many scholars feel that it was written by one of the four "Johns" as listed above under the "Gospel of John", but they can't agree on which one.

Revelations: Again attributed to St. John the Evangelist, but scholars again disagree. There are so many linguistic differences between this book and the Gospel of John that it is clear that they were written by different people.

This book is the cornerstone of the fundamentalists, the evangelicals, and the millenarianists. It records a purported "vision", and Christians are fond of tying its enigmatic allegory to current events to show that the end of the world is near. And they are generally successful, since this book is so obscure that one can elicit practically any interpretation from it. In fact, ever since it was written (around AD 100), people of every generation have been able to link it to their own period of time.

The numerous references to "a thousand years" in chapter 20 have led many to consider that doomsday will occur at the end of a millennium. The "Judgment Day" hysteria that occurred as the year 1000 approached is a historical fact. Similarly, social psychologists predicted the hysteria that occurred as we approached the year 2000. (Y2K) and Y3K will probably be no different.

Many scholars believe that Revelations is actually a collection of separate works by various unknown authors. One reason they believe this is because the book is a strange collection of Greek and Hebrew idioms. And some believe that it was never intended to be viewed as a "prophecy", but as an allegory showing the crisis of faith at that period of time (of the Roman persecutions).

It is interesting to note that Jesus himself never authored any book of the New Testament, not even a paragraph. In fact, most of the New Testament was written by Paul. This has led many to consider that Paul is the architect of modern Christianity, not Christ. A more accurate name for Christians, then, is "Paulists", not "Christians".

Many Christians believe that Paul was one of the 12 apostles of Christ, but this is not the case... the 12 were Andrew, John, Bartholomew, Judas, Jude, the two James, Matthew, Peter, Phillip, Simon, and Thomas. After Judas committed suicide, Matthias replaced him. By the way, this is one way of testing the fundamentalist's knowledge of his own religion. Many believe that St. Mark (the alleged author of the Gospel of Mark), and St. Luke (the supposed author of the Gospel of Luke), and St. Paul (the author of many New Testament books), were members of the 12 apostles, Jesus' direct disciples. But they are not on the list.

As for Paul, who plays such an important part of Christian theology, it is important to note that he never met Christ. In fact, he was active in the persecutions of early Christians, claiming it to be an unlawful Jewish cult. Acts 8:1 depicts Paul as agreeing with the stoning of the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen: "And Saul (Paul's pre-Christian name) was consenting unto his [Stephen's] death." Paul was converted to Christianity later, and became a zealous missionary (perhaps motivated by extreme guilt for his atrocities).

CONCLUDING WORDS

As a Hindu proverb says, "Philosophy without religion is mental speculation. And religion without philosophy is sentimentality." A religion guided solely by slogans and rampant emotional fervor is in no position to declare itself the only valid religion of mankind (while condemning other religions as the "tricks of Satan").

The Buddha said, "Believe not because some old manuscripts are produced, believe not because it is your national belief, believe not because you have been made to believe from your childhood, but reason truth out, and after you have analyzed it, then if you find that it will do good to one and all, believe it, live up to it and help others to live up to it."

This is true dharma. The Vedic (and Buddhist) literatures are veritable treasure houses of logical thought and sound principles, guiding the living entities to the very pinnacle of spiritual perfection. In this dark Age of Kali, when irreligion is considered religion and religion is considered irreligion, this dharma is certainly needed. It is the last light of the world, the last bastion of deep spiritual truth, and everyone should take it seriously and study and learn its philosophical truths for their own well-being and spiritual progress.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED READING

Diet for a New America, by John Robbins, published by EarthSave Foundation, 706 Frederick Street, San Francisco, California. This book was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. It lists evidence from reputable sources such as the US Dept. of Agriculture, the US Dept. of Commerce, the Journal of the American Medical Association, the New England Journal of Medicine, and much, much more, and gives undeniable, persuasive testimony that meat eating is hazardous to our health as well as to the well-being of the Earth herself.

Deceptions and Myths of the Bible, by Lloyd M. Graham, published by University books, Secaucus, NJ. This book gives compelling evidence that the many myths of the Bible came from older sources. Examples: the myths of Eden, Adam, and Eve are from earlier Babylonian stories; Moses is fashioned after the Syrian Mises; the myth of Noah and the flood came from the Puranic history of the Matsya avatar.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1) Support your local temple. It is quite normal for a thoughtful person to want to make a positive difference, to leave the world a better place than the way they found it. There are hundreds of worth-while charities you might consider giving to: charities that help the poor; health-related charities; libraries; educational, environmental and animal rights organizations. But remember these charities all have a broad base of support from the entire spectrum of the general populace. Hindu temples, on the other hand, are small islands of refuge for dharma, and are supported by only a small minority of people. *They need your help!*

If you supply water to the roots of a tree, the entire tree (trunk, branches, and leaves) is benefitted. Similarly, by nourishing dharma (the very roots of the world), all other worthwhile projects are automatically served.

- 2) Stay informed. It is absolutely vital to keep abreast of the happenings in your neighborhood, your community, and in this entire global village.
- 3) Make your voice heard. If there is some issue before a city council, state legislature, or Congress, write or call your representative. You have a right to your opinion, and let your representative know. And let him know that you keep track of his voting record. In politics, it is the "squeaky wheel that gets the grease." Also, consider writing letters to newspapers; a well-written letter can inspire others to get involved. A good way to make sure your letter gets printed is to rebut the opinion expressed in an editorial, or the views of a previous letter writer.
- 4) Make your vote count. Political conservatism and anti-foreign culture sentiment is on the rise. Make sure you vote for the right person (or, at least, vote against the wrong person). If your candidate wins the election, immediately write him a congratulatory letter, and tell him why you voted for him.
- 5) Speak with your wallet. Avoid merchants and businesses that are inimical to the cause of dharma. And go out of your way to patronize businesses that support our cause.
- 6) Pass on your values to the next generation... Don't assume they will be passed on automatically. The next generation is facing enormous pressure from their peers, from society, and from Christian fundamentalists. They need all the help you can give them.
- 7) Live dharma. At every instant, we are faced with only two choices of action. Either an action will help support dharma, or the other action will let the world drift further into darkness. At each moment, we are given the chance to add our own light to the sum of light. The choice is ours.

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