Thoughts on the Christian-Hindu Encounter and a Christian Appraisal of the Bhagavadgita

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Introduction

To understand the effects of the Christian presence on Hindus in India, the matter must be viewed from both Hindu and Christian perspectives. Through the eyes of upper caste Hindus, the Christian presence has always been strongly resented. They percieved Christian conversion as another way of extending Western domination. Indian converts to Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were also converted to a style of living which was repugnant to traditional Hindus. To many Indians, the Christian message was no more than one which called upon Indians to adopt Western dress, food, names and manners, and customs which contradicted Indian values. In addition, converts to Christianity would often turn against their ancestral religion, pouring abuse on its gods and systems of belief. The attitude and behavior of nineteenth and twentieth century Christians in India contributed to the identification of their faith with Western arrogance and imperialism.

From the European viewpoint, however, the encounter with India during the last three and a half centuries took place between their dynamic and industrious continent and a country which "had not yet experienced its Renaissance."[1] That eighteenth century India was a land of superstition, harmful social customs, and moral decadence is a fact of history. The Moghul Empire, which governed much of the country, had become corrupt, benefitting only a privileged few. The literacy rate was very low, and privilege of education only provided an understanding of the Sanskrit and Arabic classics whose gods and

rituals offered few practical advantages for everyday life. The religious traditions also became corrupt, permitting evil rituals like infanticide and immolation of victims at popular festivals. "It was this condition that made it easy for the European to regard India as a land unworthy of respect, and for the zealous Christian to see Hinduism as a complex of gross superstitions and idolatry which must surely give way before the superior enlightenment of the Gospel."[2]

The situation of the eighteenth century Christian missionary in India was not unlike that of the early Christians. Early Christianity offered the Gentile world a legitimate substitute for both Graeko-Roman polytheism and Jewish exclusivism. The early Christian gospel lifted Greek converts to a higher moral standard than what was permitted by the gods and goddesses they previously worshiped. The gospel of Christ also offered to Gentiles what was once the sole property of the "chosen Isreal" -- a legitimate place in God's Kingdom. Gentiles, by their acceptance of the gospel, could now be reckoned as "children of the promise (Rom.9:6-8)." They, too, could live spiritually and not carnally since they now stood before God as his legitimate offspring.

Centuries later, Christian monotheism, an export of the enlightened West, would win a similar victory over the superstition, idolatry and social failures of popular Hindu religion. Christianity was, however, contested by monotheistic trends that were developing in Hindu Vaishnavism.[3] What success the missionaries did achieve was limited to lower caste members (and untouchables) who found in the gospel an escape from the confines of a corrupt system. The Christ-

ian gospel of grace also offered the lower castes a spiritual deliverance that was traditionally restricted to those Brahman elites who could undertake the ascetic and contemplative practices of Vedantic teaching.

Hinduism offered its lower castes a similar deliverance. From the second century B.C. to the fourth century A.D., the existence of Hinduism was being threatened by its own elitism. Only members of the Brahman caste had access to the scriptures; and among the Brahmans, only a few could understand the philosophy or carry out the disciplines required for salvation. As a result, masses of people from the lower castes were left without a way of meeting their spiritual needs. Authors of epics like the Mahabarata and the Ramayana therefore recognized the absolute need to democratize Hindu spirituality. The God who is personified as Krishna in the Mahabarata and as Rama in the Ramayana offers liberation to even those of the lowest castes by means of bhakti, or devotion. The Bhagavadgita, a section of the Mahabarata, brought the bhakti cults into philosophical agreement with traditional Hinduism by declaring that the worship of the personal Lord (Isvara) may bring about the same result as the contemplation of the impersonal Absolute (XII.1).[4] This made moksha, release from birth and death, accessable to those who could not practice the higher disciplines.

A considerable amount of Hindu literature, then, did describe a God of grace who legitimized the worship of the masses. But this literature did not carry the social impact that one might have anticipated. It did not remove untouchability or raise the standards of living of the lower castes. Furthermore, until Tulsi Das' translation of the Ramayana into Hindi in the sixteenth century, the epic was unaccessable

to the masses of people who could not read the original Sanskrit; and the Gita's level of sophistication remained beyond the grasp of those most in need of its grace.

The Christian missionaries, on the other hand, offered in practice what the Hindu epics described only in principle. In converting to Christianity, lower caste members were not only granted the assurance of salvation (without rebirth into a higher caste), but were also made official members of a community with a higher standard of living and an ethical purpose in society.

It was not until the early nineteenth century that Hindu intellectuals began to respond to the Christian challenge from the West. From the days of Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) to Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), the Reform Movement of Hinduism attempted to distill the religion into its finest points and give its teachings social applicability:

> Reform movements in Hinduism have been mainly in four directions: the removal of caste restrictions on social intercourse, as in intermarriage and interdining; the emancipation of Hindu women from social customs in regard to marriage and enforced widowhood, the abolition of the disabilities of the outcaste, especially that of 'untouchability'; and the increasing acceptance of the individual conception of the family as against the customary joint-family system.[5]

The tendency of Hinduism to accomodate or absorb new ideas was now at work in bringing the Western ethical outlook into its fold. Hindu scholars and apologists of the Reform Movement were trying to demonstrate that conversion to Christianity was unnecessary and unreasonable, since Hinduism, too, could be given an ethical expression; Gandhi's interpretation of ahimsa (non-injury) in light of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is a fine example.

Some have identified Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan as the most significant builder of modern Hinduism. Much of his writing attempts to vindicate Hinduism as superior to Christianity, theologically and ethically: Rather than building itself upon a narrowly-defined, exclusivistic doctrine of God and salvation, Hinduism represents the Universal religion. Hinduism does not identify one creed as the only truth, but views all faiths as significant, in their various expressions and levels of advancement toward the same goal. The universal vision of the Hindu results in tolerance, while the absolute dogmatism of the Christian evangelist results in heresy-hunting, holy wars and other fanatic bigotries. Furthermore, Radhakrishnan argues that the religious and ethical values of Christianity are already developed in Hinduism.

Radhakrishnan's arguments are filled with a passionate resentment of those Christians who proclaim Jesus as the only way to God, apart from which there is eternal hell. His Indian patriotism was even more upset by the connection often made between the authority of the Christian message and the superiority of Western civiliztion. In his book, Religion and the Christian Faith, Hendrik Kraemer wrote that "a Christian from the West should accept [Radhakrishnan's] dislike and misunderstanding humbly as an act of just retribution for the many Western treatments of Hinduism, which have manifested deep misunderstanding and biased dislike."[6] Indeed, the apologetics of Radhakrishnan and other key Hindu reformers should force Christian missionaries to question whether theirs is the offense of their message or the offense of Western additives. A negative attitude

toward the Christian mission, however, should not exclude due appreciation of its contribution to the social progress of India.[7]

The message of Christianity is bound to elicit some resentment wherever it is taken. The identification of Jesus as the sole mediator between humanity and God embitters those committed to other religious figures. Proclaiming the forgiveness of sin presupposes both the reality of sin and the need for forgiveness from a transcendent God; these assumptions may offend those who either hold a positive view of human nature or deny the existence of a personal, transcendent and/or ethical God. Finally, the doctrine of justification by grace may be repulsive to those who embrace human potential philosophies or religions which teach adherence to a moral code as a means to salvation.

The object of the Christian missionary should not be to exchange the above doctrines for a more irenic message which avoids confrontation. Sacrificing conviction should not be the means of allaying hostility. What is called for is the presentation of the gospel of Christ in that manner appropriate to a given context. This would minimize tensions arising form cultural differences. The apostle Paul embraced this approach in his efforts to become **all things to** all people:

> To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law, I became as one under the law -- though not being myself under the law -- that I might win those under the the law ..... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I might share in its blessings (1Cor. 9: 19-23).

Western Christian missionaries, however, have not become "all things to all people" to convey their message in India. By failing to

respect the God-given uniqueness of Indian people, they provoked a bitterness which was unnecessary and unrelated to their message. The greatest deficit of the Christian mission in India has been its lack of understanding and sensitivity to the Hindu world view. This largely resulted from a tendency to regard all non-Biblical religious literature as "counterfeit" or as "ensnarements of the Devil."

The lack of respect for image worship, superstition and immoral social practices is understandable, considering the Biblical charges against such things; but the challenge of "higher Hinduism" -- the religion of the educated, upper castes -- has no Biblical precedent. Paul and the other evangelists simply did not encounter a Gentile monotheism with its own doctrines of incarnation, grace and redemption.[8] What if they had? Would they have: (1) regarded the similarity between Hindu theism and their Christian faith as a Satanic ploy to lead people away from the true gospel? (2) considered Krishna worship to be a legitimate alternative to a belief in Jesus? Or (3) respected Hindu scripture for its ability to point people to the risen Christ?

The first two viewpoints are troublesome. To regard the finest scriptures of India as Satanic would throw an "evil" blanket over both Indian belief and culture; this attitude along with simplistic labels like "counterfeit" might pardon the missionary from the responsibility of understanding and affirming the uniqueness of a people before offering them something new. Approaches like these have historically resulted in unjust political systems based on notions of cultural or racial supremacy.

Secondly, that the early Christians would have regarded Krishna worship (or any other form of devotion) as a legitimate alternative to a faith in Jesus is out of the question. If single-minded devotion to a supreme, ethical Personality was the decisive factor which legitimized another religion, then the Jews would have been the first people to be removed from the early Christian missionary itinery. Paul and other evangelists, however, did go to the Jews, proclaiming a Jesus Christ-centered salvation and reinterpreting their law; they encountered violent opposition in the process. Any salvific value given to a non-Christian theism would have either denigrated the meaning ascribed to Jesus' death or made the issues of sin and atonement relavent only to a particular geographic location. The salvific value of the Christ event, though, was always proclaimed as something which met the needs of a fallen world (Rom.3:10), not a fallen nation or culture.[9] The messiah of the early Christian understanding died, undoubtedly, for the sins of the whole world.

The third viewpoint is the most plausible. It involves a sincere attempt to understand and respect the merit of Hindu religious insight, primarily for its ability to help Hindus see more clearly the relevancy of the Christian gospel.[10] Hindu theology is not dismissed as a vain, human attempt to understand the divine; it may, in some instances, provide a foundation for the Christian witness. Devout Hindus or other critics of this viewpoint might respond with questions like, "Are there any truths that Hindus can offer Christians?" or "Is Hinduism being given any value apart from its relatedness to the Christian message?" These questions do not fall within

the scope of this paper. The task, here, is to show how ideas that are present in Hinduism itself -- specifically, in the Bhagavadgita -- can demonstrate the necessity of a Christo-centric salvation. While this author admits that there are profound truths to be learned from Hinduism, the perspective of this paper attaches no salvific value to Hindu belief or practice (the meaning of "salvific" will be described throughout the remainder of this paper); those truths that Hindus can offer Christians are secondary to the work of the Cross.

The Bhagavadgita (or Gita) expresses the finest elements of Hindu thought while respecting the religion's diversity. The body of this paper will devote itself to an exegesis of those sections of the Gita which relate most easily to the Christian understanding of God (this will not include, then, a discussion of the Advaitan, or nondualist, school of thought). The principal task will be to show how central concepts of the Gita can be associated with the Pauline understanding of the human condition and of the messiahship of Jesus. In effect, the paper will illustrate what being "all things to all people" would entail for Christians who would encounter followers of the Gita.

From World Negation to World Maintenance

In his book, Indian Thought and its Development, Albert Schwietzer made a very provocative distinction between Indian and Western religious thought. He claimed that the central difference between the two is that Indian thought is "world and life negating" while the Western world view is "world and life affirming." World and life negation views existence as meaningless, sorrowful and illusory.

The ultimate goal of each individual is to obtain release from the misery of existence by (a) bringing life to a standstill within oneself by mortifying one's will to live, and (b) renouncing all activity which aims at the improvement of the conditions of life in this world.[11] Furthermore, Schwietzer held that the Indian religious mentality prefers the inactive ethic of perfecting oneself to the active Biblical ethic of loving one's neighbor as oneself.

World and life affirmation gives intrinsic value to this material world and the human experience of it. This positive view of existence lends itself to an interest in preserving the world and furthering it through goodwill toward fellow human beings. Schwietzer did not deny that there were elements of world and life affirmation in Indian thought and world and life negation in the New Testament. His claim, however, was that whenever the two world views are found side by side in Indian thought, world and life negation occupies the predominant position;[12] and when world and life affirmation is found is the New Testament, its form is different from that found in India. In Jesus' conception of a Kingdom which is 'not of this world,' for instance, and in his so-called "interim ethics," there is world negation, but not a rejection of the material world -- only a denial of the evil, imperfect world in expectation of a good and perfect world which is yet to come.[13]

The significance of Schwietzer's criticisms is demonstrated by the impact they made on the scholars of the Hindu Reform Movement. The efforts of scholars such as Radhakrishnan or D.S. Sarma to redefine Hinduism as an ethical religion were catalyzed by Schwietzer's

characterization of Indian thought as non-ethical and world negating. Much of the Indian scholarship of the mid-twentieth century carried a moral thrust which was either explicitly or implicitly in reaction to Schwietzer.

Perhaps the finest example of this is Radhakrishnan's annotated translation of the Bhagavadgita. This translation, particularly aimed at Western readers, gave the Gita a meaning which would contradict any preconceptions of Hinduism as non-ethical. Radhakrishnan uses the Gita's own preferences for the way of action (karma yoga) to demonstrate that Hinduism, contrary to the view held by Schwietzer, does concern itself with the moral and social evolution of humanity. Radhakrishnan's commentary gives humanitarian overtones to the following passages taken from the second chapter of the Gita:

> (71) He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of mineness or egotism, he attains peace.
>
> (72) This is the divine state, O Partha, having attained thereto, one is not (again) bewildered; fixed in that state at the end (at the hour of death) one can attain to the bliss of God.
>
> .....Joy, serenity, the consciousness of inward strength and of liberation, courage and energy of purpose and a constant life in God are their (the saints) characteristics. They represent the growing point of human evolution. They proclaim, by their very existence, character and consciousness, that humanity can rise above its assumed limitations, that the tide of evolution is pushing foreward to a new high level. They give us the sanction of example and expect us to rise above our present selfishness and corruption.[14]

Schwietzer views the humanitarian interests of the Gita differently. Radhakrishnan's apologetical spirit and his love for his ancestral religion seemed to blind him from those elements of Indian thought

which clearly exemplify world and life negation. He and other Hindu reformers had come to the conclusion that the legitimacy of a religion rested in its moral development, and so they set out to prove that Hinduism has moral implications. In the process, they ignored the fact that even the Gita accepts the external renunciation of the world as a legitimate means to salvation. The Gita, no doubt, views "desireless action" (niskarma karma) as the superior path; but this kind of action, from Schwietzer's perspective, cannot be so easily equated with either the Western world view or the Christian love ethic . This is becaus of the world and life negating antecedents of the Gita's doctrine of action.

The Gita bridges two periods of Indian thought: (1) the period which assumed that a withdrawal from life into the forest was necessary for salvation (800 - 400B.C.). This view was advanced in the Aranyakas, or forest treatises; (2) the period which recognized that worldly obligations had to be met and a social system developed to prevent chaos and maintain society (300 B.C. -200A.D.). A more rigorous development of the duties of caste (dharma) would,in this period be found in scriptures like the Mahabarata (which contains the Gita) and the Ramayana.

The Gita's principal insight was that one need not abandon the duties of life in order to be truly liberated. The same withdrawal or renunciation can occur within the heart of the individual while still engaging in dutiful action (III.4, VI.1, V.2). What the Gita extolls is not the avoidance of action, but the elimination of the selfish desire which prompts it. All work should be

performed in a spirit of sacrifice, with no interest in or attachment to results. In so doing, an individual may obtain the same end as one who withdraws from life altogether; but s/he will have contributed his or her share to a responsibility which has rarely, in Hinduism, been given such significance -- world maintenance.

Radhakrishnan presents the Gita's doctrine of action as though it had no connection with the life-denying inactivity of earlier Hinduism (specifically, Brahmanism). When Krishna advocates the performance of one's duty without selfish interests, Radhakrishnan interprets this as a call to work for world solidarity. An enormous leap has been taken when a religion first advocates a contemplative withdrawal from life as the means to salvation, and then supposedly concerns itself with ethics, social action and universal peace. Radhakrishnan perceives no strangeness or inconsistency in these two modes of thought. He takes the Gita's most central concept -- that one should not renounce action, but the egotistical springs of action -- to its farthest limit, and gives the Gita's action an expression which is quite familiar to Westerners, but uncharacteristic of other early Hindu writings (underlining mine):

> Discernment does not imply inaction, but it involves action done in a way that does not hinder release. If we realize that the atman or the true self is the detached witness, serene and impartial, no action binds us, <u>though we engage in the great battle against imperfection and sorrow and work for world solidarity</u>.[15]

The inconsistency of Radhadrishnan and other Reform scholars is very subtle: Their apologetical method fails to respect the distinctiveness of the Indian world view, in which world and life negation is central. The reformers were obviously attracted to the Western

values of education and social action; but this attraction led them to ignore those elements of Indian thought which did not view the improvement of this world as a legitimate spiritual concern. Essentially, the mistake of Radhakrishnan and other reformers was to view the Gita's ethics through the lens of Western humanism, rather than viewing them from the perspective of earlier Hinduism.[16]

Schwietzer's interpretation is far more restricted. He views the Gita's advocation of action as a concession to the impracticability of total inaction. This idea of 'conceding to activity' is suggested by Krishna when he tells Arjuna, "Do thy alloted work, for action is better than inaction; even the maintenance of thy physical life cannot be effected without action (III.8)." Another basis for action in the Gita lies in the belief that God constantly engages in work by preserving the world and preventing it from falling into nonexistence:[17] "If I should cease to work, these worlds would fall into ruin and I should be the creator of disordered life and destroy these people (III.24)." If God works, so should people. Schwietzer, however, maintains that this world affirmation claimed by the Gita still "recognizes the sovereignty of world and life negation:"

> With Brahmanic arguments, the Bhagavadgita wrests from Brahmanism the admission that activity and non-activity are equally justified. This means that the world and life affirmation which it claims still recognizes the sovereignty of world and life negation. Krishna requires the outward performance of action in combination with inward renunciation of the world. And when he speaks of action, he never means more than the exercise of the activity dictated by caste, not subjective action proceeding from the impulses of heart and self-chosen responsibilities. If one would rightly understand the Bhagavadgita, one must not forget the Brahmanic narrowness of its horizon.[18]

The different interpretations of Schwietzer and Radhakrishnan

resulted from one attempting to view the Gita from its own religious context and the other trying to interpret the scripture in a way that would give it respectability before a Western audience. Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the Gita distorts its meaning in two principal ways: First, it strains to make the Gita's message of action resemble the Christian love ethic. Krishna's call to action is not based on a love commandment, but on the view that (a) human nature itself impels one to act, and one should act in accordance with this nature as it is dictated by caste: "Even the man of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. Beings follow their nature. What can repression accomplish? (III.33)," and (b) in spite of the fundemental deceptiveness of life (maya) and the sorrows of this earthly existence, all people must perform their duties to help maintain the world, since Krishna himself engages in such action. The performance of one's dharma, or caste duty, may indeed coexist with a loving attitude toward other people, but the two are not necessarily equated in the Gita. The basic plot of the Gita, after all, involves Krishna's attempt to convince Arjuna to slay his own kinsmen -- not because this is the loving thing to do, but because it is Arjuna's duty as a member of the warrior caste (Ksaitrya).

The second way in which reformers like Radhakrishnan would distort the true intent of the Gita is by suggesting that the Gita is concerned with the evolution of an ideal society. The Gita does concern itself with the <u>maintenance</u> of this world, but this is different from the world's <u>improvement</u>. The Gita represents most of

Hinduism in its view that this world will always be a world of dualism: with pleasure and pain, hot and cold, good and evil. There is no trace of thought in the Gita which introduces the hope of the world's evils being totally eliminated, or of society being transformed into a paradisal Kingdom. What the Gita fears is a disruption of the world's equilibrium in which evil would outweigh good. When this occurs, the god of the Gita enters history:

> IV, (7) Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth (create incarnate) Myself.
>
> (8) For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.

Once again, Radhakrishnan's commentary (underlining mine):

> .....Wherever there is a serious tension in life, when a sort of all pervasive materialism invades the hearts of human souls, to preserve the equilibrium, an answering manifestation of wisdom and righteousness is essential. The Supreme, though unborn and undying, becomes manifest in human embodiment to overthrow the forces of ignorance and selfishness.....
>
> Avatara means descent, one who has descended. The Divine comes down to the earthly plane to raise it to a higher status. .....The purpose of the avatar is to inaugurate a new world, a new dharma.....The issue between right and wrong is a decisive one. God works on the side of the right. Love and mercy are ultimately more powerful than hatred and cruelty. Dharma will conquer adharma, truth will conquer falsehood; the power behind death, disease and sin will be overthrown by the reality which is Being Intelligence and Bliss.
>
> .....God does not stand aside when we abuse our freedom and cause disequilibrium. He does not simply wind up the world, set it on the right track and then let it jog along by itself. His loving hand is steering it all the time.[19]

Above it is difficult to know whether Radhakrishnan views God as a preserver of the world's moral equilibrium or as the establisher of an entirely new world order which is void of any evil. The underlined passages identify elements of both viewpoints. It seems as though Radhakrishnan is trying to respect traditional Hindu teaching on the

subject while accommodating the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic vision of the world's evils finally being destroyed. His attempt to accommodate both visions in a single interpretation fails to adequately distinguish the Hindu from the Biblical world view. In the Hindu world view, for instance, reality is cyclical, not linear: the soul experiences many births and many deaths (reincarnation), not just one of each; the world is created and destroyed many times, with each cycle of creation/destruction representing one day and night of Brahma; within each day of Brahma, God is incarnated into history many times (not once) to continually restore the balance between good and evil until the night of Brahma, when both good and evil are destroyed.

The task of relating the Gospel of Christ to Hindus appears to be extremely difficult, now that some basic distinctions between the Hindu and Biblical world views have been identified. It would seem that the Reform scholars' new interpretation of Hinduism -- their response to the Christian missionaries -- would make Hindus even more receptive to the Christian message, but this was not the case.

The Reform Movement made Hinduism similar to Christianity in every sense but the most crucial one -- that salvation had to be Christ-centered; that it had to be the result of the event of Jesus Christ. The work of the Reform scholars was largely an attempt to make Hinduism a legitimate, if not a superior, alternative to Christianity. Ironically, the most effective way of communicating the Gospel of Christ to Hindus (specifically, to followers of the Gita) requires an understanding of the Gita <u>as it is</u>, not as the reformers

tried to present it. If the actual meaning of the text is respected, Christians can discover that the Gita does depict the human condition in a way that can edify both East and West. The way it illustrates the basic human problem is profound and perceptive. The question is whether the Gita's portrayal of the human condition and its concept of God can demonstrate the necessity of Jesus, the crucified and risen messiah.

Krishna and Arjuna

"Gita" literally means song; Bhagavad or Bhagavan refers to God or the divine. The Bhagavadgita, then, is a divine song which the Lord Krishna sings to his devotee, Arjuna, in the setting of a battlefield. Arjuna, a member of the warrior caste (Ksaitrya) and of the Pandava family faces this dilemma: He must participate in a battle against the Kauravas, his cousins, to secure a kingship which rightfully belongs to Yudhisthira, the leader of the Pandavas. Arjuna is unwilling to fight, not because he is against killing, but because he must slay his own kinsmen. Krishna is Arjuna's charioteer, spiritual guide and personal Lord. He uses the given context to unfold to Arjuna a doctrine of the immortal soul, of God and of the importance of carrying out one's duty or dharma. The chariot carries symbolic significance:

> Throughout the Hindu and the Buddhist literatures, the chariot stands for the psychophysical vehicle. The steeds are the senses, the reins their controls, but the charioteer, the guide is the spirit or real self, atman. Krishna, the charioteer, is the Spirit in us.[20]

Across the battlefield (the field of Kurukshetra) Arjuna sees the familiar faces of his in-laws, uncles, friends and former teachers;

the sight fills him with compassion, fear, anxiety and sadness. He tells Krishna:

> I. (28) When I see my own people arrayed and eager to fight, O Krishna,
>
> (29) My limbs quail, my mouth does dry, my body shakes and my hair stands on end.
>
> (30) (The bow) slips from my hand and my skin too is burning all over. I am not able to stand steady. My mind is reeling.

Arjuna continues with a moral argument against participation: "What good can there be in killing one's own family? Would it not be better to be killed by them than to attain a kingdom that is smeared with their blood?" It would be better, he says, "to live in this world as a beggar than to kill these honored teachers (I.35, 36; II.5)." Furthermore, Arjuna argues that fighting this battle would lead to the disintegration of family and of the social structure (I.38-42).

Krishna responds by telling Arjuna that he grieves for those for whom he should not grieve, and yet speaks with words of wisdom (II.2). Krishna then points to the doctrine of the preexistence and indestructibility of the soul: "Never was there a time when I was not, nor thou, nor these lords of men, nor will there ever be a time hereafter when we all shall cease to be (II.12)." As a person discards old clothing and puts on others that are new, the soul passes from body to body (II.22); anyone who knows this would not grieve over death, which is an inevitability. The doctrine of the soul's immortality is intended to enable Arjuna to fight the battle without grief or compunction over the loss of his relatives.

To persuade Arjuna to fight, Krishna also reminds him of his duty as a Ksaitrya. There is no more ennobling a duty for a Ksaitrya

than to fight in a just war. To avoid this duty out of false sentimentality, cowardice or sloth would be sin. Krishna also mentions that Arjuna has nothing to lose by fighting. If slain, Arjuna will go to heaven; if victorious, he would enjoy the earth (II.37). Even worldly considerations enter Krishna's persuasion, as he asks Arjuna to consider what other warriors would think of him if he abstains from fighting: "The great warriors will think that thou hast abstained from battle through fear and they by whom thou was highly esteemed will make light of thee. Many unseemly words will be uttered by thy enemies, slandering thy strength. Could anything be sadder than that (II.35-6)?" When Krishna finishes explaining to Arjuna why, he begins his elaborate explaination of how he should fight the battle; that is, he describes to Arjuna the proper mentality and metaphysical realization which would enable him to fulfill his dharma. This description of the basis of action comprises most of the Gita and utilizes many schools of Hindu thought. One of these schools is the Samkhya school, founded by Kapila who most likely lived in the seventh century B.C.

Prakriti, Karma and Bondage

The Samkhya system is based on a dualism which recognizes two basic principles in the universe -- the purusha and the prakriti. The purusha consists of spiritual selves or entities which have no beginning or end. The prakriti represents the world of nature and the basis of all empirical existence. The prakriti does not refer to matter alone, but to both material and psychological aspects of nature. The world evolves out of the workings of the prakriti; but

this evolution of the prakriti can only occur through the influence of the purusha.[21]

Samkhya theory emphasizes the law of causation. This may either be associated with moral causation (karma) or to the natural causation which is said to bring the world into existence and produce history. The prakriti represents a determinism or bondage existing between all actions occurring in the objective world and their consequences. The flux of events which occur in the human, sub-human and material dimensions of the empirical world are all workings of the prakriti. While the prakriti effects change and causation, the purusha or spiritual self, is the unchanging, impartial witness. Human behavior is bound by prakriti. Escape from the deterministic bonds of prakriti is only obtained when one realizes the distinction between the purusha -- the real, unchanging and eternal self -- and the prakriti -- the elemental nature which yields actions and consequences.

Prakriti is divided into three modes or gunas: the sattva, raja and tama gunas. The three gunas comprise a cosmology which is similar in purpose to the yin/yang distinction of Chinese philosophy. While these three modes of prakriti are used to characterize the whole of existence, the focus here will be on how they describe human nature.

Human behavior, again, is bound by the modes of prakriti. The sattva, raja and tama gunas represent three elements of human nature: The sattva guna deals primarily with the moral interests of an individual. Sattvic qualities include goodness, purity, truth and cleanliness. The raja guna is associated with passion and self-interest. Rajasic tendencies result in actions prompted by ulterior motives;

these may refer to the pursuits of wealth, sexual pleasure or fame. Finally, the tama guna refers to the qualities of inertia, sloth, dullness or base-level carnality. Each individual operates under the influence of all three modes; in one person, however, sattvica may predominate; in another rajasa or tamasa. All three modes constitute the state of human bondage:

> Tamas represents the limiting conditions of the animal existence, Rajas those of the mental life, and Sattva the limitations of the moral nature. According to the Gita, the immortal soul finds itself imprisoned in this world in a body, and bound by fetters of flesh, mind and conscience.[22]

Two parallels to the triguna concept can be found in Western thinking. One of them is Plato's theory of the tripartate soul: reason, the spirited element and the appetite correspond to the sattva, raja and tama gunas respectively. Many centuries later, Sigmund Freud would describe the human psyche in terms of the superego, ego and id. The ego acts as a compromiser between the moral and social interests of the superego and the libidinous and aggressive interests of the id. The result of this compromise is a type of behavior which closely resembles that of the raja guna; action performed with ulterior motives.

The irony of the triguna concept is that from the standpoint of the liberated soul, all three of the gunas -- even sattva (morality) -- are binding. One might consider sattva to be the final destiny of all spiritual ascent, but the Gita teaches otherwise. An individual can have moral and religious inclinations and still be bound by the prakriti. True liberation does not occur when one has acquired a predominantly sattvic mentality, but when one has

transcended all three gunas. In the fourteenth chapter of the Gita, Arjuna asks Krishna to list the characteristics of one who has transcended the three gunas. Krishna responds:

> (22) He, O Pandava, does not abhor illumination (sattva), activity (raja) and delusion (tama) when they arise nor longs for them when they cease.
>
> (23) He who is seated like one who is unconcerned, unperturbed by the modes, who stands apart, without wavering, knowing that it is only the modes that act.
>
> (26) He who serves Me with unfailing devotion of love, rises above the three modes, he too is fit for becoming Brahman.

The liberated individual is one who has somehow been dissociated from the activity of the three modes of prakriti. While the modes act on their objects, the true self remains seated as the passive, impartial observer.

Samkhya theory is just one school of thought accomodated in the Gita. Because of its agnosticism, it is not very compatible with Christian thought: "The Samkhyapravacana Sutra (attributed to Kapila) finds it unnecessary to make the assumption of the existence of God, though it does not deny it either."[23] Neither the theological claims of the Samkhya school (or the lack of) nor its views on how to become liberated, however, are of interest to this study. The focus here is on how the Gita uses Samkhya theory to outline the human predicament in terms of prakriti (the three gunas) and causation, and on how this correllates with key aspects of Pauline thought.

Paul describes the life lived under "the dominion of sin" in a way that is not unlike the Gita's characterization of human bondage in terms of the three modes. According to Paul, all people -- Jews and Greeks -- who have not received the gospel of Christ live under the power of sin (Rom.3:9). "Sin", here, does not necessarily refer

to immoral or unlawful behavior, but would more accurately be defined as the absence of a faithful relationship with God. At present, the main concern is with what Paul means, in the empirical sense, by being "in bondage to sin" or "under the dominion of sin." If theological and metaphysical considerations are temporarily set aside, the similarity between the bondage of prakriti and the bondage described by Paul will become apparent.

As stated earlier, different people carry different proportions of attributes from each of the gunas. In some people, sattva predominates. These are people with a moral and/or religious education who have well-developed consciences. Those in whom sattva predominates ask questions like, "How can I fulfill God's commands?" or "How might I attain the highest good?" They tend to be very introspective and try to use the knowledge of their inner selves to help overcome their carnal nature. The Pauline equivalent to those with sattvic tendencies would be those who "sin under the law (Rom. 2:12)." The pre-Damascus Paul himself possessed this sattvic type of personality.

In other people, the raja (passion) or tama (inertia) guna may predominate. They are not conscientious,like those of the sattvic category, and are more involved with worldly gain or pleasure, or with sloth, perverted sexuality or habits which are destructive to self and society (Rom. 1: 26-32).

The binding effects of sattva are clearly stated by Krishna: "Of these, goodness (being pure, causes illumination and health. It binds, O blameless one, by attachment to happiness and by attachment to knowledge." Moral and religious pursuits are just another element

of human nature which constitute the state of bondage. If the soul is to be truly liberated, it must abandon any hope of securing its release through morality:

> Sattva does not rid us of the ego sense. It also causes desire, though for noble objects. The self which is free from all attachment is here attached to happiness and knowledge. Unless we cease to think and will with the ego sense, we are not truly liberated.[24]

The soul in bondage to sattva would, in Paul's terms, be described as being "in bondage to the law." The only difference between the two expressions is that "sattva" may refer to morality, happiness and knowledge, while "the law" refers specifically to the moral and ritualistic observances of the Torah.

A person in bondage to the law is caught in a legalistic trap in which his or her own peace of mind is dependent on the success achieved in attempting to fulfill numerous commandments. Failure to observe the law brings guilt, frustration and fear of punishment, while observing the law may yield a prideful sort of happiness. The Gita teaches that the liberated soul is one who, in having transcended the modes, neither rejoices when sattva prevails nor despairs when another mode arises: "He, O Pandava (Arjuna), who does not abhor illumination, activity and delusion when they arise nor longs for them when they cease (has risen above the modes; BG XIV.22)."

Accoring to Samkhya theory, human bondage is the result of a false identification of the true self (prakriti) with the modes of prakriti. The liberated soul, by contrast, has realized the distinction between the two. S/he stands as the impartial, unattached witness to the activity of the prakriti. This distinction between the true, liberated self and the modes of nature is not unparallelled by Pauline thought.

Paul,in his letter to the Romans, writes as one who has found, in in Christ, freedom from the power of sin and death; yet he still perceives within himself an ongoing battle between the spiritual (sattva) and fleshly (tama) elements of his nature:

> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So it is no longer I that do it, but the sin which dwells within me (Rom. 7: 14-15).

As a liberated soul in Christ, the introspective Paul makes a distinction between the "sin which dwells within him" and the "I" which perceives the sin's activity. His freedom in Christ allows him to be a passive observer -- no longer a participant -- in the war between his sinful flesh (tama) and the law of God (sattva). An unliberated soul would be frustrated or grieved by such a conflict; but the liberated Paul no longer identifies himself with his "body of death:"

> For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me a captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:22-5).

The unliberated soul identifies him or herself with the three modes: "While all kinds of work are done by the modes of nature, he whose soul is bewildered by the self-sense thinks "I am the doer (BG III.27)." The performance of sattva brings pride and feelings of worthiness; indulging in tamasic behavior brings guilt and frustration. For the liberated soul, however, the activity of the three modes is no longer attributed to the ego. The realization of the liberated soul is captured by the words, "not I:"

> BG V,(8) The man who is united with the Divine and knows the truth thinks "I do nothing at all" .....

This is the state of being active, yet inactive. One who has been freed from the bonds of nature (prakriti) views all action as the out-workings of the modes, not of the ego.

When Paul violates the law, it is not Paul who violates it but the sin which dwells within him; nor does Paul attribute his fulfillment of the law or spiritual behavior to himself:

> I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me; And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal. 2: 20-1).

Paul's exhortation to the Phillipians connotes a similar message: when the law is being fulfilled, when the righteous life is being pursued by Christians, it is not the ego which is at work, but God:

> ..... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (2: 12-13).

When the unliberated soul pursues the moral life, it results in greater bondage (BG XIV.6) and pride (Eph. 2:9). The law, however, is "holy, just, and good (Rom. 7:12)" and sattvic qualities, though they may bind, are always the more preferable in both the Gita and the New Testament. In the Gita, there are various ways in which one might obtain that freedom which allows one to perform one's dharma without attachment. In the letters of Paul, it is "being justified by grace" which allows one to fulfill the law without 'boasting in God's face.'

There are two types of bondage (bandha) described in the Gita: First, there are the bonds of nature (prakriti). The term for this type of bondage is Janmabandha, which refers to the bondage implied in the act of the immortal soul taking birth in a body. Janmabandha, then, is common to all people. There are also individual bonds, karmabandha, created by an individual's actions and consequences in his or her pres-

ent life and in the previous life. Karma bandha determines the caste into which a person is born.[25]

Karma is the technical term for a religious rite. The Vedas, the earliest Hindu writings, contain a sacrificial system in which every sacred rite performed brings an appropriate 'fruit' or benificial result. The Vedic rite earns the result or blessing for which it was instituted; these may include an abundance of sons, wealth, victory in battle or the joys of paradise. Eventually, the doctrine of karma would be developed so as to include moral and immoral actions, not only religious rites and sacrifices. As the doctrine of karma developed, so did that of reincarnation. Previously, religious rites were the means of securing blessings in the present life; later, karma evolved into the idea that 'good' and 'bad' actions in this life would determine one's fate in the following one.

Karma also refers to those acts which are appropriate to the four castes. The act appropriate to the Brahman is the performance of sacrifices and the study and teaching of the scriptures. For the Ksaitrya, the act is that of waging war. Vaisyas till the soil, trade and make money while Sudras serve the other castes. Karma, then, is a very inclusive term which refers first to those acts appropriate to the four castes, and then more generally to 'good'and 'bad' acts and the rewards or punishments they earn in the following life.[26]

The consequences of good and bad karma are not restricted to the afterlife. Good thoughts and actions (the pursuit of sattvic virtues) upgrade the sould, while evil thoughts and deeds degrade it.

Hindus who seek after liberation may try to overcome the lower elements of their nature by the higher; but ultimately, both good and evil must be transcended to break the bonds of karma.

The Gita tries to establish a compromise between the early Vedic belief in heavan and hell and the later doctrine of reincarnation. In the ninth chapter, Krishna explains how the performance of the sacred rites would be rewarded in a temporary heaven. After the fruits of one's good deeds have been exhausted, s/he is reincarnated in another body:

> (20) The knowers of the three Vedas who drink the soma juice and are cleansed of all sin, worshipping Me with sacrifices, pray for the way to heaven. They reach the holy world of Indra and enjoy in heaven the pleasures of the gods.
>
> (21) Having enjoyed the spacious world of heaven, they enter (return to) the world of mortals, when their merit is exhausted; thus conforming to the doctrine enjoined in the three Vedas and desirous of enjoyments, they obtain the changeable (what is subject to birth and death).

The blessings secured by religious rites and the fruit earned by good deeds are only temporary. People who perform such acts are operating within the rajasic (action with ulterior motives) and sattvic modes and are still subject to rebirth.

The Gita teaches that all action performed with an interest in rewards or results has a binding effect on the individual. Arjuna's unwillingness to fight in the battle of Kurukshetra illustrates what may be unique to the Hindu religious mentality: the fear of pursuing a task which may result in failure, and the avoidance of the task on the basis of a spiritual ideal of renunciation. The Gita extolls the performance of duty with an inner detachment to results; such is the behavior of one who has been freed from the bonds of prakriti and kar-

ma.

Thus far all that has been described is the Gita's description of the unliberated and liberated soul and some parallels from Pauline thought. Theology and metaphysics have been deliberately avoided so that the similarity would become more apparent. No real attention has been paid to the role of the divine in effecting human liberation. The remainder of the body of this paper will address the question of whether the Christ of Paul's ministry fulfills the Gita in a way that the Hindu avatars do not.

God, Sacrifice and Freedom

Not all of the schools of thought found in the Gita are compatable with Christian belief; the agnosticism of Samkhya theory and the monism of the Advaitan school are examples. Some would argue that the most basic doctrines of Hinduism -- karma, transmigration, caste and moksha -- make the entire religion, in spite of its diversity, incommensurable with Christianity. Such a view is obviously not shared by this project. Hinduism and Christianity share one important belief which provides the basis for a constructive dialogue: they both identify the absence of freedom ~~and~~ as the basic human problem. At the empirical level, correlations have been drawn between the Gita's description of bondage in terms of the triguna concept and Paul's "dominion of sin." Differences, however, exist between the mythologies which account for this state of bondage and between the ways in which Hinduism and the New Testament propose that people find release:

> BANDHA is bondage and Moksha is liberation. Man is not

> born entirely free. The very fact of his birth involves many fetters and limitations. He is born with a certain body, a certain mind, and certain tendencies in a certain environment. Christian theology has a doctrine of original sin according to which human nature is corrupt on account of the transgression of the first man. This is only a figurative way of saying that man by his very nature is sinful. On the other hand, according to Hindu philosophy, the soul of man is essentially pure and divine, but on account of its birth in a body it is temporarily subject to certain limitations and hence, short-sighted, ignorant and deluded, liable to go wrong and commit sin. Theologies which emphasize the sinfulness of human nature maintain that man's salvation can come only from without through the help of a Savior and the grace of God, whereas the philosophies which emphasize the inherent divinity of the human soul teach that salvation can come only from within -- by the soul overcoming its temporary limitations and realizing its own divinity.[27]

That the soul must realize its identity with the divine to be delivered from its bondage is a view not shared by all of Hinduism. The dvaita (dualistic) school, popularized by Ramanuja in the eleventh century, makes a distinction between individual souls and the personal Lord (Isvara) and advocates grace and devotion, not knowledge, as the way to God. While the Gita does include both monistic and dualistic types of thinking, it most strongly advocates the latter, viewing the worship and service of the personal Lord as superior to the passive contemplation of the Absolute Brahman (BG XII.2). It is the personal theism of the Gita which is of primary interest to Christians who would want to proclaim the gospel of Christ to Hindus.

> For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse .....
>
> Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.
>
> Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts

> to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Rom 1: 20-5).

Paul writes of a time in which the nature of the one, true God was clearly revealed through creation. Through nature and through people, one could know the nature and sovereignty of God in much the same way as one could learn of an artist through his painting. This period, however, was replaced by an era of idolatry, in which people chose to worship things that are less than God, in spite of what they knew of Him. They worshipped images (1:23) and perhaps the elemental spirits of wind, rain and sunlight instead of worshipping the true author of creation. Because of this, God 'gave them up' (26) to immoral lusts and passions; He consigned them (11:32) to a life which operates under the dominion of sin. The worship of idols is the root cause of the human bondage to sin, and is what will earn the wrath of God on the Day of Judgement (2:16).

In the ninth chapter of the Gita, Krishna addresses the question of what becomes of those who worship other gods. He responds:

> (23) Even those who are devotees of other gods, worship them with faith, they also sacrifice to Me alone, O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), though not according to the true law.
>
> (24) For I am the enjoyer and Lord of all sacrifices. But these men do not know Me in My true nature and so they fall (are subject to rebirth).
>
> (25) Worshippers of the gods go to the gods, worshippers of the manes go to the manes, sacrifices of the spirits go to the spirits and those who sacrifice to Me come to Me.

Krishna speaks as the supreme Godhead who claims that those who sacrifice to other gods do so, in essence, to Him alone. While Krishna is the Lord of all sacrifices, only those which are performed to Him in the proper spirit will liberate the devotee from the cycle of birth and death. The worship of the lesser gods will never free the soul

from the bonds of karma or prakriti. While the Gita does not advance a doctrine of eternal hell, it holds that those who worship lesser gods or elemental spirits are still subject to rebirth.

This is not to suggest that the God of the Gita is without wrath. In the sixteenth chapter, Krishna describes the nature of the Godlike and demoniac mind. The list of demonic attributes is very similar to what Paul describes in the first chapter of Romans:

> .....being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventers of evil .....(Rom. 1:29-30).

Now, the Gita (underlining mine):

> (8) They (the demoniac) say that the world is unreal, without a basis, without a Lord .....
>
> (10) Giving themselves up to insatiable desire, full of hypocrisy, excessive pride and arrogance, holding wrong views through delusion, they act with impure resolves.
>
> (18) Given over to self-conceit, force and pride and also to lust and anger, these malicious people despise Me dwelling in the bodies of themselves and others.

The above list of characteristics describes those who are operating under the raja and tama gunas. The punishment for this kind of behavior is a chain of degenerate karma in which evil doers are cast into lower and lower social conditions and life forms:

> (16) Bewildered by many thoughts, entangled in the meshes of delusion and addicted to the gratification of desires, they fall into a foul hell.
>
> (19) These cruel haters, worst of men, I hurl constantly these evil-doers only into the wombs of demons in (this cycle of) birth and death.
>
> (20) Fallen into the wombs of demons, these deluded beings from birth to birth do not attain Me, O Arjuna, but go down to the lowest state.

Without a doctrine of eternal hell, the Gita vindicates divine justice by portraying God as the enforcer of favorable and unfavorable karma.

The doctrine of reincarnation cannot be reconciled with the in-

terests of the Christian evangelist. Salvation through Christ is not salvation from birth and death, but escape from the power of sin in this life, and from the wrath of God at the apocalyptic judgement. While the idea of reincarnation is of no interest to the Christian, the law of karma,upon which reincarnation bases itself, should be of great interest. Karmic bondage is experienced by the body, mind and soul even in the present life. The Gita and the New Testament, then, would overlap in their descriptions of the 'realized eschatological life' while diverging in their futuristic eschatologies. Jesus Christ can be proclaimed as the source of freedom from the effects of karma and its determinism in the present life, and from the ultimate consequence of the human denial of God -- eternal hell.

Two principal reasons make Jesus the Hindu liberator and not Krishna or any other avatar: (1) The sacrificial system of the Vedas and of the Upanishads, along with the sacrificial nature of God as portrayed by the Gita point to Jesus much more easily than they do to any other religious figure; (2) Breaking the causal chains of karma on the human plane requires a compensation on the part of the divine. This is a vital element which is underdeveloped in the Gita. The unliberated soul is bound by the immediate and ultimate consequences of his or her actions: Desires, dispositions and actions must have consequences in this life, and in the next; the law of karma requires this. Krishna, however, tells Arjuna that even the greatest of sinners can be "reckoned as righteous" (also, "deemed good") if he devotes himself to Krishna (IX. 30). For this absolution to be possible, the karmic bond must be broken; for this to occur, one who is free from

the dominion of sin, or from the bonds of the prakriti, must bear the consequences of the karma of others. Such is the nature of the Christ.

That the meaning of 'karma' developed from the conception of it as a Vedic rite or sacrifice into the more general concept of good and bad actions has already been explained. Vedic law demanded sacrifice, not only to secure earthly blessings, but also to forgive sin:

> BG III. (10) In ancient days the Lord of creatures created men along with sacrifice and said, "By this shall you bring forth and this shall be unto you that which will yield the milk of your desires."
>
> (12) Fostered by sacrifice, the gods will give you the enjoyments you desire. He who enjoys these gifts without giving to them in return is verily a thief.
>
> (13) The good people who eat what is left from the sacrifice are released from all sins but those wicked people who prepare food for their own sake -- verily they eat sin.

But the fruit gained by Vedic sacrifice is only temporary (I.42-3). The 'release from sin' that is mentioned in verse (13) must also be temporary, since it,too, is the product of a sacrifice performed with self-interest. Only a divine sacrifice on man's behalf can secure a true and lasting freedom from sin. This is the atonement of Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice made it possible for believers to be spared from the consequences of human rebellion. Verse (13) can now be viewed as a Hindu antecedent to the Lord's supper.

While all living beings act out of compulsion or out of desire prompted by motives, the God of the Gita acts in perfect freedom, out of sheer interest in preserving the world. The avatar, or descent of God into humanity, is born into the world by his own free will, not out of karmic ties. The action which is advocated by the Gita is the same sort of action exemplified by Krishna as he enters the world in human form.

This 'desireless action' (niskarma karma) is not possible without

grace, and grace can only be afforded through the sacrificial activity of God. Grace must precede the disinterested action of the liberated soul. The Gita does not advocate such action without developing a doctrine of grace, since it would be unreasonable for Krishna to expect Arjuna to fight disinterestedly without granting him the assurance of victory in the end:

> Even without thee, all the warriors who are standing in battle array will not remain (alive) .... They are already slain by me: be thou merely the tool (XI.32-3).

When interpreted metaphorically, the real battle which Arjuna fights is not carnal, but spiritual; it is a battle against supernatural forces which place fear and doubt in the human mind, obstructing freedom:

> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, powers and world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places(Eph. 6:12).

The crucifixion of Jesus marked the final conquest over the forces of darkness. In bearing the consequences of human sin and rebellion, Christ 'disarmed' the powers, making them powerless over those who live by faith:

> .....having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When he had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Col.2: 14-15).

The freedom that the Gita describes -- freedom from the bonds of prakriti and karma -- is possible only by virtue of Christ's sacrifice. Had Jesus not born the consequences of human sin, individuals would be trapped in causal chains that can be represented by strings of falling dominoes; each string is set in motion by original sin, propelled by criminal lusts, falling toward certain

idols, but only to encounter the wrath of God at the end of a life span. But the grace of God breaks this causal chain and enables the believer to be in the world, but not of it (1Cor. 7: 29-30); utilizing one's gifts in a spirit of sacrifice (1Cor. 12), for the glory of God and not self, in this life and in the life to come.

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Endnotes

1 William Stewart, India's Religious Frontier (London: SCM Press LTD, 1964)42.

2 Ibid, 43.

3 Vaishnavism is the sect of Hinduism which worships Vishnu, the preserver of the world, who incarnates himself from age to age in various forms. Rama, Krishna and Gautama Buddha are considered to be his most significant incarnations.

4 Sabapathy Kulandran, Grace in Christianity and Hinduism (London: Lutterworth Press, 1964)138.

5 Rajah B. Manikam, Christianity and the Asian Revolution (Madras: Diocesan Press, 1954)125.

6 Quote of Kraemer's taken from Bror Tiliander's Christian and Hindu Terminology (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1974)20.

7 Ibid, 20.

8 Gnosticism might be an exception; the statement, however, was referring to a Gentile monotheism which would not call itself Christian.

9 Leander E. Keck, Paul and His Letters (Philedelphia: Fortress Press, 1979)49.

10 Paul: "For even your own poets have said .... (Acts 17:28)"

11 Albert Schwietzer, Indian Thought and its Development (New York: Henry Holt & Co., Inc., 1936)2.

12 Ibid, 3.

13 Ibid, 4.

14 S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita; with an introductory essay, english translation and notes (London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1948)129.

15 Ibid, 144.

16 This tendency was resisted by a conservative group of Hindus who resisted change as firmly as they did Christianity. See Bror Tiliander, Christian and Hindu Terminology (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wicksell Tryckari AB, 1974)19.

17 Schwietzer, 187.

Endnotes Cont'd

18 Ibid, 187-8.

19 S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita, 154-5.

20 Ibid, 85.

21 Discussion of Samkhya theory drawn from K.M. Sen, Hinduism (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961)80-1.

22 D.S. Sarma, Renascent Hinduism (Bombay, India: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966)124-5.

23 K.M. Sen, Hinduism. 81.

24 S. Radhakrishnan, The Bhagavadgita. 318.

25 D.S. Sarma, Renascent Hinduism. 127.

26 Discussion of karma derived from R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism (London: Oxford University Press, 1962)59-60.

27 D.S. Sarma, Renascent Hinduism. 124.