

Conversion & Reconversion

A Letter to Christians in India

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Dear friends,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

The talks about Anti-conversion Bills, and the attempts of certain groups to reconvert Christian believers to Hinduism, in the recent months, have obviously upset us. The reaction of the Church to these moves is varied. As a Bible Teacher I started looking at the Bible afresh to find out what the Christian response should be to the subject of “Conversion & Reconversion.” I would like to share with you some of those insights.

God the Creator is the God of the Bible. He has compared Himself to a Shepherd (Isa 40:11; Jer 31:10; Ezek 34:12). One of the outstanding claims of Jesus was, “I am the Good Shepherd” (Jn 10:14). He is also called the “Great Shepherd” and the “Chief Shepherd” (Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 5:4). The Bible says, “All of us like sheep have gone astray; everyone of us has **turned** to his own way” (Isa 53:6). The repeated call of God in the Bible is, “**Return** to Me!” (Isa 44:22; Jer 3:12; Ezek 18:23). Presenting Himself as the “Good Shepherd,” Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must **bring** them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one Shepherd” (Jn 10:16). Addressing those who have come to Jesus, Apostle Peter said, “You were straying like sheep but have now **returned** to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25). Therefore we conclude, on the basis of what the Bible says, that “**Homecoming**,” in the strict sense, is the created human beings returning to God the Creator, and all of us who are sinners turning to Christ the Saviour who paid the penalty for all our sins in His atoning death on the Cross. It is over this “Homecoming” there’s great joy in Heaven. Jesus illustrated this by three parables: Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son (Lk 15).

By creation, all are the children of God. But when we choose to disobey God and listen to Satan, the archenemy of God, we become enemies to God. However, God demonstrated His love towards us by sending His sinless Son into this sinful world and sacrificing Him on the Cross for our sins (Rom 5:8,10). Through the death of Christ, man can now be **reconciled** to God (2 Cor 5:18-21). That’s why the Gospel of Christ is called the “message of **reconciliation**.” By this act of reconciliation we, the enemies of God, are given the “right” to become the children of God (Jn 1:12). That is, we become the members of the family of God. About this privilege the Bible says, “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). “Now in Christ Jesus you, who once were far off, have been **brought** near by the blood of Christ” (v13). True “**Homecoming!**” This is Reconversion.

The Creator God becomes the Father of all those who leave fellowship with darkness to come to light, and break agreement with the devil to come to Christ (2 Cor 6:14-18). Apostle John exclaims, “See what kind of love the **Father** has lavished on us, that we should be called **children** of God!” (1 Jn 3:1). How has this become possible? The lofty God became a lowly man in the Person of Jesus Christ when Jesus was born as a Babe in Bethlehem (Jn 1:14). Great indeed is this mystery (1 Tim 3:16). When Jesus the Heavenly Son of God took on earthly form, He was not ashamed to call those who have become God’s children as His “brothers” (Heb 2:11; Jn 20:17). Just like we have prodigal children in our families who rebel against parents and go their way, there are children of God who forsake God the Father and become enslaved by Satan who is the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Such are called backsliders. They go after the “cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and pride in possessions” which

are against God the Father (1 Jn 2:15-17). But the Father keeps calling them and waiting for their **return**. When they come back to the Father whom they have deserted, He embraces them with eternal love (Lk 15:11-24). This is “**Homecoming**.”

No one can be a Christian by birth. Prophet John who came as a Forerunner of Jesus told this straight on the face of the people of Israel: “Do not presume to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham” (Mt 3:9). Jesus said exactly the same thing to Nicodemus, a religious leader in Israel: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit (of God) is spirit ... You must be born again” (Jn 3:6,7). Any man or woman becomes a Christian only by this Rebirth, a new birth, a spiritual birth. This happens when a person repents of his sins, turns to God, and receives Christ as his Sin-bearer and Saviour and Lord (Mk 1:15; Rom 10:9,10). Without this **heart** experience of repentance and faith, Water Baptism (infant or adult), Holy Communion, and the like are mere rituals (Mt 3:7,8). There are thousands who worship God with their “lips,” but their “hearts” are far away from Him (Isa 29:13; Mk 7:6). These are nominal Christians and they simply are too many. Pastors and Preachers must preach forthrightly in Churches to bring the nominals to the experience of personal repentance and rebirth. They must not live on false hopes. This will be a “**Homecoming**” experience for them. Unless this happens, huge numbers will fall away from Christ during persecution. He compares their hearts to rocky ground (Mt 13:20,21).

How come there are so many nominal Christians in our Churches? By AD 400, the Roman Empire, from being 4% Christian, grew to 80% Christian with NO CONVERSIONS, when King Constantine made Christianity the State Religion. It became fashionable to become Christians. A man of God calls this “the worst disaster since Noah!” Dear friend, if you are a member of a Church without a heart experience of Repentance and Rebirth, don’t postpone this matter any further. Getting your name registered in Heaven is more important than having it on the Church register (Rev 20:15; Heb 12:23). Confess your sins to God right now. Repent of them genuinely. Believe that Christ died for your sins, and rose again. Receive Him as your Lord and Saviour. The Holy Spirit will give you an inner assurance that you are a child of God (Rom 8:16). Once you have tasted that the Lord is good, you will not go after the sinful things of the world (1 Pet 2:1-3). Meditate on the Bible regularly so you may grow in your new life. Commune with God daily in prayer. Welcome **Home** to enjoy the privileges in the family of God!

I believe that the present attempts for “Reconversion” by Hindu religionists are ordained by the Sovereign God to purify His Church. John the Baptist said concerning the ministry of Jesus, “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire” (Mt 3:12). The Church history proves that the fires of persecution have always been fires of purification. God hates **doublemindedness**. Apostle James wrote, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you ... Purify your hearts, you doubleminded” (Js 4:8). King Ahab reigned over Israel between 874 B.C. and 853 B.C. Prophet Elijah challenged him to gather all the pagan prophets for a confrontation between God and Baal the most common Canaanite deity. The Prophet told the people, “How long will you falter between **two opinions**? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Ki 18:21). The same challenge comes to all the cat-on-the-wall Christians today!

God would never stop us from going away from Him. He delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage through the leadership of Moses. But when they rejected Moses and **turned back** to Egypt in their hearts, God gave them up to worship idols. They made a calf and offered sacrifice to it (Acts 7:39-42). God laments for those who forsake Him, the fountain of living waters, and hew out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water

(Jer 2:13). But He is never frustrated. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, He laid some difficult conditions for those who wanted to follow Him. Because of this, many of His disciples **turned back** and no longer walked with Him. Only the Twelve Disciples were standing with Him. He asked them, “Do you also want to go away?” But Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of **eternal life!**” (Jn 6:60-68). In a similar instance, the religious leaders were offended over what Jesus taught. But the reaction of Jesus was cool: “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted!” (Mt 15:12,13). God respects the free will of man and He never forces anyone! The Indian Constitution has given “freedom of **conscience**” to every citizen. Neither Conversion nor Reconversion should be against one’s conscience, that is, wholeheartedness.

The incidents in the paragraph above give us Christians, especially Christian Preachers, an important lesson: We must never dilute the Bible truth. There are certain **absolutes** with which we cannot compromise. Here are some of them —

- (a) The God of the Bible is the only true God. This is what He has repeatedly said in the Bible: “I am the Lord, and there is no other; there’s no God besides Me. ... Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (Isa 45:5,6,22).
- (b) Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me ... I am the Door” (Jn 14:6; 10:7).
- (c) The disciples of Christ, in the first century, while preaching about Him, declared, “There is no other Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Christ alone died for our sins; therefore He alone has the authority to forgive us (1 Pet 2:24; Mk 2:10).

The above statements are not fabricated by us, but they are exact quotes from the Bible which we believe is the very **“Word of God.”** Anyone who does not live with these basic convictions cannot be a Christian. He will buckle under slightest pressure and deny Christ.

Huge crowds followed Jesus to hear His teaching and to receive healing from sicknesses. He was moved with compassion for them and met their needs. However, He did not relax the conditions of discipleship with a desire to keep lots of people with Him. In no uncertain terms He said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Lk 9:23). To emphasize this condition He added, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk 14:27). He also said, “Enter by the **narrow gate**. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. Because the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, those who find it are few” (Mt 7:13,14). This is part of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount.

The Church must do all that’s possible to **strengthen** believers, especially the new ones, in their faith (Acts 15:36). Praise God for the fruits of evangelistic programmes. But we are poor in follow-up. Conduct regular Discipleship Courses in the Churches. Teach the basic doctrines of the Bible. It’s not enough if Creeds are recited every Sunday. The Church members must be imparted a working knowledge of the Scriptures. The weekly 20-minute sermons are not enough. No wonder Christians are suffering from spiritual starvation. Even within those 20 minutes how many stories! Because not many come to the midweek Bible Studies, give atleast an hour of solid teaching in the Sunday Services for which large numbers gather. If you are a Pastor, free yourself from building construction works and administrative matters so you can spend long hours on knees for sermon preparation (Acts 6:3,4). Only then there will be “freshness” when you speak. This is the meaning of the shepherd leading the sheep to “green pastures” and “still waters” (Psa 23:1,2). The sermons in Sunday Services must not be evangelistic, but they must **edify** the believers to grow into maturity and **equip** them for the ministry (Eph 4:11-13; Col 1:28).

Dear Pastors, give your congregational members enough and more. John the Baptist, besides baptizing the repentant, “preached to the people with MANY other exhortations” (Lk 3:18). After preaching long sermons (Jn 14,15,16) Jesus told His disciples, “I still have MANY things, to say to you” (Jn 16:12). The Apostles exhorted people “with MANY other words” besides calling them to repentance, baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:40). Even in a Breadbreaking Service, Apostle Paul preached an all-night long sermon! (Acts 20:7-11). Let **Biblical illiteracy** leave our Churches. The Apostles mourned that folks were not growing from “milk” stage to eat “solid food” (Heb 5:12-14). But we don’t even feed them with “milk” but only “watery milk” and sometimes “milky water!” Jesus turned water into wine, but we preachers turn wine into water! Our sermons must be rich in Biblical content. Let’s repent of taking the pulpit ministry lightly! Strong Christians will withstand the storms of persecution. If they know how to recognize the voice of Jesus the Shepherd, they will not follow the voice of strangers (Jn 10:3-9). When certain men with hardened hearts spoke against “The Way,” that is the Christian faith, Apostle Paul took the new disciples to a school building and conducted daily Bible Classes for them for two long years (Acts 19:8-10).

I urge Church leaders to motivate Christians read Biographies of Missionaries and Martyrs, especially *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*. Give the people details of persecuted Churches inland and overseas for regular prayer. At least one of the Sunday Sermons every month must be on Missions, and another Sunday Sermon should address youngsters. Dr. Oswald J. Smith (1889-1986), that world-famous Founder-Pastor of the Peoples Church, Toronto, Canada, used to say, “The best diet for a sick Church is a missionary diet!” Conduct Soulwinners Training Classes and make every member of the congregation a **soulwinner**. Teach them how to bring non-Christians to Christ. Have regular gatherings to pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit in order to receive power to witness boldly for Christ (Acts 1:8; 4:31). Witnessing Christians will hardly backslide and deny their faith. Missions should not be a “department” in the Church; the entire Church must be a Mission. John Wesley (1703-1791) rightly said, “The Church is the only Society that functions mainly for the welfare of its non-members!”

Popular Evangelists with their Prosperity (Health & Wealth) message have brought into our Churches more goats than sheep. “Jesus will heal all your diseases ... Jesus will solve all your problems ... Jesus will wipe away all your tears” — This is not the Gospel. Our message should be, “Jesus will **save** you from your **sins**” (Mt 1:21; Lk 24:27; Gal 1:4; 1 Jn 1:7-9). For a “definition” of the Gospel, study 1 Cor 15:1-4 carefully. Salvation from sin is guaranteed to anyone who believes on Christ (Mk 16:15,16; Acts 16:31). Healing or other blessings are not so guaranteed for now in the New Testament (Rom 8:22,23). We have projected the secondary benefits over the primary blessing. In Gospel Meetings there are more tears for “earthly sorrow” than the tears of **repentance** (2 Cor 7:9,10). Conversions therefore are shallow, not deep enough (v11). As a result, “because-of-blessings” Christians outnumber “in-spite-of-sufferings” disciples. The Apostles “strengthened” the new believers saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Jesus rebuked those who followed Him primarily for earthly blessings (Jn 6:26,27). Such people are a liability for the Kingdom of God. They are like “a reed shaken by the wind!” One day they will shout “Hosanna,” and the next day, “Crucify Him!”

Christian Missionaries are accused of “alluring” people and converting them by works of charity. Some clarification is necessary here. Charity is not necessarily Christianity; but Christianity is certainly **charity**. The God of the Bible is a God of the poor. Here’s the Bible definition of “pure and undefiled” religion: “(a) To visit orphans and widows in their troubles and (b) to keep oneself undefiled by the world” (Js 1:27). Jesus said, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” To explain who our “neighbour” is, Jesus told the Story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, taught first about charity, and then followed

prayer and fasting (Mt 6:1-4,5-15,16-18). God condemned fasting that was void of charity (Isa 58:5-7), and prayers without charity (Isa 1:15-17), and offerings to Him without charity (Mt 23:23). See His warning: “Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, will also cry himself and not be heard” (Prov 21:13).

The God of the Bible is not so cheap to bless people just in order to induce them to follow Him. By coming to Him or worshipping Him we don't add anything to His being (Acts 17:25). Here's what Jesus said: “The Father in Heaven makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt 5:45; Acts 14:16,17). He is a God of **compassion**. Therefore there can be no missionary work without charity. At the same time we must never use charity as a bait for evangelism. The only reason for helping the poor should be that he is poor and needy (Dt 15:11). Don't mix up relief and belief. Acts of charity of course will attract non-Christians towards the Christian faith. But when that's not our primary motive, and if antichristians misunderstand us and accuse us falsely, we need not bother about it. God knows the hearts and He will fight for us. India cannot so easily forget a Graham Staines and Mother Teresa.

What the **Christian Missionaries** have done thro' the centuries all over the world to improve the lot of people through social works cannot easily be erased from history. Take India for example. Do we know that most Indian languages were developed by the early Christian Missionaries — from alphabets to grammar, to phonetics, dictionaries, everything? Do we know that these very people helped eradicate inhuman evils like *sati*, child marriage, infanticide and others, and even worked in laying down our Nation's Constitution? Based on an analysis of over 100 Indian languages, Dr. Babu K. Verghese in his 750-page book, “*Let there be India!*,” 2014, proves that Bible Missionaries as pioneers developed 85 Dictionaries, 116 Grammar books and 45 Newspapers in these languages between 150 and 200 years ago when India had nothing of these. The first Printing Press was established by Missionaries in 1556 in Goa. The first vernacular newspaper was published in Bengali and Hindi by Serampore Missionaries in 1818, besides an English Journal, *Friend of India*. Who can measure the contribution of Christian Schools, Colleges and Hospitals in India? The Christian Medical College Hospital (CMC) in Vellore, Tamilnadu, is a national pride. India comes here. The list is endless. It was the **Bible** that created modern India, bringing it from traditions to modernity, from insular to global, and from national to international. Therefore, dear Christian friend, don't believe the lie that Christians are foreigners and that Christian Missionaries have destroyed the Indian culture. We actually open the eyes of the tribespeople and the ignorant against exploitation by businessmen and politicians. We free the enslaved. We uplift the downtrodden. We embrace the untouchables. We love the unloved and the unlovables. We civilize cannibals and head hunters. We treat the lepers. We are anointed by God for this humanitarian service (Lk 4:18,19).

We in the Indian Church have been the most direct beneficiaries of the work of overseas Missionaries. Let's thank God for this. But there's still a backwardness in the Church we need to be ashamed of. That's **casteism**. It was casteism and racism among Christians that prevented Mahatma Gandhi and Ambedkar from embracing Christianity though they supremely revered Christ and His teachings. No caste is superior or inferior to the other. God has made from one blood (or man) every nation of mankind (Acts 17:26). This was a statement Apostle Paul, a Jew, made in Athens addressing Epicurean and Stoic philosophers who charged him as “a proclaimer of foreign gods” (v18).

Where's casteism after coming to Christ? The Bible repeatedly teaches, “There is neither Jew nor Greek ... because you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28; Rom 10:12; Col 3:11). In the ancient days, Jews will have no dealings with non-Jews. The Jews considered even

Samaritans, who were half-Jews, as untouchables (Jn 4:9). In order to break this prejudice, Jesus deliberately appreciated the Samaritans and non-Israelites over Israel on several occasions (Lk 4:25-27; 7:9; 10:33; 17:16). About His death on the Cross, the Bible says, “He has broken down the middle wall of division between us ... through the Cross ... putting to death the **enmity**” (Eph 2:14-16). Here the word “us” means Israel and non-Israel (vv11-13,17-22). If the Cross of Christ can bring together two diametrically opposite groups like Jews and non-Jews in the Church, can it not unite Aryans and Dravidians in the Indian Church and Community? The Cross symbolizes **peace**: the vertical staff speaks of peace with God, and the horizontal speaks of peace with one another. What’s the point in keeping Crosses in our Churches if we have not understood the basic Message of the Cross? Let’s repent of this sin of casteism which has plagued not only the Churches but also para-Church organisations. A divided Church cannot heal a fractured society (Jn 17:21).

The citizens of India are given the fundamental right to “freedom of conscience and freedom of profession, practice and propagation of religion.” You cannot have a right to “propagate” when there’s a ban on being influenced by such propagation. Prevention of conversion by “**force, fraud or allurements**” is a regulation to maintain public order. However, vague definitions of terms such as “force,” “fraud,” “inducement” or “allurement” are open to misuse.

Take for example, the word “force.” God never plays with the free-will of man. Otherwise He would have prevented the first man, Adam, from eating the forbidden fruit. Jesus never forced anyone to follow Him. He simply gave open invitations. Look at these sayings: “Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28). Here He was referring to those crushed by laws impossible to obey. Again, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (Jn 7:37). He never wanted anyone follow Him out of emotional excitement without counting the cost (Lk 14:27-33). Where is “force” here? We are accused that we “force” people by mentioning “**divine displeasure**” over those who would not respond to God’s call. Sorry, we can’t but “**warn**” people of the impending judgment. God warned Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:16,17). Moses warned people lest they go after false gods (Dt 4:2,3). The Prophets warned Kings and the people again and again, and called them to repentance. John the Forerunner of Jesus warned the people of the “wrath to come” (Mt 3:7). Jesus warned unbelievers, saying, “He who believes (the Gospel) and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15,16). Apostle Paul thundered from Mars’s Hill in Athens, “Truly, the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man (Jesus) whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30,31).

The believers of Jesus Christ are God’s watchmen for the world. Here’s God’s commission to them: “When I say to the wicked, You shall surely die, and you give him no warning ... to save his life ... his blood I will require at your hand” (Ezek 3:17,18). Is it not inhuman not to warn fellowmen of the danger ahead? God’s danger signals are expressions of His love. “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not PERISH but have eternal LIFE” (Jn 3:16). No Gospel preaching can be complete without this glorious Biblical text. If I believe what the Bible says, and what the Bible says is what God says, and if I love others as myself, I cannot suppress the Truth. This is the conviction of every Evangelical Christian. With this conviction, we don’t “pressurise” people but “**persuade**” them to be reconciled to God thro’ Christ who became sin for us. We are “Ambassadors for Christ” (2 Cor 5:18-21).

Dear fellow believers, never be terrified or intimidated by threats, oppositions and persecutions (Phil 1:28). We are called not only to “believe” in Christ, but also to “suffer” for

Him (v29). At the maximum, our heads will go. Remember what Jesus said: “Do not **fear** those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him (God) who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28). There was never a time in Church History when there was no **opposition** to evangelism and **persecution** of God’s people and His servants. Read through the 28 chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. This is the story of the early Church. We call it an infant Church because it was in the formative stage. The new disciples and the apostles were beaten and imprisoned. There were oppositions both from the traditional religionists and civil authorities. Magicians and businessmen were against the Christian witnesses (Acts 13:6-8; 19:23-29). But nothing could stop them because they had believed the words of their Master, Jesus, that the “building” of the Church and “battling” with evil powers will go hand in hand (Mt 16:18). The more the Christians were persecuted the more they grew! This is what Mr. Rajaji, an Indian Statesman, used to say: “Don’t crush Christians; they will multiply like bedbugs!” The Bible says that God from His Throne in Heaven will “laugh” at the persecutors of His children (Psa 2:1-4; 37:12-14). Pray specifically for the opponents. Usually the vehement “opponents” of the Gospel become its mighty “proponents” and “exponents” (Acts 9:21).

The Bible repeatedly admonishes us to obey the civil **Government**. Here’s the reason why: “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Rom 13:1). Remember, this admonition was given to Christians who were under the pagan Roman Rule. It matters not to us who comes to power—BJP or Congress or Communists! We will obey all the rules, except if there come laws which prevent proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, and which are opposed to basic Bible teaching. At such instances we will remember the reply given by the Apostles to the Rulers who “commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the Name of Jesus.” Here it is: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you must judge. For we CANNOT BUT SPEAK the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:18-20). We are not talking about the “right” to propagate our faith, but the **“authority”** Jesus has given us: “All authority in heaven and earth is given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I’ve commanded you!” Following this command, which we call the Great Commission, He promised, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age!” (Mt 28:18-20). As the disciples of Jesus, we have no option than to obey our Master. Our basic calling is to be “fishers of men” (Mt 4:19). Christ’s abiding presence with us is assured. When you face enquiries, remember what Jesus said: “When they bring you to trial ... do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say ... for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mk 13:11). Do not get angry but answer the questions gracefully (Col 4:5,6).

There’s a move all over India to ban “religious” conversions. This need not worry us, because Christianity is not a “religion.” It’s a **“Person!”** This is what Apostle Paul, who once was an opponent of Christian faith, testified: “To me, to live is CHRIST, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). While writing to intellectual Greeks, he said, “We preach the crucified CHRIST” (1 Cor 1:23). The pursuit of every Christian is to “know CHRIST” more and more (Phil 3:10). Christianity is not a religion of rules and rituals. Christianity is Christ (Rom 8:9b; Gal 2:20). In His last recorded long prayer Jesus told His Father, “This is ETERNAL LIFE, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn 17:3).

There’s nothing as Christian **“culture.”** We have only Christian “faith.” One can believe in Christ by being in any culture. As a Christian, you can be a vegetarian or a non-vegetarian (Rom 14:2,3). We are called to “liberty,” and we are not to hurt or despise others but serve them with love and respect (Gal 5:13,14). No culture is superior or inferior to the other. They are only different. For example, we encourage new believers in tribal areas to worship God with their cultural music and tribal dance. There’s no need to change one’s name at baptism.

Jesus did not make all non-Jews as Jews though that's what the Jews expected. He brought Jews and non-Jews to the central point of the Cross! Apostle Paul declodged Christianity from its Jewish clothing. Martin Luther declodged it from its Latin clothing. It's the responsibility of the Indian Christians to declodge it from its Western clothing. It's erroneous to think that Indian culture is Hindu, and Western culture is Christian. Only when certain practices are related to the worship of idols, we need to change them. Because the very first and the second of the Ten Commandments say, "I am the Lord your God ... You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image ... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Ex 20:1-5).

There are talks at the Government level to declare **December 25th** as a Day of "Good Governance." So what? Christ is the centre of history dividing it as B.C. and A.D. Who can change this? History is His Story! However, there's no record in the New Testament that the early Christians celebrated Christmas. The Christmas story is only in two of the four Gospels. But all the four Gospels record full details of Christ's death and resurrection. While preaching the Gospel, the Apostles started with and mainly stressed the "death" and the "resurrection" of Christ (1 Cor 15:1-4). Regarding the Lord's Supper they taught the believers, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's DEATH till He comes" (1 Cor 11:26). Unfortunately Christmas is commercialised all over the world. For many it's only drinking and dancing. Santa Claus has taken the centrestage. "Christmas" has become "X-mas!" After all December 25 was the date of a Roman pagan festival (for Sun god) which was Christianized by the Church (for God's Son) in Rome in A.D. 336.

If December 25th will be declared as "**Good Governance Day,**" what an opportunity for us Christians to tell people about the forthcoming 1000-year REIGN of Christ on earth! The most famous Christmas text in prophecy is Isaiah 9:6-7, which says, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the GOVERNMENT will be upon His shoulder ... Of the increase of His GOVERNMENT and of peace there will be no end!" The prophecy of Prophet Micah (750-686 B.C.) concerning Christ's place of birth says, "You Bethlehem, ... out of you shall come forth the One to be RULER!" (Mic 5:2). When the wise men from the East saw the star and came to Jerusalem, they asked, "Where is He who has been born KING?" (Mt 2:1,2). Governor Pilate mockingly put on the Cross the title, "Jesus of Nazareth, the KING of the Jews!" (Jn 19:19). During the **Millennium** (1000-year reign), Christ will be called, "KING of kings and LORD of lords" (Rev 19:16). Only during millennium, when Christ would be the KING of kings (= Presidents, Prime Ministers, Kings, Queens, etc.), there will be perfect peace and righteousness, which the world has never witnessed (Isa 11:3-9). Even wolves and lambs, leopards and goats, shall lie down together! Dear Christian preachers, pick up the words, "*Good Governance,*" for your Christmas sermon title! Why not? Did not Apostle Paul pick up the inscription, "*To the Unknown God,*" from the altar of a Roman Temple for his sermon title? (Acts 17:22,23). Let me tell you something: Whatever any Government does, it will ultimately benefit the Kingdom of God. Does not the Bible say, "The King's heart is in the hand of the Lord; like the rivers of water He turns it wherever He wishes?" (Prov 21:1). The Roman roads and the Greek language helped to spread the Christian message so fast!

Instead of reacting to the Anticonversion Bills, let us repent of our disobedience to the **Great Commission**. Did we do our best when the winds were favourable? Let's repent of our indifference towards the perishing souls all these years. PRAY more than ever for missionaries and those not yet reached with the Gospel (Mt 9:37,38; 1 Tim 2:1-4). GO wherever you can to introduce Christ to men and women. Get involved in some regular neighbourhood evangelism. Consider seriously to invest the rest of your life in frontier missions. SUPPORT missionary organisations, evangelistic agencies, relief ministries, Bible translation societies,

and the like with liberal offerings. Don't be bothered too much about the rules and laws relating to evangelism. What's important is not the "laws" but the "keys." The keys are not in the Parliament House, but in God's House (Mt 16:18,19). Laws can "close" the doors, but not "lock" them. It's God who opens the doors, and no man can lock it! (Rev 3:7,8). Open doors of course do not mean absence of opposition (1 Cor 16:9).

Earlier I mentioned that God would use persecution against the Church for its **"purification."** Purification not only means separating the chaff from the grains, but also purifying the lives of individuals. The supreme and oft-repeated character of the God of the Bible is holiness. He is incomparable in holiness (Ex 15:11). He has commanded us again and again, "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44; 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16). The Apostles exhorted the believers to be holy in all their **conduct** (1 Pet 1:15). This means practical holiness. We are to walk as "children of light," renouncing all works of darkness in our lives (Eph 5:8-13,3-5). We must be "salt" if we are to bless the earth; we must be "light" if we are to bless the world (Mt 5:13,14). Lifestyle evangelism is not a substitute for witnessing thro' lips but it's basic (v16). There can be no argument against a life well lived (Dan 6:3,4,22). Apostle Paul, imprisoned for the Gospel, wrote to the believers, "Don't be frightened in anything by your opponents ... Only let your **conduct** be worthy of the Gospel" (Phil 1:27,28). The God of the Bible not only calls us to be holy; He also promises to make us holy (Lev 20:8). That's why Jesus prayed to the Father for the sanctification of His disciples (Jn 17:17). Where else can we find a God like this? Let's pray for a Holy Spirit revival that will flush out all that's unholy from our lives. That will make the Church truly attractive in the society. Withdraw all court cases against fellow Christians (1 Cor 6:1-3). Avoid dirty politics in Church administration. Anyone who "contests" or "canvasses" for leadership is not qualified to be a leader (Mk 9:33-35). God put the Church in the world; but the devil has put the world into the Church. If a nation is to be healed of its ills, the Church in it must repent (2 Chr 7:14). "Judgment must begin at the house of God" (1 Pet 4:17).

The Bible has the answer to all the major problems of India. Take for example, the disputes over **worship places**. The Bible teaches that God is a Spirit and not a substance to be localised (Jn 4:24). Even King Solomon (990-930 B.C.) who built that magnificent Temple in Jerusalem confessed, "The Temple which I build will be great, for our God is greater than all gods. But who is able to build Him a Temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?" (2 Chr 2:5,6). The dying words of the first martyr of the Church included this: "Solomon built God a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:47,48). The Bible teaches that our bodies are the Temple of God's Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). The Church buildings or Prayer Halls are simply meeting places. There's nothing sacred about them. God's presence is promised WHEREVER people gather in the Name of Jesus (Mt 18:20). Not the dead bricks but God's people the "living stones" make the Church (1 Pet 2:4,5; Eph 2:21,22). In the same way, no Land is to be called "Holy" today. A visit to Israel is only a "tour" and not a "pilgrimage."

Sometimes we are accused that Christians in India are not patriotic. This is simply not true. We love India. Christ loved India, and that's why He made an exclusive appearance, after His Resurrection, to His disciple Thomas who was to come to India. Thomas exclaimed in response to Jesus, saying, "My Lord and my GOD!" (Jn 20:24-28). Only with this deep conviction he came to India, a land of many gods and goddesses! Christianity and **patriotism** are not opposed to each other. The Roman Empire was not Christian; but Apostle Paul, though a Jew, was proud of his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-28). India is not Christian, but we Indian Christians are proud of our Indian citizenship. Ours is a great Nation. God put Joseph (1870 B.C.), a Hebrew, in Egypt, and he was a blessing to the entire Nation (Gen 39-48). God put Daniel (555 B.C.), another Hebrew, in Babylon and he was a blessing to the

entire Nation (Dan 2:48). We are taught in the Bible, “Pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22:21). These are the very words of Jesus. Tax-evasion is antichristian (Rom 13:6,7). We must be law-abiding.

Any day the Indian Christians will be a blessing to this Nation. We don’t believe in **terrorism**. Look at these words of our Master: “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other side also” (Mt 5:38,39). He prayed for those who crucified Him, saying, “Father, FORGIVE them, because they do not know what they do” (Lk 23:34). The first Christian martyr prayed for those who were stoning him to death, saying, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). Mrs. Gladys Staines, the widow of the Missionary Doctor Graham Staines, said, “I FORGIVE those who burnt alive my husband and two sons” (23 Jan 1999, Orissa). That’s why even atheists love us! The Rationalist Mr. EVR’s famous *Periyar Thidal* in Egmore, Chennai, is regularly used for Christian meetings!

Religious freedom is desirable, but it is not a must for Evangelism and Church Growth. Is not the Church growing fast in certain Islamic Nations and Communistic Countries? Dear Christians, don’t resort to Protest Marches and Protest Fasts against anticonversion moves. Rather, lift your voices to God in prayer like the early Church. Let’s have more signs, wonders and remarkable miracles by the power of God to attest our preaching (Acts 4:16,24-31; 19:11; Mk 16:20). TV scenes of violent body-shaking, falling backwards, and rolling don’t prove anything. These things are there in many religions. Don’t go on the so-called “Prayer Walks” in Pilgrim Centres and around Temples and Mosques. This will irritate people and hurt their religious sentiments. Christ has explicitly taught us to “pray in secret,” and our Heavenly Father will “reward us openly” (Mt 6:6). Don’t shout “India for Christ,” rather, “Christ for India!” Christ has not called us to Christianize the world but only **evangelize** it! Our Indian Hindu friends are known for their tolerance. Some of them are more Christian in virtues than Christians. Don’t take advantage of it and play the fool. Don’t attack other religions and speak against idols (Acts 19:37). Simply proclaim the **Uniqueness of Christ**. No one was born, and no one lived, taught, worked, died and rose again like Him. (Read my 8-page Tract, *Is Christ Unique?*). Avoid mockery of all sorts and behave with dignity on the pulpit. If you are unwise and get into trouble, don’t call it persecution for the Gospel. Be discreet.

The **enemies** of the Gospel are more inside Christendom than outside. They were there in the first century itself. Here are some examples: Christians who always set their minds on physical health and material wealth are “enemies of the Cross of Christ.” Apostle Paul mourned that such people and preachers were too many. These men may talk about “Christ” but not about the “Cross of Christ” which means suffering and shame (Phil 3:17-21). They have taught Christians the one side of faith only, namely, “receiving” blessings. The other side is, “giving up” things and “sacrificing” our lives (Heb 11:17,24-27,35-38). For them Christian ministry is a business (1 Tim 6:5). And there are many liberals and modernists on our pulpits who do not believe in the Uniqueness of Christ, Miracles, Rebirth, a literal Heaven, a literal Hell, and the like (1 Jn 4:3). And there are those who “secretly bring in” legalism into the Church against the “liberty in Christ” (Gal 2:4,5). Don’t be surprised if you are betrayed by fellow Christians and family members before antichristians (Mt 24:9,10; Mk 13:10-13; Lk 21:12-19).

As warned by the early Apostles, we have “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13), “false prophets” (Mt 7:15), “false evangelists/another gospel” (Gal 1:6-8), “false shepherds” (Jn 10:12), and “false teachers” (2 Pet 2:1). According to Jesus, they are “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Mt 7:15). From inside they would devour the sheep (Acts 20:29). Pastors and Teachers must teach believers how to identify these wolves. These are the people who through popular media present a **distorted version** of Christianity and the Gospel. Systematic doctrinal teaching should be a regular feature in the Church programmes.

The Gospel of Christ is 2000 years old in India. There are still millions of people and thousands of villages not reached with the Gospel yet. Don't keep on preaching to the preached and comforting the comforted. 95% of Christian money is spent on Christians only who are hardly 3% in this Nation. How sad! Listen to what the Bible says: Eccl 11:6, "In the morning sow your seed (of God's Word), and at evening withhold not your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or both alike will be good." 2 Cor 9:6, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." 2 Tim 4:2, "Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season." Tell every non-Christian, "Christ came over 2000 years ago as the **Saviour**, and He's coming again soon as the **Judge!** Those who do not receive Him today as their Saviour will have to face Him tomorrow as the Judge!" Each one of the 100 prophecies in the Bible concerning the First Coming of Christ was fulfilled literally. In the same way each one of the 300 prophecies concerning His **Second Coming** also will be fulfilled. Let the love of Christ constrain us so much that we don't rest until we tell every non-Christian this most urgent and important message! No Indian should go to Hell because we didn't show him the Way to Heaven! Indians should fill Heaven! God bless you!

Your brother
with love for India,
R. Stanley

February 2015

Recommended Reading:

- *"Biblical Christianity in the Indian Perspective"*
by Wilber O'Donovan (2000) ... 400 pages
Price: Rs. 200/- Forwarding Rs. 50/-

"The Blood of Martyrs is the Seed of the Church!"

Here's how the Disciples of Jesus died —

- *Matthew*: Suffered martyrdom by being slain in Ethiopea.
- *Mark*: Died at Alexandria, being dragged thro' the streets.
- *Luke*: Hanged on an olive tree in Greece.
- *John*: Put in boiling oil. Afterward banished to Patmos Island.
- *Peter*: Crucified upside down in Rome.
- *James the Less*: Thrown from a pinnacle and beaten to death.
- *Bartholomew*: Flayed alive.
- *Andrew*: Bound to a Cross wherefrom he preached until dead.
- *Jude*: Shot to death with arrows.
- *Mathias*: Stoned and beheaded.
- *Paul*: Beheaded at Rome by Emperor Nero.
- *Thomas*: Killed by us by arrows in Chennai, India.

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