

Christ on the Hindu Road

CHRIST FLOWING IN HINDU CHANNELS

By Paul-Gordon Chandler

India is a fascinating place—steeped in religion, and all things spiritual. It is a wonderful place to talk about the person and teachings of Christ. In the last decade, within the Western world, for various reasons there has been a resurgence of interest in the spirituality of India--from the many Indian gurus that have come to the West and have attracted substantial followings, to the Dalit mass conversions in India from Hinduism to Buddhism, and in smaller numbers to Christian faith.

It is within this context that many Indian followers of Christ are living reminders that following the way of Christ among Hindus, and those of other faiths, requires genuinely respecting them. St. Paul's experience in Athens, Greece is a helpful starting point. He does not criticize the Athenians for their enthusiastic polytheism. Instead, he starts by praising them for their religious and spiritual zeal. And consequently they respond with an openness to listen to his beliefs.

Vincent Donovan, a Catholic priest who worked with the Masai in Kenya, says to the Masai in his excellent book, *Christianity Rediscovered*, "Everyone knows how devout you Masai are, the faith you have, your beautiful worship of God. You have known God and he has loved you...." His approach to the Masai reminds us all that God has created this world and is already present and working within God's creation. And as Christians, it is critical to never assuming one is taking God with us, but rather to discover "the God who is already present" and share about how we have come to understand that God more fully through the person of Jesus Christ—just as St. Paul explained to the Athenians that this "unknown god" who they worshipped, whose shrine had been built hundreds of years earlier, is actually knowable and is the God of creation.

Donovan, like St. Paul, uses the imagery of the national god of the Masai as really being the High God of all creation. God always goes ahead of us, and is both already there and being experienced. The role of followers of Christ is never to bring in an opposing God, bigger

and better, but rather sharing that the existing God may be beautifully experienced beautifully through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

In regard to Hinduism, Sadhu Sundar Singh, the mystic and Sikh follower of Christ in the early 1900's, had an interesting personal perspective. He writes, "Hinduism has been digging channels. Christ is the water to flow through these channels...there are many beautiful things in Hinduism; but the fullest light is from Jesus Christ."

When living among those of other faiths, as Christians our goal needs to be to respect the other and to learn about that faith—studying its holy books—and when it is appropriate, and when invited to do so, share about how we have understood and experienced God ourselves in the person and teachings of Christ.