

**A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO HINDUISM:  
THE ROLE OF ADVENTIST SCHOOLS IN SOUTHERN ASIA**

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The topic assigned is a relative and comprehensive theme. This paper attempts to present an approach that can help our teachers in Secondary schools in approaching Hindu students. This paper will orient the reader the basics of Hinduism and suggest a Biblical approach to it. Methodologically, this paper attempts to base its conclusions on careful research done on similar areas and also with the observations and interviews conducted in our schools. It is with a deep sense of concern I have undertaken this problem. We hope the conclusions will offer tangible ways of resolving the problems related to the integration of faith. There are two advantages of this study. On the one hand it gives the opportunity to maintain the distinctiveness of the Adventist system of education and on the other hand it helps to focus on maturing our understanding of those in partial light. As part of my introduction I would like the readers to take a look at the chart given below:

	C. I. U Central India Union	N. I. U Northern India Union	N. E. I. U North East Union	S. I. U South India Union	Grand Total
<b>Schools:</b>					
Elementary	33	43	20	50	146
Secondary	20	12	4	54	90
Total	*53	55	24	104	236
<b>Students Enrollment:</b>					
SDA	3,555	1,115	1,258	4,281	10,209
Non-SDA	15,029	11,379	3,089	50,040	79,537
Total	18,584	12,494	4,347	54,321	89,746
<b>Teachers:</b>					
SDA	891	320	245	1,874	3,330
Non-SDA	205	230	37	961	1,433
Total	1,096	550	282	2,835	4,763

\*This figure of C.I.U include the statistics of Spicer College High School which has 694 SDA students and 40 non-SDA students; 87 SDA teachers and 2 non-SDA teachers.

- a. The number of non-SDA teachers amounts to 1433 as compared to 3300 SDA teachers.
- b. The number of non-SDA students is 79,537 as against 10,209 SDAs.

A careful look at the figures leads to the following conclusions:

- More than half of our teachers come from Non-Adventist backgrounds.
- The subject of Bible is most often taught by those who are not well grounded in the Scripture.
- The teaching of the Bible has lost its significance and importance.
- Adventist education in Southern Asia is no longer correlated to the original blueprint given by Ellen White. 2

These factors significantly contribute to the decline of the integration of faith and learning in our schools. The nature and scope of the study is to develop what is basic to Hinduism and to suggest the areas in which integration can be applied.

## **THE ADVENTIST PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION**

A brief review of the context indicates that our schools have become school centred rather than church centered. In the 60s and the 70s, the schools were mushrooming all over Southern Asia and during the formative years, the schools were run by the church in focus and they were operating in partnership with the church pastor and its members. As the schools began to increase in number, the relationship to the church was de-linked. A sense of independence began to be seen in the operating of the schools. Earlier, it used to be a church centered school where the pastor and the members of the church had some say in the functioning of the school. This trend has changed in the 80s and the 90s. the school principal works directly in consultation with the church structure rather than the local church. This has brought about a shift in the focus and emphasis. Our schools are no longer mediums of evangelism. It is a means of financial stability and it has lost its credibility as an institution of Christian learning. The SDA educational philosophy initiated by Ellen White can be summarized as follows: 3

Adventist education is committed to the formation of character as part of the cooperative effort which involves parents, teachers and church leaders. Students learn that they belong to a special people with a history, a mission, and a glorious destiny in which they can play an important role. It is equally true that the Bible constitutes the basis and reference point of all our academic endeavors. The curriculum and the co-curricular activities ought to reflect the world view of the principles revealed in the scriptures. Teachers and students should believe that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible writers will guide them as they pursue their education. Education should also promote each student a balanced development in every dimension of student life. Students ought to be encouraged to adopt a simple and healthy lifestyle. Their ultimate goal ought to be "Shalom", that simple peaceful harmony with God, oneself, others and nature. It is also the aim of education to realize the individual worth of God's children. This could be possible by helping the students to make principled choices. This goal is best reached in a context of responsible freedom and redemptive discipline. Teachers and students should recognize that all truth is God's truth and every field of study can broaden and deepen their understanding of truth as revealed in Jesus, the Bible and nature. The curriculum should favour interdisciplinary and practical training. Education should also

motivate the students for service. This is the ideal purpose of life. Priority is given to the qualities of justice, active compassion, generosity and honest work. School programs should foster activities that alleviate human needs. Our schools must encourage students to be motivated to become independent and responsible thinkers. Instead of allowing themselves to be molded by surrounding culture they should be taught to approach it with critical discernment from God's perspective, learning to choose the true, the good and the beautiful. We need to give opportunities for our students to take active part in God's plan of redemption. We must allow them to experience the joy of sharing, acknowledging their roles as salt and leaven. They must seek to bring this world into closer harmony with His ideal. It is also the duty of a Christian educator to help their students to discover their talents and to utilize them for God's glory. It is also to help them to build up a vocation that can prepare themselves for a useful life of self-directed learning. The ultimate goal is to help each of them to qualify as citizens of Christ's kingdom where their education will continue throughout eternity with God. This is in essence the Adventist philosophy of education. It is in this sense that education is fundamentally redemptive. <sup>4</sup>

### **UNDERSTANDING OUR STUDENTS MIND SET (WORLDVIEW) IS IMPERATIVE**

Research was done with at least two hundred students who have studied in our Adventist schools for over seven years. The basic objective of the study was to find out whether our educational system really made an impact on their worldview. Did it change or were the students really maintaining a dual worldview? Were they confused over what was right? I conducted this experiment with major schools in Southern Asia. The methodology was based on scientific formulations. Questions were formed keeping in mind all the basics of Christian faith. The questionnaire was distributed to all the students in the class without any gender or other bias. The questions that were asked were mixed with both relevant and irrelevant questions. This was done in order to give it a different turn as far as the attitude of the respondents was concerned. The students were requested to be honest. What follows are the conclusions of my research:

#### **1. 80% of the students were maintaining a dual worldview.**

The respondents have clearly stated that in more than one way the world view that was communicated to them for over five years has not made an impact on their own belief system. Reviewing the answers given by the students has impressed me about the parallel worldview they have temporarily adopted. It has not become their own. In fact, they tend to look at it as another way of looking at the world. They have not made a conscious attempt to internalize these views from the classroom. However, the cause is not because the teacher has failed in communicating the basics of the worldview. It could be traced to the attitude of the teachers, parents and the state toward religion. So, maintaining the dual worldview is a commonplace experience in our schools. This does not seem to disturb them. They are comfortable maintaining such diametrically opposed worldviews. <sup>5</sup>

#### **2. The Christian worldview did not make an impact on their belief system.**

Here again, as mentioned earlier, because they have been ingrained in a certain culture that breeds tolerance and because their attitude to God is all inclusive and all pervasive, and since

Hinduism is very accommodative to any form of religious practice, the common Hindu does not feel the need to change his religion for all roads lead to God. In fact, Hinduism provides at least three ways to reach liberation or *moksha*. So, it is in this context that we are making a statement on the impact of our worldview upon others. What I want to emphasize here is the fact that Hinduism is not antithetical to Christianity, it includes it and therefore, there is no need for it to be modified because it has already provided a provision to accommodate it. That is the essence of our stand in relation to our students worldview.

### **3. Most of them were confused over the divine nature of Christ.**

Many of the students merely accept Jesus Christ as a good teacher. They accept him for what he has done for those in distress. They accept him as a healer. A very small percentage of students accepted the fact of his divinity but could not qualify it. Here again the impact of their own worldview was seen in play. To put it in different words, an *avatara* is thought to be God's way of intervening in human history for spiritual progress, but the *avatara* concept does not include redemptive values at all within the framework of the Hindu mythology. So, Christ is one among many avatars. The Christ child has been reduced to a historical person without any consequence to the destiny of the human race.

### **4. Teachers were not sure of their own worldview.**

This fact is a tragic explanation of our Adventist educational institutions in Southern Asia. If you have seen the statistics on page one and the conclusions that I had drawn from it, you would not be surprised by the conclusion. If half the teachers come from non-Adventist backgrounds and if non-Adventist teachers are engaged in the transmission of Biblical values and if most of them do not have any orientation in Christian education, how can we expect them to teach the basics of the Christian worldview? They are not sure of what they are teaching from the point of truth convictions. They teach the Bible as a subject that has no convictions. It is imperative that we change the ratio of our teaching force to Adventists otherwise soon we may only have the name Seventh-day Adventist but there would be nothing distinctive about it. The pillars of Adventism and the foundations of our educational system have all be systematically diluted. What is left is a name and a group of teachers who do not share a common worldview. This is the tragedy of the Seventh-day Adventist schools in Southern Asia.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT IS BASIC TO THE STUDY OF HINDUISM**

### **Definitions**

Hinduism can hardly be defined because it is not all a single religion with a creed to which everybody must subscribe. It is rather a federation of different approaches to the reality that is behind life (S K Chatterjee, *Cultural Heritage of India*, Volume 4.) Besides the multiplicity of doctrines, sects and practices, two other elements make the elaboration of definition very difficult. Unlike Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, Hinduism has no founder and unlike the Seventh Day Adventists and Roman Catholic church, Hinduism possesses no authoritative body to define the limits of orthodoxy. 6

Another definition suggests that Hinduism is the most complex of the major religious traditions of the world. In its broadest meaning, Hinduism includes not only the numerous sects and sub-sects that have appeared within its fold from time to time and have either willingly agreed to be called part of it or have been historically forced to be absorbed in or assimilated to it. The complexity of Hinduism is reflected in the bewildering variety of beliefs and dogmas comprehended within it on the one hand and innumerable forms of worship and rituals prevailing among Hindus on the other. Still others have defined it as the religion of the Hindu people. Hinduism is so because it is so interwoven with Indian ways of life. It can be said to be both more or less a religion depending on one's definition and viewpoint. Sociologically, it may be seen as grouping of individuals free from any set of creeds regarding the nature and work of God. In this sense the faith of Hinduism is not religion. However, Hinduism may be said to be more than a religion. This is true because most Hindus do hold certain common practices. In this context what John B Hoss says is very apt: "It is not one religion but rather a family of religions." Hinduism is fundamental and changing. It is a whole complex of beliefs and institutions that have appeared from the time when their ancient scriptures, the Vedas, were composed and till now. Hindus have an extraordinarily wide selection of beliefs and practices to choose from. They can Pantheists, Polytheists, Nontheists, Agnostics or even Atheists. In Hinduism, therefore, one finds mutually exclusive or contradictory teachings. In essence, Hinduism offers different ways of looking at a single object. Each aspect helps to convey what the statue is like but no single aspect is able to comprehend that statue as a whole. Still less the act of viewing it from one particular angle, so neither constitute the state itself.

7

A historical retrospect of this religion would give a basic orientation to its historicity. A sweeping look at history would give us a more comprehensive outlook of Hinduism. Hinduism did not enter India as a religion but rather as a race. In fact, the Aryans established their racial superiority by using religion in the early years of their invasion in the North.

What follows is the outline of my Historical retrospect:

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions of the world. It has no founder and it is not creedal. Its history is contemporaneous with the history of the races with which it is associated. It is not simply a system of theology though it includes within its scope more than one theology. A sweeping historical view is necessary in our understanding of the historical perspective. A historical overview would include the following categories:

Pre-Aryan, Aryan Intervention, Post Aryan, Puranic Age, Islamic domination, Colonialism, Post Colonialism. 8

### **Common Beliefs**

There are certain fundamental beliefs which constitute the basic aspect of authoritative religious core of Hinduism. Dr. D S Sarma holds that there are five of these and states them as follows in modern terms: a. The evolution of the world, b. The organisation of society, c. Progress of the individual. d. Fourfold need of human life e. The law of Karma and rebirth.

#### *a. The evolution of the world:*

It seems to me that the belief in the supreme spirit or the ultimate reality should be added to

this as a major belief. Hindus believe that the evolution of the world came through successive stages. It began with matter then came life then consciousness then intelligence and finally spirituality. We do not know how the primal spirit came to divide itself into subject and object and started the process of evolution. For the beginning and the end of the cosmic process are beyond time which is a bridge two eternities. So at the one end of the cosmic scale there is pure matter and at the other end pure spirit. In the matter the spirit is dormant and the spirit the matter is dormant. The spirit becomes partly of matter and partly of spirit. Spirit becomes richer as it ascends the scale and matter becomes poorer. The spirit appears life in vegetables, as conscious in animals, as intelligence in man and as bliss in the supreme spirit. So there is a gradual ascent from matter to life, from life to consciousness, from consciousness to reason and from reason to spiritual perfection. In relation to the supreme spirit, man is nearer than an animal, an animal than a plants, a plant than a thing without life. In the same way a saint is near to the supreme being than a bad man. Thus the universe is a vast amphitheater in which there is a colossal struggle going on between on spirit and matter giving rise to various orders of being ranging from the lifeless stone to the omniscient supreme being. 9

*b. The organization of society:*

Arising from the principle of spiritual progression referred to about comes the belief concerning the organisation of the society. In the ideal society men are ranked according to their spiritual progress and culture and not according to number, wealth or power. This ideal social system is called "varnadharma". "Varna" means color and "Dharma" means duty and the presence of fair colored Aryans and dark colored non-Aryans led to the term "Varna" which came to be designated as caste later. Eventually, not only were the four castes conceived as a creation of God, but also they were said to conform to the cosmic law of the spiritual progression, the most spiritual class occupying the top and the least spiritual the bottom. The theory also provided that good actions of a man in this life earned for him promotion to a higher caste in the next life.

*c. Progress of the individual:*

Thirdly, the Hindus held that a individuals life also is based on the proposition of spiritual progression which should control community life. For this, an ideal life is divided into four stages called Ashrams: the student, the householder, the recluse and the religious medicant. This is the ideal and hardly anyone follows this. 10

*d. The fourfold need of human life:*

As was the case with the four castes as well as the four stages of life, this is also based on the principles of progressive realizations of the spirit. In Hinduism the goal of for a man is called "dharmaarthakamamoksha". dharama means righteousness, artha prosperity; kama has another meaning, and moksha liberation. In this context further comment on dharma is necessary. The word dharma is difficult to translate. It is often referred to as duty, law, righteousness, or morality. Dharma is moksha in the making. If moksha is complete divinity, dharma is divinity in human condition. Dharma is half divine and half human. It is divine because it is the call of the spirit, it is human because it changes to according to the conditions of time and place. As man progresses the code of laws also progresses but at every stage their is a divine element in it and so it has to be obeyed as a

divine commandment until it is abrogated. It may be noted that the last stage is moksha this is the final and ultimate goal of man - liberation of salvation. In Hinduism it is not only liberation from the bondage of the body or the flesh but also from the limitations of our finite being. In other words moksha means becoming a perfect spirit like the supreme spirit but on his way to this final goal man is to satisfy the animal wants of his body and the economic and the other demands of his family and community. It is the eventual fusion of the individual in the godhead or nothingness as the case may be and the resultant deliverance from the cycle of rebirth. <sup>11</sup>

*e. The law of karma and rebirth:*

It is the law of moral causation. This is the most characteristic and probably the most important doctrine of Hinduism. Part of this belief is the doctrine of rebirth. The law of karma is the moral law corresponding to the physical law of causation. Just as the law of cause and effect works in the physical world, the law of karma works in the moral world. If one cuts his finger it bleeds, likewise if one steals his moral nature is adversely affected and that is the law of karma. This law goes beyond ones present life the law of karma postulates that and individuals would pass through the series of lives either on this earth or somewhere else before he obtains moksha or liberation. It further more postulates that what we are at present is the result of what we thought or did in the past life. Further what we shall be in the future life will be the result of what we think and do now. We carry with us our own caste. The mental and moral tendencies, the upanishads writings indicate that actions generate a person course and future destiny. In other words, the mental and moral tendencies that the soul acquires in a particular life as a result of its motives and actions work themselves out in suitable surroundings in the next. This process goes on through many lives, the individual sliding upward and downward in the moral scale according to the karma until his soul obtains liberation.

<sup>12</sup>

*Three ways to salvation:*

The last and the most important element is the notion of moksha. The word that needs explanation at this juncture is the word yuga. The word is connected with yoke or union. In this path of union with God there are three paths - karma yuga, gnana yuga, and bhakthi yuga. They are also termed as marga meaning path. It places special emphasis on gyana yuga (knowledge) and karma yuga (works). Karma yuga is for men of action. With works you obtain moksha or salvation. The Geetha shows Lord Krishna as an example in this. He advises Arjuna (fixed in the yuga do thy work abandoning self with a ..... yuga indeed). In other words it is attaining union with the supreme through disinterested service. In fact unselfish performance of ones duty is thought to be better than total renunciation of activity for the simple reason that it is impossible to be totally inactive and do no work at all. Gyana yuga meant for men of contemplation - unity with the supreme. Brahman Athman is the final and supreme goal for man in the upanishads and this is obtainable by knowledge alone. Further it says that wise men free from desires worship the person and pass beyond the seed of rebirth. The yoking of intelligence is far superior to mere action or seeking the fruits of action and the yoked intelligence even now has caste away both good and evil. Such a one passes beyond contemplation and attains true insight. Bhakti yuga is presented as even superior to gnana yuga. Those who fix their mind on the supreme are one, means perfect in yuga. The devotee or bhakta is delivered to God who takes pity on him and assures him grace, so the final command is to fix that mind on me, be devoted to me so thou shall come to me for thou art delivered to me. Bhakti marga



teaches there is no liberation for men without the grace of the Lord. What is therefore more important than knowledge is mans sincere devotion to and pure love of the Lord. To develop and maintain this essential religious attitude a man ought to keep himself constantly engaged in the service and worship of God. He should devote his body and mind, his thought and self to the cause of goodness and truth and to the study of holy scriptures. All this pleases God for God himself is truth and goodness. Being thus pleased, God gives his grace to the man who loves him as his Father. Just with this does a man stand liberated from all the bonds which bind the soul to the world. He leaves this body and this world at death and lives forever in the presence of God enjoying the eternal bliss of communion with him. <sup>13</sup>

#### *Six schools of thought:*

The Hindu religion does not subscribe to any one of these schools. Some adhere to all of them and some subscribe to a particular school of thought. These six schools of thought are distinctly different from each other.

1. The first school that needs explanation would be the school that is commonly known as Nyaya. The Nyaya school of thought deals with logic and rationalisation. It explains the rudiments of indicative logic and the basis of rationalism.

2. The Vaisheshika school of thought deals with science and systems of thought. This system of knowledge comes closer to modern science.

3. The Sankhya school of thought deals with the origin of things and the transformation and evolution taking place in the universe.

4. The Yoga school of thought deals with the form of physical and mental exercise by which a soul can unite with the universal soul to attain deliverance of the soul from the bondage of the body.

5. The Purvamimansa school of thought deals with a detailed interpretation of the Vedas. It gives principles that need to be understood in the understanding of the Vedic scriptures.

6. The Vedanta school of thought is the most popular school of thought. It deals with the essential teachings of the Vedas. <sup>14</sup>

#### *Scriptures:*

The most common scriptures that are accepted by the Hindus of various religious views are: Vedas, Epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata and the Bhagwat Purana. The Vedas are Shruti(which is heard) and Smriti(that which is remembered). Shruti therefore forms the higher from Vedas. Upanishads come at the end of the Vedas and the teachings based on it are called Vedanta. The teachings of the Upanishads are summarised on the Bhagwat Gita. The Vedas are for the learned and the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are for the common people. The Bhagwat Gita presents the truth in a simpler form the teachings of the Upanishads.

From the dawn of thought the Indian mind has always attempted to transcend the material, the worldly and the transitory. Life on earth with all its sensory manifestations was considered as Maya-an illusion which was evanescent. To have recognised material life at a time when the rest of the world was unable to comprehend it and further to have proclaimed the life beyond the body as the only reality, the reality that is of the spirit was indeed the very conscience of the religious

thought in India. Apparently, they produced the impression that life was to be scorned and wealth and material glory were only infatuations of the ignorant. The highest virtue lay in despising this world and the existence of it. <sup>15</sup>

## A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT THE HINDU AND CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEWS

<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Christian</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Polytheism\Pantheism</li> <li>• Evolution through successive stages: matter-&gt; life-&gt; consciousness -&gt; intelligence-&gt; finally spirituality.</li> <li>• 3 ways to moksha (gnana, karma and bhakti yuga)</li> <li>• Karma decides your destiny</li> <li>• Fatalism - deterministic</li> <li>• Liberation - one with the ultimate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monotheism</li> <li>• Creation by word of God</li> <li>• Only Jesus is the way</li> <li>• Faith is the key</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Spirit-led life.</li> </ul>

A prima facie look at the above mentioned concepts indicates that the Hindu worldview is diametrically opposed to the Christian worldview in several respects. Let us begin with the first concept. The Hindu thought subscribes to the thought that there are many Gods. In fact, it maintains that Polytheism and Pantheism can coexist at the same time. Philosophically, there is a concept of a supreme ideal being who may be worshiped in different forms in different gods by different people. Every concept is a pointer that points beyond itself. Signs should not be mistaken for the things significant. The signpost is not the destination. It is this concept that led Hinduism to take the position that one may worship his god his own way. One does not have to give up his religion. So the common people look for some concrete embodiments of the divine while the learned who knew better were tolerant and even encouraged all popular forms of worship. This led to the creation of numerous deities who represented every phenomenon observed in nature to meet every form of human need and activity. Then finally, by a long process of rationalisation and analysis, three important functions of the supreme were identified - creation, protection and destruction. This came to be established in the imagination of the people as three great gods commonly known as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, also known as the Hindu triad or trinity. The power associated with each of these were later personified and represented as his consort. So Brahma the creator has Saraswati the goddess of Learning, Vishnu the Protector has Lakshmi the goddess of Prosperity and Shiva the destroyer has Shakti the goddess of Power and Destruction. It is also believed that other animate or inanimate things have the being of God. This is something that Hinduism very easily accommodates. The ontological continuity with nature is the distinct difference between Christianity and Hinduism. God and nature is not distinct. It is one, so what is worshiped and what worships are part of the divine. So, accordingly Pantheism hold true within the framework of the Hindu thought, whereas the Christian worldview anchors its belief in a monotheistic concept of God. In fact, it re-enforces such a position by its account of creation. Monotheism presupposes that there is one God and that one God is the prime mover of the world. This concept is diametrically opposed to the theology of the Hindu worldview which is impersonal and non-relational whereas the Christian concept of God is not only relational but personal. A relationship is possible only with a person and in the Christian thought, God is a

person and therefore the creature can have a relationship with the Creator (person).

The Hindu thought sustains the position of evolution which is now at the present time maintained by the Roman Catholic church. In the Hindu thought the *modus operandi* of the process includes the following stages: Pre-existing matter was the first stage in the process of evolution. Then came life in all its forms. These life forms evolved independently and developed itself and adapted itself to its immediate environment and this led to a human form and consciousness. This human form and consciousness presupposed a certain form and intelligence and this so called intelligence led to spirituality. So spirituality is the summation of the development of life. In other words, one cannot expect to be spiritual in the initial stages of life. The transformation of life forms or to put it in Darwinian language, the evolution of life forms is the root of spirituality. One might not reach that spiritual plane at all, it is only an option. Matter does not essentially need to end with spirituality. It could remain in the level of life forms or consciousness or even intelligence. So spirituality is not binding on everyone. It all depends upon which stage of evolution you are. As against this concept is the profound account of creation given in Genesis 1. Creation was possible by the word of God. To contain this thought philosophically would be difficult because the word equates existence in various life forms. In other words, the word of God had the power to produce all life forms in one indivisible act of sound. This is indeed philosophically an absurdity. For word cannot equate existence. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." It is not possible to comprehend the creation of life forms without an experience of faith. God created a heaven and the earth and this is essentially grasped by a act of faith. God and nature are in two different planes. They are ontologically discontinuous as against the Hindu worldview and the hierarchy of life forms are by no means the result of the development process but rather by the singly act of God, the word.

Hindus can choose the way they want to reach liberation. The educated normally prefer *gnanamarga* and the one who is action oriented chooses *karmayuga* and one who is pious and devoted to God chooses *Bhaktiyuga*. But all these ways lead to one realisation - God realisation. However, there is a flexibility in the approach. The individuals who are inclined to use their knowledge find fulfillment in *gnanayuga*, those with goal oriented attitudes essentially choose the *karmayuga*. In other words, aptitude decides what path you are choosing. The Christian concept of salvation does not provide such a flexibility. In fact, there is no two ways about it. Jesus is the only way and there is no other name whereby man can be saved. "I am the way the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the father but by me." So it is striking to note the significant difference between the concept of *Moksha* and the concept of salvation in the Christian thought. One is based upon an attitude to an impersonal force and the other is linked to an attitude to a person. So essentially the Christian concept of salvation is person-based and relational.

The Hindus believe that *Karma* decides one's destiny. What is entailed in this statement is the fact that actions determine your liberation. Now there is a need to qualify the word *Karma*. As I have explained this concept earlier, it is to be noted that good actions lead to their maintaining the same status of being or moving to a higher form of being. Bad actions lead to essentially a lower form of being. This is the crux of the *Karmic* cycle of life. So if one has been enjoying a life of good actions he is a result of someone's good actions in the past and will also be the cause of some other person who will receive that benefit in his next life. But if that person has followed an erroneous route of bad behavior he is bound by his own *Karma* that leads him downward on the levels of life forms. Christianity on the other hand maintains that faith decides

your destiny. So faith is so basic and critical to ones spiritual survival as a Christian.

Fatalism is the belief that your destiny as a being has been predetermined by the power that is higher than you. In Hinduism this is commonly known as kismet. People often recall negative experiences or positive achievements to ones kismet. So life is programmed, determined and worked out long before you were born and you are essentially fulfilling a master plan that has been in operation before life was born. So Fatalism binds the thinking of all Hindus so they tend to negate their individual role in the attainment of salvation. The Christian concept of freedom is one of the most beautiful expressions of true freedom. It cannot be explained nor described philosophically. This freedom has to be experienced. Freedom not in the absolute sense of the problem but freedom from sin. It is difficult to, at this point, go into the details of the concept of freedom, but I would like to however maintain that freedom in the Christian theological framework simply suggests that man was created and he was created with freedom to choose between right and wrong and this power that God has given to choose is the essence of man's distinctiveness in relation to nature and also that identifying point with the creator. Freedom has many facets to it but we are primarily dealing with freedom in the liberative sense. Liberation as far as the Hindus are concerned is to be merged with the ultimate and that experience is an experience that very few attain. The Christian concept of liberation offers liberation in an instant provided the individual freedom is given up for a greater spiritual freedom. So a comparative look at the Hindu and Christian worldview I hope has given a partial understanding of what the basic tenets are. Having explained the context related problems in Southern Asia, I hope it is clear that the focus of attention needs to be on formulating concrete approaches in approaching our Hindu students. The basic tenets of Hinduism explained in this paper could give few clues and hints on whether to begin the process of dialogue. I have offered four concrete ways by which our Adventist schools can fulfill its divine mandate. My fundamental assumption is that education is basically redemptive. All these four steps can be taken as ways to make education effective within the Christian environment. The first step suggested is to develop a proper attitude towards other religions. The second is to develop a partnership relationship between parents, teachers and students. The third is to integrate the basic Christian worldview concept in curriculum and lastly, to introduce the miracle hour meditation plan as a point of departure in introducing the gospel. <sup>16</sup>

## **A PROPER ATTITUDE TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS**

There are three possible responses to the question raised above in relation to our attitude towards other religions. All three approaches need to be presented before a position is taken. The three approaches are: the exclusive, the inclusive and the pluralistic approach. I have developed a modified inclusivist approach as a point of departure as far as our relationship to other religions are concerned.

*Exclusive approach:* This approach holds that outside Christianity there is no salvation. This view is based on the conviction that Jesus Christ is the soul creation by which all religions are to be judged. Such a view is to be found generally among the members of evangelical churches but only recent times it is more or less the traditional view of the Roman Catholic church. Origins invariably brought out in relations to it: *extra ecclesiam nemo salvatur*, outside the church everyone is saved. Particular power of exposition of the exclusivistic approach was set forth by Hendrik Kraemer in preparation for the international missionary conference held at Tambaram in Madras in 1987. His main argument in maintaining the exclusive approach is that the event of Christ belongs to a totally different order of reality than that of there religions.

*Inclusive approach:* It supports the view that salvation is found in all religions but salvation is

ultimately from and through Jesus Christ. Christ is claimed at holding together to equally binding convictions - the operations of God's grace in all religions and the world working for salvation and the uniqueness and the manifestation of grace in Christ which makes a universal claim to be the final way of salvation. <sup>17</sup>

Biblically this position would base itself primarily on Luke and Acts which tend to emphasize the universal nature of Christ's saving activity. It cause attention to St. Paul's going to other's religions and particularly to Areopagus scene: Men of Athens I perceive that in other ways you are religious for I passed along and observed the object of your worship. I also found an alter an object of your worship. I found an alter with this inscription on it: "To an unknown God". What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (Acts 17:22,23). So the question is not whether individuals can be saved outside the church but rather that they can no longer deny the final and fuller revelation that is explicitly affirmed by the highest authority in the church.

Can they be saved in and through their own convictions and in spite of them? The opponents of the inclusivist theory point out that it would see to undermine the significance of incarnation. In your emphasizing the universality of salvation the uniqueness of Christ seems to have faded somewhat in the background. Likewise it would lessen the necessity of conversion.

*Pluralistic approach:* This can be summed up as follows: All religions are equally valued paths to the one goal. In other words Christianity is but one way to God among the others that have appeared and are appearing in the world. <sup>18</sup>

#### *The Adventist Position*

There is a need in the church to officially state its position on its attitude and approach to other religions. This will help in formulating the missiological challenges more effectively. The liberals within the church structure have embraced the inclusivistic stance and the conservative theologians have maintained the exclusivist position. It must be admitted that the exclusivist approach is very attractive. It proclaims clearly and unambiguously the central truth that Christianity is the one true religion precisely because revelation and salvation are only offer to humanity in and through Jesus. It is in line with what the Bible seems to proclaim clearly and what the mainstream of tradition has understood for well over 2000 years. However, Breman argues while granting all of this : It is position severely criticized today, so what do we do? Is it necessary for us to review the missiological challenge in the light of the three approaches outlined? Would a modified inclusivist approach prove to be advantageous or could we maintain a balance between both inclusivism and exclusivism? We need to reach a consensus on this fundamental question.

#### *Advantages of the modified inclusivist position.*

It is possible to establish the inclusivist stance from the Bible, especially from the writings of Paul, but more importantly we could argue that if we could use propositions of truth from other religions that are non contradictory as our point of departure, where as if the exclusivist position is maintained, this would be unacceptable. In the light of the suggested option it would be suitable to maintain a modified stance because that would implicitly accept the truth is found in other religions. This could be helpful because it can open the doors of dialog not merely for searching common areas of agreement but also to lead them from the known to the unknown. In the case of reaching other religions it is imperatives that we modify our stance and make them feel that they stand in partial light. This would help them to move to greater understanding of truth by the introduction of the Gospel. I have used a modified inclusivist stance in the book "Will the brothers

meet?" I have used points of commonality between Christianity and Islam as a point of departure. I hope this modified inclusivist stance will find a place in our approach to other religions.

### **DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS, TEACHERS AND STUDENTS**

One of the most important factors in reaching out to the Hindu students in our schools would be to develop a partner relationship between parents, teachers and students. The process of learning lies more in a partnership relationship than in a monologue with students. The spirit of prophecy and the educators of our times clearly acknowledge the joint responsibility of education. This can help in understanding the roles which one ought to play. Ellen White stated in her book, *Education*, that the teacher should not be left to carry the burden of his work alone. He needs the sympathy and kindness, the cooperation and the love of several church members. This can help cementing the roles that the teacher, parent ought to exercise. Ellen White, while commenting on the needs, states very forcefully as follows: "When the child is old enough to be sent to school, the teacher should cooperate with the parents". Further, she also explained the parents part by reaffirming: "But the teacher should not be expected to do the parents work. There has been with many parents, a fearful neglect of duty." <sup>19</sup>

### **INTEGRATE BASIC CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW CONCEPTS IN YOUR RESPECTIVE SUBJECTS**

It is essential for a Christian educator to integrate the concepts that are derived from the Christian faith into the various levels of the curriculum. The curriculum should be Christ-centered. All subjects must be focussed on the primary mission of the church. Christ must be presented appropriately according to the level of the students. For example, if you were to teach history, it would be essential to explain the great theme of the Great Controversy and how each dispensation in history falls in its right place. In other words, if a teacher approaches history from the point of the Great Controversy, historical contingencies fall into the right place. You could apply the same principle to other areas of the curriculum and you will find that there are so many things that you can integrate and there are so many areas that you can expand the students mind to greater avenues of thinking. It is easy to integrate faith in the classroom. Some subjects maybe easy and some hard but all subjects must have a core belief. This core belief ought to be Christ. Christ must be presented in every classroom. This is the Christian educators imperative. <sup>20</sup>

### **INTRODUCE THE MIRACLE HOUR MEDITATION PLAN TO NON-CHRISTIAN STUDENTS**

This method has been useful in reaching out to non-Christians with the gospel. It has been proven beyond doubt to lead students to a first hand experience with God. It has made an impact on the level of spiritual reception. The miracle plan needs explanation. The concept has been a result of her own prayer life. The author of this paper experimented with this miracle hour with seven hundred students and found it spiritually uplifting. Those who would like to have their non-Christian students aware of the gospel can begin with the miracle our. It could be a very timely tool to introduce the gospel. The prayer and reflections that would be suggested in the paper can help in schools anywhere in the world. You can expect a tremendous awakening and deepening of your spiritual life. It will take your students through a process of breaking down barriers and loosening things up in many areas of their lives. There is a desperate need for prayer in this world

of Atheism and anti-Christian practices. The miracle hour is divided into twelve segments and each segment represents a spiritual thought that needs specific attention . Each segment is allotted five minutes but for the beginners it need not be an impediment. The diagram below will outline the segments. What follows will be an explanation of each segment to make things clear. The twelve segments are:

- |                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Praise                     | 7. Forgiveness.               |
| 2. Sing to the Lord           | 8. Scripture reflections      |
| 3. Spiritual warfare          | 9. Wait for the Lord to speak |
| 4. Surrender                  | 10. Intercessory prayers      |
| 5. Release of the Holy Spirit | 11. Petitions                 |
| 6. Repentance                 | 12. Thanksgiving              |

### *1. Praise:*

Throughout the Scriptures, God is very insistent about praise. When we praise we acknowledge His supremacy and authority in our lives. Through praise we are stating that we are weak and he is strong. Praise makes room in our hearts for God's will to be done and recognizes the absurdity in any attempt to manipulate God in prayer. People of praise discover that this action of the heart and the mind is very healthy for the body and mind and spirit. The students ought to be encouraged to praise God. Praise God for His love, for the creation, for the universe, for His spirit, for His righteousness, for His salvation, and so on and so forth. One can go on praising God for everything. <sup>21</sup>

### *2. Singing:*

The second segment affirms the need for singing. It has been said that singing helps us to come closer to God. He who sings prays twice. Music has the power to open our spirits. Encourage your students to close their eyes and allow the song of their hearts to make them feel the presence of God. You can suggest songs like "Turn your eyes upon Jesus" and "Halelu, halelu, haleluiah" as songs that could begin the process of singing and the songs must be sung prayerfully. As they continue to sing you will sense a difference in their whole attitude towards the meditation. Maintain that tempo. It may even take more than five minutes but that should not matter much. <sup>22</sup>

### *3. Spiritual warfare:*

The third segment is spiritual warfare. The Bible reminds us that there are negative spiritual forces that can exert a controlling influence in our lives and diminish our capacity to be free, open and loving people. At times we may inadvertently open ourselves to some of those influences. It is time to close such doors. To concretely do that you need to pray for power. Power to deal with the spiritual adversary. Non-Christian students are attracted by the symbol of the cross and so you can urge your students to pray, "I place myself now under the cross of Jesus Christ and cover myself with the precious blood of Jesus. I surround myself with the light of Jesus Christ and so in the name of Jesus nothing shall interfere with the Lord's work being accomplished in my life. I put on God's Armour to resist the Devil's tactics. I stand my ground with truth buckled around my waist and integrity for my breastplate. I carry the shield of faith to put out the burning

arrows of the Evil One. I accept salvation from God to be my helmet and receive the word of God from the spirit to use as a sword" (Eph 6:10,11,14,16,17). Such prayers can initiate your students to receiving power that can combat the forces of the Evil One. <sup>23</sup>

#### *4. Surrender:*

This segment is a crucial one. After the prayer for power to remove the evil influences, one must understand and realize that the surrender of the will makes that possible because the Good Book says, "Not my will but thy will be done". Our healing begins when we surrender to Jesus. There is nothing more important in your spiritual life than to say yes to Jesus. You can request your students to sing the song "All to Jesus I surrender" and you could explain the significance of the verse recorded in Matthew 26:42 which talks about God's will and its role for us today. The concept of surrender is all inclusive. It does not exclude anything. The person who surrenders himself to God surrenders his position, his relationships, his achievements, his plans, his goals and all that is in him. So surrender is total and only such a surrender is complete. So the teachers need to re-enforce the need for total surrender very prayerfully. <sup>24</sup>

#### *5. Release of the Holy Spirit:*

The next five minutes can be spent in asking for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit is to empower Christians with spiritual vitality that can help them accomplish God's purposes in their lives. You cannot receive the Holy Spirit unless you pray for it. So prayer for the Holy Spirit should flow from within. According to the book of Acts, the prayer for the Holy Spirit is a normal Christian response. It is because of that prayer experience the disciples received power that made them powerful to witness for God's truth. There is no limit to what the Holy Spirit can accomplish in the lives of those who have committed themselves totally. You could ask your students to invite the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives so they can have the privilege and opportunity of exercising true freedom. You can also invite the student group to thank the Holy Spirit for being a teacher, a comforter, a counselor, an intercessor, and a giver of extravagant gifts. You can also join the next segment in the miracle hour with the song "Spirit of the Living God". <sup>25</sup>

#### *6. Repentance:*

The more you are open to the Holy Spirit the more aware you will be of those areas in your life where Jesus is not yet fully revived in you. With that awareness should come a deep acknowledgement of the Lord's unconditional love. If you start feeling like a failure, remember the power of God's forgiving love. Repentance has a power to lift us up again and release a flow of God's love. Encourage your students to let the Holy Spirit to guide them. Do not allow them to be bogged down with the details of the prayer but make the prayer a stimulating experience in activating the conscience. <sup>26</sup>

#### *7. Forgiveness:*

The next segment in the releasing of the power in forgiveness. When Jesus is at the center of our lives, we can expect his reconciliation within ourselves and with others. The Holy Spirit will not let us off the hook in our broken relationship. Never will he expect us to forgive in our own power. He will do it through us as we let him. Help your students to make a decision to be reconciled with God. <sup>27</sup>

#### *8. Scriptural reflections:*



As most of our non-Christian students do not own a Bible, it would be better if the Bible teacher provides a copy for them from the Bible Society of India. The students must be given a little orientation into what the Bible is about. It would be better for them to know some basic concepts before it is given for their use. As you begin this segment, ask your students to pray before they read God's word. Ask them to browse through a particular chapter and read it carefully. If a particular phrase or verse draws their attention, that could be the focus of the meditation for that day. They can ponder over the meaning of it and draw spiritual applications for their own life. In fact, they can begin to write some of their reflections on the passage of scripture in their notebook and continue to meditate upon it later during the day. This could prove to be very important in their spiritual walk with God. <sup>28</sup>

#### *9. Wait for the Lord to speak:*

Often we do not take time to listen. We find it difficult to experience silence. After you read God's word, it is in silence that you can listen to what God is impressing upon you. God's thoughts are impressed when one is silently waiting to listen to His voice. This is one of the most special times in the miracle hour. It is imperative that one finds a quiet place, away from distractions and simply listen to the voice of our Lord. It would be helpful if we can close our eyes. You have quietened your mind, your heart is open, your conscience is clear and you are centered on the Lord and if you are like most of us, you need a word of encouragement from the Lord. So with Samuel say, "Speak for your servant is listening". As words or thoughts begin to come into your mind, write them in your notebook. It may be the Lord giving you the hope of healing. You will grow in the ability to hear Him speak throughout your daily affairs as you spend quality time in prayer and scripture. <sup>29</sup>

#### *10. Intercession:*

One of the greatest gifts we can give to each other is the gift of prayer. This is the time to pray for other people. Pray for those who have no one to pray. Pray for your enemies and your associates. Ask for the Holy Spirit to bring people to mind. Pray with simple faith. Pray for His will to be done. <sup>30</sup>

#### *11. Petitions:*

Help your students to get into the habit of asking for everything throughout the day, including their basic needs and petty needs. It is good to be very specific about it. It helps to write down your intercessions and petitions as well as your goals so that when they are answered, faith will increase for the promise is "ask and it shall be given unto you", Matthew 7:7-8. <sup>31</sup>

#### *12. Thanksgiving:*

The last segment in the miracle hour is to return to the Lord thanks and worship Him through your gratitude. Use this prayer as a jumping off point and begin to thank him spontaneously. Thank Him for the prayers of intercession you have offered, thank Him for the petitions you have place before Him, thank Him for the scriptural portion, thank Him for the meaning derived from it and thank Him for speaking to you. The students could end their miracle hour by a song or by a praise line. <sup>32</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

It has not been easy for me to approach this topic. I have struggled in my own limited experience to

formulate these approaches and to understand the basics of Hinduism. Christian education in Southern Asia needs drastic changes in its focus and perspective and the roles of Adventist schools must be geared to achieving its primary goals more than being centers for academic excellence. The approaches recommended by the author of the paper are to be taken as tentative suggestions. It needs refinement, it needs alterations and modifications but the process must begin now. We cannot afford to lose sight of the larger vision of education while imparting information to our students. What Christian education should do is more important than merely following the pattern of the world. It should integrate faith in the process of learning. That would mean total transformation of not only the attitude of the teachers, but also of the students and the parents. I look forward to that kind of experience in our schools in the near future.

"In the higher sense, the work of education and the work of redemption are one for in education as in redemption, other foundation can no man lay than is laid in Jesus Christ".

Our educational institutions need to adopt these approaches mentioned above. It is high time we began the process of restructuring our educational curriculum in Southern Asia. Let us begin the process, this is the role we are called to play as Christian educators.

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