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Hinduism, Yoga and the Christian

by J. Greg Sheryl

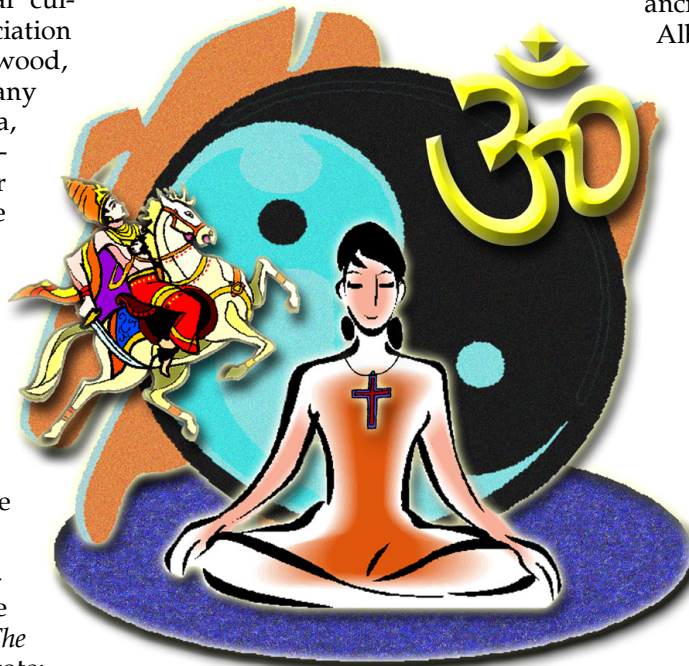
Hinduism, the primary religion of the subcontinent of India, has gained a firm foothold and wide acceptance in the United States since first attracting significant attention in the 19th century. Images of Hindu "holy men" are familiar in modern popular culture, due to their frequent association with those among the Hollywood, music, and literary set. And many Americans have taken up yoga, which is inextricably intertwined with Hinduism, for physical exercise. Some churches even offer yoga classes, going so far as to call it "Christian yoga."

But before taking a yoga class, the discerning Christian needs to consider the implications of yoga and whether it can be integrated into one's daily walk with the Lord Jesus.

No examination of yoga's influence and impact can exclude Hinduism. In his 1989 book, *The New Age Cult*, Walter Martin wrote:

"The great English apologist and writer C. S. Lewis saw the battle lines clearly drawn. He noted that in the final conflict between religions, Hinduism and Christianity would offer the only viable options because Hinduism

absorbs all religious systems, and Christianity excludes all others, maintaining the supremacy of the claims of Jesus Christ."¹



Hinduism has no identifiable founder and it does not require a belief in any god. It tends to absorb — or try to absorb — elements from other religions. The conventional wisdom is that Hinduism is the most ancient world religion. But Mark Albrecht writes:

"Modern scholarship has established that the earliest vestiges of the Hindu religion are to be found in the scripture known as the *Rig Veda*, which was probably compiled about 1500 B.C. at the earliest. This makes Hinduism the world's second oldest religion after Judaism, which was established by God's covenant with Abraham, somewhere between 2000 to 1800 B.C."²

Another states:

"Hinduism is not really one religion, but many religions that interact and

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Editorials

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE ENIGMA OF MICHAEL JACKSON

Michael Jackson was a real enigma. In the months and years before the popular entertainer died unexpectedly June 26, the news media sarcastically labeled him "Wacko Jacko" due to his strangeness and eccentricity, such as the dangling of his nine-month-old son out of a third-floor hotel balcony in Berlin. However, within minutes of his death, this same media was christening him as one of the world's greatest humanitarians and civil rights leaders. Listening to the news reports, it seemed that Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King Jr. had nothing on Michael Jackson.

During the Jackson memorial on July 7, basketball legend Earvin "Magic" Johnson exulted the late performer calling him "the greatest entertainer ever" and credited Jackson with making him "a better point guard and basketball player." Johnson said, "I want to thank Michael for opening up so many doors for African-Americans to be on daytime shows, late night shows. He allowed Kobe [Bryant] and I to have our jerseys in people's homes across the world because he was already there and he opened all those doors for us." Many thought it was Jackie Robinson who broke the color barrier in sports. Apparently not. Move over No. 42, it sounds as if Jackie needs to surrender his famed status to Jacko.

Yet there was a spiritual enigma about Jackson as well. Many readers may be surprised to learn that in those early years, when Jackson's career was rising to superstar status, he was a Jehovah's Witness. Therein laid a real quandary for the Watchtower.

Jehovah's Witnesses and the Watchtower often chide Christian denominations for a "lack of unity." What they miss is that there is unity on the essentials, and liberty on the non-essentials. And their boast of absolute unity is more correctly identified as uniformity — agree with us 100% or get out. But despite its claim of absolute unity, the Watchtower really does not live up to that which it boasts, or that for which it condemns others. Jackson was an excellent case study of this.

In the early 1980s, Jackson became a Jehovah's Witness. His mother, Katherine, and two sisters, Rebbie and LaToya, had also embraced the faith. In 1984, *USA Today* labeled Jackson as "the USA's most famous Jehovah's Witness" (Aug. 31, 1984, pg. D1). *Rolling Stone* magazine stated, "Religion is a large part of his life, requiring intense Bible study and thrice-weekly meetings at a nearby Kingdom Hall. He has never touched drugs and rarely goes near alcohol" (Feb. 17, 1983, pg. 13). The magazine identified one of Jackson's "few 'safe' zones" as the Kingdom Hall (pg. 14). *The New York Times* reported, "According to his mother, Katherine, Mr. Jackson regularly dons a disguise to proselytize on street corners, distributing copies of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*" (Aug. 29, 1984, pg. 15). Other newspaper

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News Updates

NO LONGER FOR MEN ONLY

One theory says golf is a Scottish word derived from the Dutch word *kulf*. However, in recent years, the word has become part of the Internet rumor mill which claims golf is an acronym of gentlemen only ladies forbidden. But in one regard the rumor does hold a measure of truth as to the history of the sport. Golf was once played distinctively by nobles, military men, executives, and politicians. Golf is now played and enjoyed by both genders.

Just like the sport of golf, which originally discriminated against women, so too Promise Keepers has relaxed its restraint on female participants. This year, for the first time ever, the former men only ministry invited women to attend its "A Time to Honor," a day-and-a-half long meeting held July 31 and Aug. 1 in Boulder, Colo. The event was the sole assembly for the Promise Keepers, which once annually hosted more than a dozen of such rallies across the country. Tickets were \$59 each.

This new direction came last year as the ministry's co-founder, Bill McCartney, returned to his role as the chairman and CEO of the organization. Five years earlier he had resigned those positions, saying he needed the time to devote to caring for his ailing wife.

In recent years, Promise Keepers suffered diminishing numbers from its attendance peaks in the 1990s. McCartney told *New Man eMagazine*, "The ministry has been on a downward spiral. Our staff and our resources are really limited." The online magazine also revealed, "Limited resources necessitated the shift from a multi-city tour to a lone event. Last year Promise Keepers scheduled eight events, but canceled one and shifted several others to smaller venues due to a lack of ticket sales."

The movement continues to display a propensity toward ecumenism. Speakers advertised for its summer event included Tony Evans, Gary Smalley, Assemblies of God pastor Tommy Barnett and Jane Hansen Hoyt, president of Aglow International.

—MKG

TILTONS ENCOUNTER MASKED GUNMAN

In the early 1990s, televangelist Bob Tilton found himself retreating into obscurity when his unscrupulous

prosperity theology enterprise was exposed on national television. After the dust settled on his imploded Dallas megachurch and worldwide ministry, Tilton divorced his wife Marte and relocated to the Miami area. In the midst of a brief second marriage and divorce, Tilton returned to doing what he does best: preaching his good-fortune gospel, albeit on a smaller scale.

The anonymity to which 63-year-old Tilton has toppled was demonstrated when it took the news media nearly four months to report a home invasion at his Miami Beach estate. According to a police report, Tilton and his third wife Maria, 49, were accosted on Feb. 3 by a masked man dressed in black and carrying a semiautomatic pistol. The assailant ordered them to lie face-down on the floor and bound their wrists with plastic "flex-cuffs." In addition to Tilton and his wife, the couple's twin 1-year-old daughters, Elijah and Rebekah, along with the toddlers' nanny were home at the time of the attack. The intruder became distracted by the family dogs, allowing Maria to get away. She ran down the street and found a passer-by who contacted police. The perpetrator fled the home after Maria had escaped. The Miami police have called the incident a botched robbery attempt and have made no arrests in the case. Authorities also believe that a second intruder may have been involved.

It was in late May when the *Dallas Morning News* finally disclosed the episode and stated that "the Miami news media didn't even bother to report the incident."

According to the Dallas newspaper, Maria said in April that, "she cannot go back to the beachfront home." The Tiltons have moved into a high-rise in the Miami South Beach area. Their new residence comes with 24-hour security. The 8,000-foot Miami Beach mansion where the invasion occurred has been put on the market for \$6.9 million. Tilton had built the five-bedroom, eight-bathroom Marco Island home in May 2003 for \$5 million.

—MKG

KEEPING IT ALL IN THE FAMILY

Seven months after removing his son as senior pastor of the Crystal Cathedral and preacher on its *Hour of Power* broadcast, the Rev. Robert H. Schuller announced in June that the leadership of his 10,000-member Garden Grove, Calif., church would be turned over to his eldest daughter, Sheila Schuller Coleman.

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Paramahansa Yogananda

Purveyor of a Different Jesus and a Different Gospel

by J. Greg Sheryl



Anyone who has practiced yoga for a while probably has heard the name "Yogananda." Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952),¹ a 20th-century Hindu yogi, was a devotee of yoga and yogic meditation. Indeed, he appears to have viewed yogic meditation as the key to everything.

He brought his practice from India to America in 1920, where he lived for most of the rest of his life before dying in 1952 at age 59. He may be best known for his book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*.² He has been called "the Father of Yoga in the West,"³ and he founded the organization Self-Realization Fellowship to promote his teachings. Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) continues to publish his resource materials.

The particular "brand" of yoga that Yogananda is known for is called kriya yoga, which is "an advanced Raja ["royal"] Yoga technique."⁴

HIS LIFE

Although one might suppose that the best account of Yogananda's life is his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, such may not be the case. There is another book, also published by Self-Realization Fellowship, called *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*.⁵ It contains much information about Yogananda's life, work, and teachings, as well as personal recollections of others about him and his final days. It also shows,

to an extent, how much he is esteemed by his followers.

Yogananda was born Mukunda Lal Ghosh on Jan. 5, 1893. His autobiography says:

"My name was changed to Yogananda in 1915 when I entered the ancient monastic Swami Order. In 1935 my guru bestowed on me the further religious title of *Paramahansa*."⁶

Later, he explains that the name "Yogananda ... means 'bliss (*ananda*) through divine union (*yoga*)'"⁷ and also mentions that "Yogananda is a fairly common name among swamis."⁸ As for the title "Paramahansa," he explains that when it was given to him by his guru, Yukteswar, in 1935, "It now formally supersedes your former title of *Swami*," he said as I knelt before him."⁹ And he further explains the meaning of the name:

"Lit., *parama*, highest; *hansa*, swan. The white swan is mythologically represented as the vehicle or mount of [the Hindu god] Brahma the Creator."¹⁰

Mukunda's birthplace was "Gorakhpur in northeastern India near the Himalaya Mountains."¹¹

Yogananda says in his autobiography that he was healed by a photograph of his parents' guru.¹² After his mother's death when he was 11, he wrote, "Intense pangs of longing for

God assailed me. I felt powerfully drawn to the Himalayas."¹³ More than once, Mukunda tried to follow his dream of fleeing to the Himalayas.¹⁴

Biographical material and photos of Yogananda accompany his books. One says:

"It was in 1910, at the age of seventeen, that he met and became a disciple of the revered Swami Sri Yukteswar. In the hermitage of this great master of Yoga he spent the better part of the next ten years receiving Sri Yukteswar's strict but loving discipline. After graduating from Calcutta University in 1915, he took formal vows as a monk of India's venerable monastic Swami Order, at which time he received the name Yogananda."¹⁵

In 1917, Yogananda founded a boys' school at Dihika in Bengal with seven boys.¹⁶ But his big break came three years later when he:

"...received an invitation to serve as the delegate from India to an International Congress of Religious Liberals in America. It was to convene that year [1920] in Boston, under the auspices of the American Unitarian Association."¹⁷

On Oct. 6, 1920,¹⁸ he spoke before the assemblage on "The Science of Religion." That same year, he founded the Self-Realization Fellow-

ship in the United States.¹⁹ This was the American counterpart to the Yogananda Satsanga Society of India, which he had founded in 1917.

“For the next several years, he lectured and taught on the East coast and in 1924 embarked on a cross-continental speaking tour. In Los Angeles, he began a two-month series of lectures and classes in January of 1925. As elsewhere, his talks were greeted with interest and acclaim.”²⁰

Also in 1925, the International Headquarters of SRF was established in Los Angeles, Calif.²¹ It is still in Los Angeles on top of Mount Washington.

A volume containing some of his speeches says that on Jan. 28, 1925:

“*The Los Angeles Times* reported: ‘The Philharmonic Auditorium presents the extraordinary spectacle of thousands being turned away an hour before the advertised opening. ... Swami Yogananda is the attraction. A Hindu invading the United States to bring God in the midst of a Christian community, preaching the essence of Christian doctrine.’”²²

This same volume states:

“In the early 1930’s Paramahansa began to withdraw gradually from nationwide public lecturing. ‘I am not interested in crowds,’ he said, ‘but in souls who are in earnest to know God.’ Thereafter, he concentrated his efforts on classes for serious students, and spoke mostly at his own Self-Realization Fellowship temples and the international headquarters.”²³

Yogananda embarked on “an eighteen-month tour of Europe and India in 1935-36,”²⁴ after which he returned to the United States. In 1946, he published his now-famous *Autobiography of a Yogi*. He died of a heart attack on March 7, 1952, while giving a speech. He had turned 59 two months earlier.

After he died — for the 20 days that his body remained unentombed — his

body exhibited no physical signs of decay, a fact attested to in a written statement (which was also notarized) given by Harry T. Rowe, the Mortuary Director of the Forest Lawn Memorial-Park Association, who stated:

“The absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramhansa Yogananda offers the most extraordinary case in our experience.”²⁵

The document further stated:

“The physical appearance of Paramhansa Yogananda on March 27th, just before the bronze cover of the casket was put into position, was the same as it had been on March 7th. He looked on March 27th as fresh and as unravaged by decay as he had looked on the night of his death. On March 27th there was no reason to say that his body had suffered any visible physical disintegration at all. For these reasons we state again that the case of Paramhansa Yogananda is unique in our experience.”²⁶

Then, “In 1977, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the [death] of Paramhansa Yogananda, the Government of India issued [a] commemorative stamp in his honor.”²⁷

The most recent edition and printing of *Autobiography of a Yogi*²⁸ embellishes the cover photograph of Yogananda by placing a nimbus (a halo of light) around his head.

FAMOUS PEOPLE

By the time of his death, “Yogananda [had] personally initiated over 100,000 students into kriya yoga.”²⁹ Among those he initiated was Mahatma Gandhi³⁰ and horticulturalist Luther Burbank,³¹ to whom he dedicated *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

The Self-Realization Fellowship Website reports:

“Among those who became his students were many prominent figures in science, business, and the arts, including horticulturalist Luther Burbank, operatic soprano Amelita Galli-Curci, George Eastman (inventor of the

Kodak camera), poet Edwin Markham, and symphony conductor Leopold Stokowski. In 1927, he was officially received at the White House by President Calvin Coolidge, who had become interested in the newspaper reports of his activities.”³²

Another source states:

“The most popular lay minister at the Los Angeles headquarters [of Self-Realization Fellowship] is television star Dennis ‘McCloud’ Weaver, an SRF disciple for some 40 years.”³³

Dennis Weaver died in 2006.

HIS WORK

Yogananda was a Hindu despite his apparent respect for Jesus and the Bible. Christian apologists John Ankerberg and John Weldon observe:

“SRF claims religious tolerance and pluralism, and even to be Christian. However the essentially Hindu outlook of SRF is illustrated in Yogananda’s definition of ‘self-realization’ as the recognition of our own divinity. It is ‘The knowing — in body, mind, and soul — that we are one with the omnipresence of God; that we do not have to pray that it comes to us, that we are not merely near it at all times, but that God’s omnipresence is our omnipresence. ...’ The essential beliefs of SRF parallel Vedantic Hinduism in the monistic, or non-dualist (*advaita*) tradition.”³⁴

Another example is found in a volume of Yogananda’s speeches where it states:

“His Holiness the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram, revered spiritual leader of millions in South India, wrote of Paramahansa: ‘... We are grateful to Yogananda for spreading Hindu philosophy in such a wonderful way in America and the West.’”³⁵

Autobiography of a Yogi was first published in 1946 and was expanded by him before his death.³⁶ It is a dangerous book because it is an attractively packaged presentation of

Hinduism and it promotes anti-Christian doctrines of astrology, idolatry, reincarnation, contacting the dead, and so forth.

The late Beatle, George Harrison, a Hindu, said of Yogananda's *Autobiography*:

*"I keep stacks of Autobiography of a Yogi around the house, and I give it out constantly to people. When people need 'regrooving,' I say read this, because it cuts to the heart of every religion."*³⁷

But Ankerberg and Weldon write that *Autobiography of a Yogi* "is replete with occult experiences."³⁸

In addition to the promotion of Hinduism, occultism, and other anti-Christian teachings in this book, it is very difficult to locate the line separating truth from fiction; for some of the experiences he relates in it are patently false on their surface.³⁹

On the book's title page is John 4:48: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." To remedy this situation, Yogananda's solution is to serve up tale after tale of miraculous events that he has heard of, experienced, and/or supposedly witnessed. This quotation from John's Gospel is ironic for a couple of reasons:

First, Yogananda doesn't actually "show" us any miraculous signs and wonders; he merely relates them, and we must decide whether or not to believe him. Many of the things he describes simply could not have occurred.

Second, in context, the words Yogananda quotes from the Gospel of John are a reproach of the Lord to a nobleman, who wants Jesus to heal his dying son. Jesus complies with the man's request, apparently with reluctance. This is a far cry from the way Yogananda uses the verse.

Far from obliging man's perverted desire for miraculous signs, Jesus clearly stated:

"A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah" (Matthew 16:4).

Another book by Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*,⁴⁰ is a set of teachings by Yogananda on the four New Testament Gospels. It is subtitled, "A revelatory commentary on the original teachings of Jesus." These commentaries were developed from articles Yogananda had written for the Self-Realization Fellowship's magazine. Yogananda claims that the expertise to write such a commentary came "by revelation." Yogananda describes the source of his revelation:

*"He [Jesus] approved very dearly and blessed me for writing these interpretations. This I can say without pride, because the interpretation of Christ's words herein is not mine. It has been given to me. I am happy this book is coming through me; but I am not the author. It is Christ. I am only the vehicle through which it is explained. I hear Christ in the land of my inspiration; I behold Christ speaking to me all the eternal wisdom he intended to convey within his pregnant words. Even when urged by well-meaning British teachers in my youth, I never read the New Testament, except for a few passages; for had I done so, theology under their tutelage would have blinded my vision and prejudiced my hearing, and I could not have heard Christ's voice or seen him speak. Now I rejoice as I will always long to rejoice to hear Christ speak to me his words of life, truth, and eternal liberation for all."*⁴¹

As one looks at his explanations of passages, it obviously wasn't the living Christ or the Holy Spirit who inspired his commentary. By forcing Hindu philosophy into the Bible, Yogananda makes unrecognizable Scripture passages that are otherwise profound in their simplicity. Here are a couple of examples:

John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Yogananda says this about the passage:

*"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son' to redeem it; that is, God the Father remained hidden beyond the vibratory realm that went out from His Being, but then secreted Himself as the Christ Intelligence in all matter and in all living beings in order to bring, by beautiful evolutionary coaxings, all things back to His home of Everlasting Blessedness."*⁴²

John 3:14-15: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Yogananda interprets this passage this way:

*"Jesus explains that whosoever believes in the doctrine of lifting the bodily consciousness (son of man) from the physical to the astral by reversing the life force through the coiled passage at the base of the spine, will not perish, that is, be subject to mortal changes of life and death, but will gradually acquire the immutable state — Christ Consciousness, the Son of God."*⁴³

Although Dr. Ronald B. Allen of Dallas Theological Seminary was speaking on a different subject, his words apply to this, when he said, "This isn't exegesis [determining the meaning of the text]; it isn't [even] eisegesis [reading a meaning into the text]; this is metagesis [changing the text]!"

YOGANANDA, TELL ME A STORY...

In *Autobiography of a Yogi* and elsewhere, Yogananda relates things that are questionable, highly suspect, or even patently false.

In a letter written from the Holy Land, regarding some of his experiences there, Yogananda wrote:

"He [Jesus] was with me everywhere; and a very special communion I had in Bethlehem where he was born as the little

babe body of Jesus. He touched me as I entered the ancient menagerie where Mary brought him into the world — in a humble little stable under an inn. This place is absolutely authentic. I know it from the Divine. But there are other places where different factions have marked Jesus did this and that, which have some errors. Every place was verified from within. Most places are authentic.”⁴⁴

In one talk, Yogananda declared:

“For most of his followers Christ exists as an ideal personage they have read about in the Bible. But to me he is much more than that. He is real. Once, eight years ago, he came alone and meditated with me all night long. ... Many other times I have seen him in visions, and talked with him. And that same Christ you too can see.”⁴⁵

“Jesus attained most of his perfection in his former incarnation as Eliseus (Elisha). I know for certain that he was Eliseus in a past life, and that Jesus’ guru, John the Baptist, was Elijah (Elias), in his former life.”⁴⁶

“We are all children of God. Many incarnations ago He created us as *He created Jesus*.”⁴⁷

In one place, he describes a vision he supposedly had of Jesus. In part, he wrote:

“As he gazed down at me, a Holy Grail appeared at his mouth. It descended to my lips and touched them; then went up again to Jesus. After a few moments of rapt silent communion, he said to me: ‘Thou dost drink of the same cup of which I drink.’”⁴⁸

The “cup” that Jesus drank was that of obeying the Father’s will by being crucified for our sins by the hands of sinful men. Yogananda never drank such a cup. To be fair, Yogananda doesn’t associate the “cup” with this meaning; rather, he associates it with a reference to a cup in the Gnostic gospel of Thomas.

SERIOUSLY SENIOR CITIZENS

In *Autobiography*, Yogananda tells of people who are (or were) supposedly centuries old. One of these was a guru, who probably never lived, named “Babaji.” Supposedly, this “deathless guru,” as Yogananda refers to him, is still alive after many centuries. He even is said to have initiated the Hindu philosopher Shankara into kriya yoga.⁴⁹ Shankara lived around the 9th century A.D. This would make Babaji older than Methuselah, the oldest man recorded in the Bible, who “only” lived to be 969 years old (Genesis 5:27). Additionally, Yogananda also tells of a Trailanga Swami, who was rumored to be over 300 years old, weighed more than 300 pounds, and went around naked.⁵⁰ Despite this, Yogananda incongruously refers to him as “the Christlike yogi, Trailanga.”⁵¹

Without any hint that he might be putting us on, Yogananda writes, “Mahavatar Babaji and a number of other great masters have lived for several hundred years.”⁵² He also wrote of Babaji, “Babaji is ever in communion with Christ; together they send out vibrations of redemption and have planned the spiritual technique of salvation for this age.”⁵³

Christian author and researcher Elliot Miller writes:

“Yogananda’s autobiography is replete with accounts of the mystical and miraculous, including his own ecstatic visions as well as his encounters with legendary Hindu ‘saints.’ ... Most fantastic of all is his description of Babaji, the ‘yogi Christ of India,’ who — like the ‘Immortals’ in the 1990s *Highlander* movies and television series — is believed to have retained the same 25-year-old appearance for hundreds or even thousands of years. Babaji allegedly initiated [Yogananda’s guru] Sri Yukteswar’s master, Lahiri Mahasaya, and thus got the SRF ball rolling. In the SRF visitor center, a drawing of Babaji, which had been sketched under Yogananda’s supervision, accompanies photographs of Mahasaya and Yukteswar. Not sur-

prisingly, although Yogananda supposedly met Babaji and his *Autobiography* is filled with pictures of the people (including Indian gurus and ‘saints’) described in its pages, no known photograph of the ‘yogi Christ’ exists.”⁵⁴

Yogananda’s *Autobiography* also informs us:

“Babaji (revered father) is a common title; many noted teachers in India are addressed as ‘Babaji.’ None of them, however, is [the] Babaji [referred to here]... . The existence of [Babaji] was revealed to the public for the first time in 1946, in *Autobiography of a Yogi*.”⁵⁵

Consistent with this assertion, we also read therein:

“That there is no historical reference to Babaji need not surprise us. The great guru has never openly appeared in any century; the misinterpreting glare of publicity has no place in his millennial plans. Like the Creator, the sole but silent Power, Babaji works in a humble obscurity. ... Such masters always veil themselves from the gross public gaze and have the power to become invisible at will. For these reasons, and because they generally instruct their disciples to maintain silence about them, a number of towering spiritual figures remain world-unknown. I give in these pages on Babaji merely a hint of his life — only a few facts that he deems fitting and helpful to be publicly imparted.”⁵⁶

So we must rely on Yogananda’s assertion that Babaji exists — like so many other events in Yogananda’s *Autobiography*. Nevertheless, Yogananda contradicts himself about Babaji’s supposed desire to be hidden from the public’s gaze only three pages later when he writes:

“Only one reason, therefore, motivates Babaji in maintaining his physical form from century to century: the desire to furnish humanity with a concrete example of its own possibilities.

Were man never vouchsafed a glimpse of Divinity in the flesh, he would remain oppressed by the heavy mayic delusion that he cannot transcend his mortality."⁵⁷

Yogananda cannot have it both ways. Babaji must either wish to avoid the public stare or to show himself to the public to help their enlightenment.

In Yogananda's *Autobiography*, we find tales of supposedly historical events involving materializations of extra bodies, materializations of lunches on gold plates, materialization of a palace in the Himalayas, etc. Flesh and blood resurrections of dead people and materializations of living people in the book become almost commonplace. In one place (according to a story that his guru, Yukteswar, supposedly related), an old, limping man, who was a yogi, suddenly "straightened himself; his body instantly became strong and youthful."⁵⁸ On another occasion, Yogananda's recently deceased guru, Yukteswar, appears in "flesh and blood" in order to give him a lengthy discourse on the afterlife.⁵⁹ His guru explains in part:

"As the prophets are sent on earth to help men work out their physical karma, so I have been directed by God to serve on an astral planet as a savior," Sri Yukteswar explained. "It is called Hiranyaloka or 'Illumined Astral Planet.'" There I am aiding advanced beings to rid themselves of astral karma and thus attain liberation from astral rebirths."⁶⁰

The Scriptures warn us to beware of such people when it says:

"By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Peter 2:3).

The New International Version has a particularly vivid translation of the first part of this verse. It reads, "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up." Unfortunately, it is not always easy to tell what actually occurred in his

Autobiography and what did not, or what was embellished or exaggerated.

YOGANANDA'S DOCTRINES

Yogananda believed in and taught the Hindu doctrines of karma (the law of cause-and-effect) and reincarnation. He also proclaimed the Hindu doctrine of the material world being *maya* (an illusion; delusion). He also taught yoga.

God and Man: Yogananda believed in a Supreme Being. It wasn't the biblical God, but the Hindu god Brahman. He believed Brahman was an impersonal being but greater than man, and man was a manifestation of Brahman. He wrote:

"The wave cannot say, 'I am the ocean,' for the ocean can remain without the wave, but the wave cannot remain without the ocean. It is all right for a fully liberated master to say, 'God has become myself,' but he would never say, 'I am God.' The ocean has become the wave, but the wave is not the ocean."⁶¹

"Hinduism as well as Christianity believes in one God. ... Uninformed Westerners conclude that Indians as a whole worship idols. But we worship only Brahman, Spirit. The concept of one God is the same in Hinduism as in Christianity."⁶²

It is true that *some* Hindus believe in one God; some Hindus believe in many gods; and some Hindus are atheists, believing in *no* God. And regardless of whether a particular Hindu is a monotheist or not, Brahman is assuredly *not* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! As James reminds us, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble!" (James 2:19) Being a monotheist, in and of itself, doesn't qualify one for salvation. However, Brahman is not the biblical God. And many, if not most, Hindus worship more than one god. Yogananda himself worshipped "the Divine Mother," although he may have considered her to be merely one aspect of Brahman, rather than a separate deity. In any event, from his *Autobiography* it is evident that he also

worshipped various Hindu gurus and Hindu "saints":

"We are all part of the One Spirit. When you experience the true meaning of religion, which is to know God, you will realize that He is your Self, and that He exists equally and impartially in all beings."⁶³

As he stated in one of the quotations above, Yogananda believed that God has become each being. In other words, Yogananda was a pantheist: He believed that God was everything. This is certainly not the Christian concept of God, and contradicts his assertion in the quotation above, where he claimed that the Christian concept of one God was the same as the Hindu concept of one God. The Christian God is separate from His creation, not identical with it. Yogananda wrote:

"Befriend the Self and the Self will save you. There is no other savior than your Self. ... Seize the God within you and realize that the Self is Divinity."⁶⁴

Sin: Yogananda's exalted view of man led to a defective view of man's primary problem. He wrote:

"Man only increases the inner darkness of his spiritual ignorance when he thinks of himself as a sinner."⁶⁵

"Through use of the *Kriya* [yoga] key, persons who cannot bring themselves to believe in the divinity of any man will behold at last the full divinity of their own selves."⁶⁶

A problem that often arises with Yogananda's Hindu description of man's problem is the notion that people have to "work off" something during their multiple lives before breaking out of the cycle of reincarnation.

Yogananda attributes man's sins to "ignorance," and explains it this way:

"Then why do people behave in an evil way that is bound to cause pain and sorrow? Such actions arise from the greatest of all sins — ignorance. 'Wrong-

doer' is the right word rather than 'sinner.' You may condemn wrongdoing but should not condemn the doer. Sins are errors committed under the influence of ignorance, or delusion. But for a different degree of understanding, you might be in the same boat."⁶⁷

Yogananda — and Hinduism in general — teaches that man is ignorant of his "true identity" of being one with "God" (the Hindu supreme deity Brahman).

Yogananda doesn't deny the existence of sin. However, he calls ignorance "the greatest of all sins," and implies that all other sins flow from this. Notice also the non-existent distinction Yogananda makes in the above citation between "wrongdoer" and "sinner."⁶⁸ And he also admits that people may behave in "an evil way" and commit "wrongdoing" and "sins." Yet he somehow wishes to exempt such a person from being labeled a "sinner." People who sin — and that is all of us as Romans 3:23 declares — are sinners.

As he does with most problems, Yogananda proposes meditation as the solution:

"While still in this body, work to destroy the seeds of your past karmas (actions). Remember, roasted seeds will not germinate. People who in deep meditation roast their karmic seeds in the fires of wisdom will never again need to reincarnate on earth."⁶⁹

In other words, to stop the cycle of reincarnation, people have to pay off their "karmic debt." It should be noted that Hinduism does recognize good karma as well as bad karma. However, it emphasizes bad karma.⁷⁰

The Holy Spirit: Yogananda appears to view the Holy Spirit as a cosmic intelligent "It," rather than the personal God:

"The Holy Ghost is the Cosmic Intelligent Vibration, whose sound is the *Aum* [i.e., OM] or Amen heard in deep yoga meditation. ... In its vibration is our comfort."⁷¹

The Holy Spirit is not an "it," but the one personal God — the third Person of the Trinity. He demonstrates the traits of personality: He loves (Romans 15:30); can speak (Acts 28:25; Hebrews 3:7; Revelation 22:17); can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30); can be lied to (Acts 5:3); can be insulted (Hebrews 10:29); can be resisted (Acts 7:51); can be blasphemed against (Mark 3:29), and so forth.

Jesus and Christianity: At times, Yogananda seems full of reverence for Jesus. He can even refer to "the blessed Lord Jesus."⁷² He obviously admired Him, and sought to make him a divine guru, even incorporating Jesus as one of the six gurus of Self-Realization Fellowship, with Krishna and himself being two of the others.

Part of the problem with Yogananda's view of Jesus is that he didn't understand the uniqueness of Jesus. Hinduism can accept Jesus as one of many gods, even as Yogananda placed Jesus on the same level as the mythological god Krishna. Gandhi, whom Yogananda met and admired, well illustrates this problem that Hinduism has in accepting the unique and unparalleled deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. In his autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi wrote:

"It was more than I could believe that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were His sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself. ... I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice, and a divine teacher, but not as the most perfect man ever born."⁷³

The Reverend Philip Graham Ryken observed:

"Authentic, biblical Christianity has always been an exclusive religion. This became apparent during the Roman Empire. When the Emperor Alexander Severus heard about Christianity, he

placed an image of Christ beside the other gods in his private chapel, just to be safe. The Romans were happy to welcome Jesus into their pantheon. What the Romans could not understand was why Christians refused to reciprocate. If the emperor was willing to worship Christ, why weren't Christians willing to worship the emperor? Yet the early Christians insisted that in order to worship Christ at all, they had to worship Christ *alone*. ... Jesus Christ refuses to have any colleagues."⁷⁴

And the Scriptures also declare:

"Jesus said to him [Thomas], 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6).

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Again, to quote Ryken:

"To use an analogy, Jesus is like God's telephone number. The God of the universe can only be contacted through Jesus Christ. Philosophical pluralists insist on getting through to God no matter what number they dial. But that is not how the telephone system operates, and it is not how God operates either. Jesus is the only direct line to God."⁷⁵

The Lord Jesus, being God in the flesh, is peerless. He has no equals and no rivals. He is King of kings and Lord of lords (see Revelation 19:16).

THE DIFFERENT JESUS OF PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

Part of Yogananda's attitude about Jesus is expressed in a book of excerpts of his teachings about Jesus. The title of the section of the book is called "Jesus the Christ — Avatar and Yogi."⁷⁶

Yogananda wrote:

"Do you believe in the divinity of Christ?' a visitor inquired. Parama-

hansa Yogananda replied: 'Yes. I love to talk of him because he was a man of perfect Self-realization. However, he was not the only son of God, nor did he claim to be. Instead, he clearly taught that those who do the will of God become, like himself, one with Him. Wasn't it the mission of Jesus on earth to remind all men that the Lord is their Heavenly Father, and to show them the way back to Him?'"⁷⁷

Yogananda denied the *unique deity* of Jesus. Jesus never taught that those who do the will of God become one in essence with Him. Additionally, Jesus' mission was to die for the sins of men and to, Himself, be the way back to God; it was not to tell sinners that they are *already* sons of God and to *show* them the way back to Him. Yogananda also wrote:

"There is a distinguishing difference of meaning between *Jesus* and *Christ*. His given name was Jesus; his honorific title was 'Christ.' In his little human body called Jesus was born the vast Christ Consciousness, the omniscient Intelligence of God omnipresent in every part and particle of creation."⁷⁸

There is a difference between the name "Jesus" and the title "Christ." However, it isn't the difference that Yogananda thinks. The title "Christ" means "Messiah," and it wasn't merely an "honorific" (a respectful title), but it actually signified that Jesus is God's Anointed One. As to Yogananda's denigration of the body of Jesus by the words, "his little human body called Jesus," this seems, at the very least, both disrespectful and irreverent. He further wrote:

"The Christ in Jesus lived among men as one of them that they too might learn to live like gods."⁷⁹

Again, Yogananda seems determined to deny Jesus' unique divinity. And Jesus' mission was certainly not to live among men so that we could learn to live like gods.

The Second Coming of Jesus: Yogananda seems to have held contradictory views of the Second Coming of Christ. In one place he said:

"The God-ordained saviors of mankind have to return to earth again, but when they will come, no one can say. Thus many people believe in Christ's second coming; but when it may happen depends on the will of God. The great ones come only with the permission of the Heavenly Father."⁸⁰

Yet in the Introduction to his book on the Gospels, he states:

"In titling this work *The Second Coming of Christ*, I am not referring to a literal return of Jesus to earth. He came two thousand years ago and, after imparting a universal path to God's kingdom, was crucified and resurrected; his reappearance to the masses now is not necessary for the fulfillment of his teachings. What is necessary is for the cosmic wisdom and divine perception of Jesus to speak again through each one's own experience and understanding of the infinite Christ Consciousness that was incarnate in Jesus. That will be his true Second Coming."⁸¹

Elsewhere, Yogananda declares:

"Worshiping Jesus is not truly meaningful until one can expand his consciousness to receive within himself the Christ Consciousness. That is the second coming of Christ. Unless you do your part, a thousand Christs come on earth would not be able to save you. You have to work for your own salvation. Then Christ can help you."⁸²

YOGANANDA'S DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Entering the Kingdom of God: According to Yogananda, the guru Babaji told one of his disciples:

"My son, arise. Receive your initiation into the kingdom of God through *Kriya Yoga*."⁸³

Hell: Yogananda opposed the doctrine of hell:

"So although the notion of everlasting hellfire and damnation is untenable and should be ban-

ished from the superstitious minds of men, the existence of an Eternal Heaven in God is incontrovertibly true."⁸⁴

"The orthodox notion of eternal hellfire and damnation is an utterly false precept; it arises not from God or His true prophets but from man's own unforgiving wrath against the evil actions of his brethren. It is nothing but satanic delusion that makes men ascribe to the all-loving God, who is equally the Father of all, a revengeful, vindictive spirit that creates hells and purgatories."⁸⁵

Part of the problem with Yogananda's false assertions above is that Jesus Himself taught the doctrine of hellfire and damnation (e.g., Matthew 13:40-42; 25:41-46). And the Bible teaches the doctrine elsewhere also.

ROUNDING OUT THE PICTURE

While desiring to unite both East and West, Yogananda clearly believed in the spiritual superiority of India among the nations of the world. It is obvious that he was proud of this supposed spiritual superiority. He wrote, "India is the mother of religion."⁸⁶ And also:

"The wisdom garnered by India, the eldest brother among the nations, is a heritage of all mankind."⁸⁷

Yogananda's final words preceding his fatal heart attack were before the (then) Ambassador from India to the United States, Dr. Binay R. Sen. They were from a patriotic poem he had written about India, entitled, "My India." Immediately preceding his recitation of those lines from "My India," he had said:

"I am proud that I was born in India. I am proud that we have a great Ambassador representing my spiritual India. I am very proud today."⁸⁸

Without attempting to put a damper on a legitimate sense of patriotism that Yogananda might have felt, a couple of things need to be mentioned:

First, Hinduism is not the oldest religion in the world; Judaism is.⁸⁹ Secondly, Yogananda denied the clear teaching of Jesus, Who said some words that Yogananda would have done well to heed. The Lord told the woman at the well, "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

The Hindus worship an unknown god called Brahman. The Jews worship the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Salvation is of ("from") the Jews, in that, through the Jewish people came the patriarchs, the prophets, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the Savior of the world.

Without going into everything that Yogananda wrote regarding this verse, we cite the following, illustrating his denial of the Savior's clear teaching in this verse. Yogananda wrote:

"When Jesus said that 'salvation is of the Jews,' he was not referring to the Jews as a nation, but to the exalted class or caste of spiritually developed souls. ... He meant that salvation is for the spiritually exalted — the position, socially speaking, generally accorded to the Jews, who were held to represent the highest standard of spirituality in that place and time."⁹⁰

Little of the Self-Realization Fellowship's literature mentions the fact that, for the last two years of his short life, Yogananda was not in good health.⁹¹ And when it does say so, his ill health is explained away by making it sound as though he was working out the "bad karma" of others.⁹²

This is significant because of the reputed health benefits of yoga and because Yogananda told of yogis who had lived such lengthy lives: Babaji, Trailanga Swami, the South Indian Agastya, and others. In the speech he gave immediately preceding his death, he said:

"One morning I was passing by an empty field next to a store. That evening, as I passed that same way again, I saw a house standing in the field. I inquired

of a man if the house had been there in the morning. 'No,' he replied, 'they just put it up.' When I think of such energy, I like to be an American. But *when I hear of so many American millionaires who die prematurely after making a business success, then I like to be a Hindu.*"⁹³

Notice, first of all, that Yogananda referred to himself as a Hindu, lest there be any lingering doubts. And this was mere minutes before he breathed his last. Secondly, though, notice his lamentation of "American millionaires who die prematurely," Yogananda probably had no inkling that he was about to die; nor, that he himself would die so young.⁹⁴

As to the amazing immutability of his body some 20 days after his death, Elliot Miller has well observed:

"Whether or not Yogananda's body showed signs of decay at the time of his burial, he is still in his crypt. The tomb of Jesus, on the other hand, is empty."⁹⁵

AN EVALUATION

Yogananda was a fascinating, intelligent, gifted, and charismatic figure whose work affects people even today.

For all his apparent reverence toward Jesus and his frequent use of the Bible, Paramahansa Yogananda didn't value Christ as the unique Son of God, the only Savior. Instead, he believed that all men were sons of God, and that other men could become saviors. It seems likely that he even viewed himself as such a savior of men.

Someone once asked Yogananda whether or not he was a Christian. Yogananda concluded his reply this way:

"He who keeps ever alight the lamp of remembrance of the Heavenly Father and who obeys the precepts of Jesus is a Christian.' He added, 'It is for you to decide whether or not you think I am a Christian.'"⁹⁶

Part of what makes Yogananda dangerous is that, like all false teach-

ers and prophets, some of what he said and wrote was true. Christian researchers John Ankerberg and John Weldon wrote:

"...false teaching is a mixture of truth and error. Thus, people may at the same time be encouraged and nourished by some things that are true but unknowingly accept error along with it. Unfortunately, sometimes even a small amount of error may be dangerous. Ninety-eight percent of rat poison is wholesome food. Only two percent is deadly."⁹⁷

The Apostle Paul wrote:

"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted; you may well put up with it!" (2 Corinthians 11:2-4)

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

And Jesus said:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:15-20).

Endnotes:

1. His first name (actually a title, rather than a name) is sometimes spelled without the middle "a" thus, "Paramhansa," rather than "Paramahansa."
2. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1993. Self-Realization Fellowship is not the only publisher of Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Because pagination differs in the various editions (and the different printings) of *Autobiography of a Yogi*, when citing from it from now on, I will cite the chapter first, and then the page number, so that the reader can locate the citation by the chapter, if not by the page number. Unless otherwise indicated, all page citations and quotations in this article from this book are from the 12th edition, 12th paperbound printing, 1993 mass paperback version.
3. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007, pg. vii. Also, Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Science of Religion*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2001, from the back cover.
4. *Undreamed of Possibilities: An Introduction to Self-Realization Fellowship*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1997, pg. 9, quoted in Elliot Miller, "Swami Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship," *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 02, pg. 36.
5. Self-Realization Fellowship, *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2002.
6. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 1, pg. 4, footnote, italics in original.
7. *Ibid.*, chapter 24, pg. 258, italics in original.
8. *Ibid.*, footnote.
9. *Ibid.*, chapter 42, pg. 460, italics in original.
10. *Ibid.*, footnote, italics in original.
11. *Ibid.*, chapter 1, pg. 4.
12. *Ibid.*, chapter 1, pg. 10.
13. *Ibid.*, chapter 2, pg. 18.
14. *Ibid.*, chapter 2, pg. 19. See also, chapter 4, pp. 34ff. and chapter 13, pp. 157ff.
15. *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 87.
16. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pg. 78.
17. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 37, pg. 400.
18. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pg. 79. The speech was made available as a pamphlet. Later, in 1924, and to this day, a revised and expanded edition was published. It is entitled *The Science of Religion*. See Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., copyright page.
19. See John Bowker, editor, *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pg. 1059, s.v., "Yogananda, Paramahansa"; Irving Hexham, *Pocket Dictionary of New Religious Movements*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002, pg. 99, s.v., "Self-Realization Fellowship"; and Ron Rhodes, *Find It Quick Handbook on Cults & New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2005, pg. 178.
20. *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 88.
21. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1988, 2nd edition, pp. xvi-xvii.
22. *Ibid.*, text at the bottom of a page of photographs inserted between pages 14-15, italics and ellipsis in original.
23. *Ibid.*, pg. xvii.
24. *The Science of Religion*, op. cit., pg. 89.
25. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pg. 121.
26. *Ibid.*, pg. 123.
27. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., pg. 571, supplemental material following the last chapter.
28. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007, 13th edition, mass market edition.
29. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1999, pg. 427.
30. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 44, pg. 508.
31. *Ibid.*, chapter 38, pg. 414.
32. "The Life of Paramahansa Yogananda," document available at: www.yogananda-srf.org/py-life/life2.html.
33. *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, op. cit., pg. 427.
34. *Ibid.*, pg. 428, ellipsis and italics in original. Although the terms that they use to describe the "brand" of Hinduism are important, they need not concern us here. What is important to realize is that Yogananda (and his Self-Realization Fellowship organization) teach a form of Hinduism. The Yogananda quotation cited by Ankerberg and Weldon is from Paramahansa Yogananda, *Man's Eternal Quest*, (Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 1975, pg. 480).
35. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. xv.
36. Self-Realization Fellowship Catalog 2008-09, pg. 16.
37. *Ibid.*, pg. 17, italics in original.
38. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Hinduism in America*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1991, pg. 18.
39. My thanks to Dr. Robert P. Lightner for suggesting this wording.
40. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2004. A shorter 1-volume collection of excerpts from this 2-volume set is published as Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007.
41. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. xxxii-xxxiii, emphasis added.
42. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Discourse 1, pg. 17.
43. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Discourse 14, pg. 269.
44. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pg. xv.
45. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 233.
46. *Ibid.*, pg. 231.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 232, emphasis added. Jesus is the Creator, Who has always existed, not a creature who had a beginning!
48. *The Second Coming of Christ*, op. cit., Vol. I, pg. xxxii.
49. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 33, pg. 346 and footnote on pp. 346-347.
50. *Ibid.*, chapter 31, pp. 329-331.
51. *Ibid.*, chapter 31, pg. 333.
52. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Healing By God's Unlimited Power*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2005, pg. 23.
53. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 33, pg. 347.
54. "Swami Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship," op. cit., pp. 34, 36, italics in original.
55. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 33, pg. 348, footnote, italics in original.
56. *Ibid.*, chapter 33, pg. 347.
57. *Ibid.*, chapter 33, pg. 350.
58. *Ibid.*, chapter 18, pg. 213.
59. *Ibid.*, chapter 43, pp. 475-476ff.
60. *Ibid.*, chapter 43, pg. 476.
61. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. II, Discourse 47, pg. 915.
62. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 299. The next-to-the-last sentence is cited by Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions*, pg. 426.
63. Quotation by Paramahansa Yogananda on the Self-Realization Fellowship Website, document available at: www.yogananda-srf.org/aboutsrf/index.html. This statement rendered in italics on webpage.
64. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 9.
65. Paramahansa Yogananda, *How To Cultivate Divine Love*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2006, pg. 16.
66. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 35, pg. 386, italic in original.

67. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Why God Permits Evil and How To Rise Above It*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2004, pp. 45-46.

68. The Bible clearly states that, "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 John 5:17).

69. Paramhansa Yogananda, *Karma and Reincarnation*. Nevada City, Calif.: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2007, pg. 53.

70. Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998, pg. 197.

71. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 300, italic in original.

72. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 49, pg. 558.

73. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, translated by Mahadev Desai. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1983, pg. 119. An unabridged republication of the edition published by Public Affairs Press, Washington, D.C., 1948, under the title *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*.

74. Philip Graham Ryken, *Is Jesus the Only Way?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999, pp. 10, 11, italic in original.

75. *Ibid.*, pg. 37.

76. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of*

the Gospels, Selections from the writings of Paramahansa Yogananda. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007, pg. 1. This book is, in the main, excerpts from the 2-volume set by Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*.

77. *Ibid.*, pg. 2, italics in original.

78. *Ibid.*, pg. 5, italics in original.

79. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

80. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 235.

81. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. I, pg. xxi, italics in original.

82. *Man's Eternal Quest*, op. cit., 2nd edition, pg. 292.

83. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 34, pg. 362, italics in original.

84. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. II, Discourse 68, pg. 1336.

85. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, Discourse 48, pg. 931.

86. *The Yoga of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 13.

87. *Autobiography of a Yogi*, op. cit., chapter 49, pg. 568.

88. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pg. 69. The entire text of Yogananda's short speech is given in this book. This book contains much good biographical material about Yogananda.

89. See Ronald Enroth, editor, *Evangelizing the Cults: How to Share Jesus with Children, Parents, Neighbors, and Friends Who Are Involved in a Cult*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Vine Books, 1990, pg. 21. This specific is taken from the chapter on "Hinduism" by Mark Albrecht.

90. *The Second Coming of Christ: The Resurrection of the Christ Within You*, op. cit., Vol. I, Discourse 18, pg. 308.

91. *Paramahansa Yogananda In Memoriam: Personal Accounts of the Master's Final Days*, op. cit., pp. 12, 32.

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-95.

93. *Ibid.*, pg. 68, emphasis added.

94. This book consistently takes great pains to make it appear that Yogananda knew about and gave intimations of his coming demise. However, from what he said here in his speech, it certainly doesn't sound like it. Otherwise, why would he point out the premature deaths of American millionaires?

95. "Swami Yogananda and the Self-Realization Fellowship," op. cit., pg. 41.

96. *The Yoga of Jesus*, op. cit., pg. 20, this statement rendered in italics in the book.

97. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on False Teaching in the Church*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1988, pg. 5, italics in original.

YOGA AND THE CHRISTIAN

(continued from page 1)

blend with one another. There is no known founder of Hinduism, no credal statements of faith to sign and no agreed-upon authority. In fact, one can be a good Hindu and believe in one god, many gods or no god at all!"³

Christian researchers John Ankerberg and John Weldon state:

"In its most simple definition, Hinduism may be defined as the religious beliefs and practices common to India. Defining Hinduism in a more precise manner is difficult because of the wide number of practices and teachings it offers."⁴

The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions says Hinduism is "The major continuing and connected religions of India, which have now spread throughout the world."⁵

It also says, "About 80 per cent of India's approx. one billion people

regard themselves as Hindu, and there are about 30 million Hindus elsewhere in the world."⁶

Hinduism does have scriptures and core beliefs. Hindu scriptures include the four Vedas; their commentaries, called the Upanishads (also known as Vedanta, "the last of the Vedas"); the Mahabharata (of which the Bhagavad Gita is a small portion); the Ramayana; and other lesser books.

One of the popular gods within Hinduism's pantheon is Krishna, the main character in the Bhagavad Gita. The Bhagavad Gita is sometimes called "the Gita" and, as noted above, is a portion of the larger Hindu epic called the Mahabharata.

As far as "core beliefs," Fritz Ride-nour states, "There are, however, two foundational assumptions that almost all Hindus believe without question: reincarnation and karma."⁷ Christian researcher Elliot Miller adds a third: "practice of some form of yoga."⁸

Reincarnation is the belief that, after death, one's soul is recycled in

another body — human, animal, or insect. Karma is the law of cause and effect, involving the idea that a person must somehow pay for the wrongs they have done, either in this life or the next. Hinduism also teaches the caste (or class) system, although some Hindus, such as Gandhi, opposed it. Seminary professor George Braswell explains:

"According to the Laws of Manu [a portion of the Hindu scriptures] the caste system is justified by the belief in Karma and the transmigration of souls. Hindus are not in their social position by accident, and there is no injustice in being in any caste. One gets what one merits. ... The caste system still remains in India."⁹

Braswell further describes the five broad castes within Hinduism:

1. "The *Brahmin* caste is the most privileged one. It is the protector and transmitter of the Veda scriptures and has general oversight of society."

2. "The *warrior* caste (Kshatriya) is the governing class. The kings, princes, politicians, army, and police populate this group. They make policy, collect taxes, and defend the people while recognizing the supremacy of the Brahmin in faith and moral instruction."

3. "The *Vaisya* is the third caste. It includes the middle class occupations, including merchants, traders, teachers, and craftsmen."

4. "The *Sudra* class is composed of farmers, peasants, and manual laborers."

5. "Another caste which has developed is called the *outcaste* or the untouchables. The untouchables are aliens who moved into India. They have little association with the other four castes. They perform such jobs as washing clothes, making shoes, and cremating the dead. They have no access to the religious rituals of the other castes."¹⁰

Most, if not all, Hindus are vegetarians and many believe in and practice astrology. Hindu religion bars the slaughter of cattle and the consumption of beef.¹¹ Regarding astrology, one source states, "In Hinduism, decision-making on all serious matters (e.g. the date and time of a wedding) and on many everyday matters is referred to astrology."¹²

HINDUISM COMES TO AMERICA

At least three factors contributed to Hinduism's rise to prominence in America in the 18th century. Concerning the first, Ridenour says:

"Hindu ideas began to influence Western thought in the mid-nineteenth century when Ralph Waldo Emerson, a leading American exponent of transcendentalism, steeped himself in Hindu writings. His doctrine of the 'Oversoul' was an expression of pantheism Henry David Thoreau, a contemporary of Emerson and fellow transcendentalist, was inspired by the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita* when he

wrote *Walden* and some of his other books."¹³

A second factor was the rise of the mind science religions, such as Christian Science and Unity, and other new religions, such as Theosophy, which borrowed from Hinduism.

A third factor arose in 1893. L.T. Jeyachandran describes it:

"The most memorable event that inaugurated the entry of Hindu thought into the West was the visit to the United States of Swami Vivekananda in 1893 when he took by storm the World Congress on Religions in Chicago. He began his speech with the politically correct phrase 'Brothers and sisters,' which was greeted by several minutes of thunderous applause. ... In his interaction with Christians at this conference, Swami Vivekananda also denied the existence of sin, because all reality was one and therefore there could be no *final* distinction between right and wrong. He is supposed to have made the memorable statement 'It is sinful to call man a sinner.' He substantiated his position by positing the ultimate unity of all things, including apparently conflicting beliefs."¹⁴

The next prominent guru was Swami Yogananda,¹⁵ who came to the United States in 1920, bringing his practice of *kriya yoga* with him. He has been called "the Father of Yoga in the West."¹⁶ Yogananda's authorized organization, Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), continues to publish his writings and speeches.

In the latter half of the 20th century, other gurus came to America. Among them were Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who developed the *yoga* technique of Transcendental Meditation; Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, who gave impetus to the Hare Krishna movement in America; Guru Maharaj Ji, who was associated with the Divine Light Mission; Guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, whom the late cult expert Walter Martin said was "indisputably the preeminent Eastern guru of the 1980s."¹⁷

The modern day New Age movement has continued the influence of Hinduism, as have such contemporary New Age gurus as Deepak Chopra and Shirley MacLaine.

BREAKING DOWN HINDUISM

Hinduism comes in a number of varieties. John Ankerberg and John Weldon explain:

"In America the dominant Hindu belief is called *Vedanta*. Of all the conflicting schools of Hinduism, Vedanta has had the most profound overall influence: 'Vedanta ("the End of the Vedas") was the school which gave organized and systematic form to the teaching of the Upanishads. While the other schools are almost or wholly extinct, Vedanta is still very much alive, for nearly all the great Hindu religious teachers of recent centuries have been Vedantists of one branch or another.' Since the texts of Vedanta are contradictory and impossible to interpret uniformly, various schools of Vedanta have arisen. The dominant Vedantic school in America is called *advaita* or the 'non-dual' school. This belief teaches that there is only one impersonal God called *Brahman*. Brahman alone is real; everything else is considered a dream of Brahman — an 'illusion.' ... This idea that the world is an illusion 'hiding' Brahman is a key teaching of Hinduism in America."¹⁸

As one source says:

"[The Hindu philosopher] Sankara summarized his system [i.e., *advaita Vedanta*] in a single sentence, 'Brahman alone is real, the world is [only] appearance, *atman* [i.e., "the true self"] is nothing but Brahman."¹⁹

And so the philosophical underpinning of what we in the West think of as *yoga* is this *advaita Vedanta* school of Hinduism: A pantheistic belief that the only thing that truly exists is the impersonal Hindu god Brahman. Everything, including each individual, is also Brahman (God).

According to this brand of Hinduism, man's problem is that he has *forgotten* that he is God (or that God — Brahman — is him/her). Yoga is designed to cause practitioners not just to *intellectually believe* that they are God, but to *experience* that they are God. Yoga is also designed to cause the individual to *experience* the "truth" that the material world is an illusion, and that everything in existence is Brahman. The technique for accomplishing this is yoga, which does this by producing an altered state of consciousness in which the individual experiences these "truths."

As one Christian publication describes it:

"Our problem is not sin but ignorance — the fact that we have forgotten our divinity. ... We have to realize our own divinity, and yoga is the path by which to experience God-consciousness. Salvation, in other words, is a matter of perception or realization. In this context, perceiving is not a cognitive activity. It is not a matter of intellectually knowing or logically deducing our divinity, but rather transcending our cognitive, rational consciousness and experiencing a higher state of expanded consciousness, which is believed to be God, or our true self [also known as self-realization]."20

"To sum up, then, salvation in Hinduism is found in the realization, perception or experience of our so-called true nature, which takes place when we attain a 'higher' state of consciousness. We attempt to reach this state of consciousness through manipulation of the nervous system, and the techniques that help us do this — techniques developed over several millennia — are found in yoga."21

When most Americans think of yoga, they may think of various bodily poses and postures and/or breathing techniques associated especially with hatha yoga. This is, indeed, a *physical* form of yoga. How-

ever, not all forms of yoga "involve sitting in yogic postures, controlling one's breath, and concentrating on a mantra or mandala."22

It doesn't really matter whether one practices a physical or relatively non-physical form of yoga, however, because the goal is the same for all varieties. Elliot Miller explains:

"Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word *yug*, which means 'to yoke.' ... In Hinduism, as in many religions, union is desired with nothing less than God or the Absolute, and yoga is the system that Hindus have developed to achieve that end. The historic purpose behind yoga, therefore, is to achieve union with the Hindu concept of God. This is the purpose behind virtually all of the Eastern varieties of yoga, including those we encounter in the West. This does not mean it is the purpose of every practitioner of yoga, for many people clearly are not practicing it for spiritual reasons but merely to enhance their physical appearance, ability, or health."23

Certain forms of yoga that don't particularly involve physical poses are bhakti yoga, jnana yoga, and karma yoga.24 One source briefly delineates these non- (or less overtly) physical forms of yoga in this way:

"**Bhakti Yoga:** the Yoga of devotion. ... **Jnana Yoga:** the Yoga of wisdom. **Karma Yoga:** the Yoga of self-transcending action."25

One well-known form of bhakti yoga is practiced by the Hare Krishna sect, with its devotion to the Hindu deity Krishna. Classical yoga is called Raja ("royal") yoga or ashtanga ("eight-limbed") yoga. Hatha yoga is a subset of raja yoga, as is the relatively non-physically exerting yoga technique of Transcendental Meditation taught by the late Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.26

Raja (classical or ashtanga) has eight steps or "limbs." One introductory yoga text briefly describes these eight steps and their intended results as follows:

"*Yama* (pronounced *yah-mah*): Moral discipline, consisting of the practices of nonharming, truthfulness, nonstealing, chastity, and greedlessness ... *Niyama* (pronounced *nee-yah-mah*): Self-restraint, consisting of the five practices of purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and devotion to a higher principle. *Asana* (pronounced *ah-sah-nah*): Posture, which serves two basic purposes — meditation and health. *Pranayama* (pronounced *prah-nah-yah-mah*): Breath control, which raises and balances your psychosomatic energy, thus boosting your health and mental concentration. *Pratyahara* (pronounced *prah-tyah-hah-rah*): Sensory inhibition, which internalizes your consciousness to prepare the mind for the various stages of meditation. *Dharana* (pronounced *dah-rah-nah*): Concentration, or extended mental focusing, which is fundamental to yogic meditation. *Dhyana* (pronounced *dhee-yah-nah*): Meditation, the principal practice of higher Yoga ... *Samadhi* (pronounced *sah-mah-dhee*): Ecstasy, or the experience of unitive consciousness in which you become inwardly one with the object of your contemplation."27

As one source explains, hatha yoga is "the first five steps of the eight-step process" of raja yoga and "includes external preparations for transcending physical and psychological processes of the body."28 We are then told:

"When this [i.e., the first five steps] is done, one is to begin the three internal steps of *raja-yoga*. The first five steps of Yoga have been conscious external methods of preparation for the internal goals of *raja-yoga*."29

The occultic nature of raja yoga is revealed in a discussion of "Raja-yoga" given by *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. It states in part:

"The last three stages [of raja yoga], dharana, dhyana, and samadhi, collectively termed samyama, are stages of concentration very closely connected. ... Through practicing samyama the

yogin also develops various magical powers (vibhuti or siddha) such as knowledge of his own previous births ... telepathy ... knowledge of the past and future ... and levitation ... etc."³⁰

In a short entry on "Hatha-yoga," the *Oxford Dictionary* also states that hatha yoga was:

"Originally a part of Raja-yoga as taught by Patanjali [perhaps 2nd-3rd centuries A.D.], but now frequently detached as a yoga to seek mental and physical health. Its purpose is to locate and activate the cakras (centres of energy) and thus to raise the kundalini (dormant spiritual power) to life. It works especially through bodily postures (asana) and control of breath (pranayama), uniting the *ha* (breath of the sun) with *tha* (breath of the moon). The reputed founder is Gorakhnath."³¹

In an article on "Yoga and Hinduism," the authors wrote:

"In ancient Indian philosophy yoga was not meant to be a fitness regime. Rather, it was a means to salvation or liberation (*moksha*) through the isolation of the soul from the body. Out-of-body experiences are still the goal of some popular forms of yoga. Later, after other schools of Indian philosophy had adopted yoga, its goal was reinterpreted as the union of the human self with the cosmic self, or God."³²

So there is more to that hatha yoga class than physical exercise. Elliot Miller states:

"...many yoga teachers and advocates deliberately cover up the spiritual nature of yoga in order to extend its influence in secular culture, but, on the other hand, there is no shortage of yoga teachers and authorities who openly proclaim it. 'Why be covert?' Swami Param asks. 'Participants should be invited up-front to "come study Hinduism," which is what they're doing when learning hatha yoga.'"³³

Miller adds:

"Hatha (physical) yoga is not so overtly religious, but Hinduism lies just beneath its surface and often surfaces in unanticipated ways, and so it is unwise for Christians to practice it."³⁴

Likewise, in an article on "Yoga and Hinduism," Christian authors Vishal Mangalwadi and Ronald Enroth wrote:

"In our view, yoga cannot be dismissed as simply another aid to physical fitness. Someone has said that there is no Hinduism without yoga and no yoga without Hinduism. Yoga's connections to Eastern religious metaphysics are clear."³⁵

A former Hindu yogi who became a Christian has written, "No part of Yoga can be separated from the philosophy behind it."³⁶

In a 1993 publication, an American-born Hindu monk named Palaniswami predicted:

"A small army of yoga missionaries — hatha, raja, siddha, and kundalini — beautifully trained in the last 10 years, is about to set upon the Western world. They may not call themselves Hindu, but Hindus know where yoga came from and where it goes."³⁷

WHAT ABOUT "CHRISTIAN YOGA?"

Because yoga's purpose is to enable the individual to achieve union with the impersonal Hindu god Brahman, in an experience called "cosmic consciousness" or "self-realization," it is not too much to say that yoga is intended to be and is in fact a gateway into Hinduism itself.

Despite this, some Christians believe that yoga can be separated from Hinduism, or that *physical* yoga can be divorced from *spiritual* yoga³⁸ and/or that at least some Christians may safely practice yoga, at least under certain conditions and/or with certain stipulations.³⁹ Some have tried to divorce the physical exercises of hatha yoga from its Hindu intentions and

have gone so far as to claim that this is a ministry the Lord has given them. Among these is Brooke Boon, author of the book *Holy Yoga: Exercise for the Christian Body and Soul*⁴⁰ and Susan Bordenkircher, author of *Yoga for Christians*.⁴¹ Without questioning their sincerity or their desire to serve the Lord, one can still question the whole idea of trying to "Christianize" a Hindu practice developed for Hindu purposes.

Brooke Boon, for instance, is aware that there are "people for whom the idea of 'Christian yoga' would seem oxymoronic."⁴² Because of this, she devotes a chapter in her book to dealing with objections that Christians might have to the practice of any form of yoga for Christians. One of Boon's arguments for a Christianized version of yoga is:

"...yoga predates Hinduism by at least one thousand years. Yoga was not created by Hindus but was indeed co-opted by Hindus as a major part of their religion. Because of this, I've heard numerous variations on the theme that yoga is inseparably bound up with Eastern religion and philosophy."⁴³

Boon's only citation to support that claim is a Website link (www.americanyogaassociation.org/general.html) which does state that yoga predated Hinduism.⁴⁴ However, other sources are less dogmatic about that claim.⁴⁵ Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that yoga predated Hinduism, Miller counters:

"What makes the promoters of Christian yoga think that pre-Hindu yoga was spiritually safe? The fundamental reason why mixing Hinduism with Christianity is objectionable is because Hinduism is a pagan religion, but so was the Stone Age shamanism practiced in the Indus Valley 5,000 years ago. This argument therefore makes a distinction without a difference."⁴⁶

Miller adds:

"There is no evidence that raja or ashtanga yoga ... existed prior to

the second century BC or thereabouts, when Patanjali set it forth in his Yoga Sutras. The stretch postures that Westerners tend to think define yoga do not appear until around the fifteenth century AD in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. It is therefore meaningless to say that yoga predated Hinduism because what *we* mean by 'yoga' clearly developed in a Hindu context."⁴⁷

While religions such as Buddhism and Jainism include yoga, one must remember that both are offshoots of Hinduism. Additionally, yoga also is found in Sikhism, an example being the late Yogi Bhajan, who was a Sikh yoga practitioner. Again, however, Sikhism is an attempt to synthesize Hinduism and Islam; and, so again we see yoga's Hindu roots.

One might imagine that the objection to yoga is merely on the grounds of its Hindu origins and history. However, yoga is intertwined with Hinduism in such a way that it is difficult or impossible to separate yoga from its Hindu roots. Additionally, yoga is deliberately designed to produce an altered state of consciousness in which Hindu, anti-Christian goals are sought and achieved, beyond whatever physical benefits might also accrue to the practitioner.

One short reference work defines "yogic religions" as:

"A term used to refer to those religious traditions where the practice of yoga is the central experience and the doctrines associated with it, such as karma, form the basis of belief."⁴⁸

It then states, "Yogic religions are the main rivals to Abrahamic religions,"⁴⁹ which it defines as:

"Religious traditions that trace their ancestry to the patriarch Abraham. The major religions in this grouping are Christianity, Islam and Judaism."⁵⁰

Brooke Boon, who has called her attempt to Christianize yoga, "Holy Yoga," also states:

"The postures of yoga may have been co-opted by a religion but

they can't 'belong' to that religion any more than prayer can belong only to a single religion. The body is of God. Prayer is of God. Scripture is of God. Other religions may have used the techniques of yoga toward their own ends, ends that conflict with a Christian worldview. They may have used yoga to worship creation or anything in it. But in Holy Yoga we worship only the Creator."⁵¹

It should also be noted that Boon clearly believes that yoga is a spiritual practice and not merely physical exercise. She writes that some people:

"... think I'm trying to tell them that yoga exercises are really just 'physical in nature' and that they have nothing to do with spirituality, so yoga is not dangerous to Christians. That's *not* what I'm saying. Yoga absolutely does open a person up to spiritual influences. But in Holy Yoga, the only spiritual influence we are open to is that of Jesus Christ. ... We must *completely* co-opt the amazing gift of yoga for Christianity. That's what we're doing with Holy Yoga."⁵²

In an e-mail, Boon wrote, "Yoga is a spiritual discipline, much like fasting or prayer."⁵³ Because, in one of the above citations from her book, Boon brings up the matter of worship, it only seems fitting to cite the Scripture, in which the Lord warned the Israelites before they crossed into Canaan:

"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for

they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods" (Deuteronomy 12:29-31).

A biblical example of disobedience to this principle seems to be found in the life of King Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:10-16. Note that in the above Scripture passage, the Lord warned Israel against trying to "co-opt" the pagan methods of Canaanite spirituality to serve the true and living God.

Miller states:

"One who practices yoga is participating in a system that deliberately was designed to lead participants ultimately to samadhi or union with Brahman, the Hindu deity. When dealing with a practice that is potentially idolatrous, should the Christian have the confidence that she will be able to avoid those elements?"⁵⁴

Miller also observes:

"There are some rather sneaky elements in hatha yoga that help explain why enrolling in the neighborhood yoga class would be a dubious decision for the Christian. First, teachers and students typically greet each other with the Sanskrit *namaste*, which means, 'I honor the Divine within you.' This is an affirmation of pantheism and therefore a denial of the true God revealed in the Bible. Furthermore, hatha yoga classes typically conclude with 'a 10-15 minute relaxation period to relax the body and still the mind.' As part of this process students often are given a mantra to repeat in meditation or chanting. Hindu mantras are generally the names of Hindu gods or goddesses."⁵⁵

Additionally, "The postures of yoga are not religiously neutral. All of the classic asanas have spiritual significance."⁵⁶ As just one example of this, Miller cites the sun salutation.⁵⁷

WHAT IS "OM"?

Anyone the least bit familiar with yoga has heard of the term "mantra," and one in particular: "Om" — some-

times rendered as "Aum."⁵⁸ It may be chanted by itself, or as part of a longer mantra. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, "Om" is:

"The most sacred syllable in Hinduism, which first appears in the Upanisads. It is often regarded as the bija (seed) of all mantras, containing, as it does, all origination and dissolution. ... Although it is made up of three ... connected but distinct elements (as sounded), the silence at its conclusion is regarded as a fourth, expressing the attainment of Brahman/atman."⁵⁹

Professor Winfried Corduan explains:

"A notion that came out of the Vedantic phase of Hinduism is that the essence of Brahman can be captured in the mystic syllable OM. OM has no meaning as a word. Its meaning lies in its sound as it is pronounced or chanted. The vibrations produced capture the essence of Brahman and put the chanter in touch with it and thereby with his Atman-Brahman identity."⁶⁰

The "Atman-Brahman identity" of which Corduan speaks above is the individual's mystical experience of being one in essence with Brahman. In the words of an introductory yoga text, "Hindus consider this syllable [Om] to be sacred and to symbolize the ultimate reality, or higher Self (*atman*)."⁶¹

"CHRISTIAN" YOGA: JUST SAY NO

Perhaps a good question to Christian promoters of yoga would be, "Why even *attempt* to Christianize a pagan practice such as yoga when there are non-pagan alternatives to yoga for accomplishing the same physical goals that Christian yoga promoters are attempting to achieve?"

One former Hindu yogi, who became a Christian, has written:

"If one desires to achieve physical fitness only, exercises designed for that specific purpose

ought rather to be chosen. No part of Yoga can be separated from the philosophy behind it."⁶²

There are fitness alternatives to yoga. Elliot Miller speaks very highly of PraiseMoves designed by Laurette Willis, a former yoga instructor. Of these exercises, Miller writes:

"PraiseMoves is designed to approximate all of the benefits associated with yoga, including relaxation and reduction of stress, within a consistently Christian context. I have thoroughly examined PraiseMoves and find nothing spiritually dangerous about it."⁶³

Miller also notes that some of the postures in PraiseMoves are similar to some yoga postures (due to the limited number of ways that the body can be positioned), however:

"She [i.e., Laurette Willis] has not used any traditional yoga postures or gestures that have clear-cut associations with Hinduism, such as the 'praying hands' gesture."⁶⁴

Additionally, Miller suggests the exercise program "Pilates (when not mixed with yoga)"⁶⁵ as another *spiritually* safe alternative to yoga, although he admits that he doesn't know how effective or physically safe Pilates is.

In a chapter called "Yoga and Hinduism," Vishal Mangalwadi and Ronald Enroth wrote, "Most exercises are good for us, though my physician says that walking is better for me than yoga."⁶⁶

And, regarding the matter of spiritually safe alternatives to yoga, Christian author Michael Gleghorn has written:

"It seems to me that if someone wants an exercise program with physical benefits similar to yoga, but without all the negative spiritual baggage, they should consider low-impact or water aerobics, or maybe even water ballet. These programs have the potential to be just as beneficial for the body, without possibly endangering the soul."⁶⁷

So for those who desire the physical benefits of yoga without having to be concerned for themselves (or for others who may be influenced by them) about spiritual dangers associated with yoga, there are spiritually safe alternatives.

The Hindu practice of yoga was specifically designed to produce an altered state of consciousness, in which the person "experiences" their essential identity with the impersonal Hindu supreme deity, Brahman. To be sure, yoga seems sort of "cool," contemporary, exotic, and avant-garde. It has certainly invaded popular American culture. For all this, however, it is a pagan practice designed with Hindu, anti-Christian goals and purposes in mind.

Even if one does somehow personally manage to avoid becoming influenced by the Hinduism with which yoga is so intertwined, one's practice of yoga could become a stumbling block for other Christians who might be spiritually weaker, less discerning, and more inclined to be influenced and/or led astray by yoga's Hindu underpinnings. Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 seems especially appropriate here.

HINDU TENETS

Some of Hinduism's tenets are karma, reincarnation, astrology, vegetarianism, polytheism, and idolatry. We will briefly consider each of these:

Karma (the relentless, unforgiving law of cause-and-effect). The Bible teaches, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). So the doctrine of karma does have some truth to it. However, karma is an impersonal, unforgiving law; whereas, God is personal and is also a God of forgiveness and second chances. The Bible also says, "If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Psalm 130:3-4).

Additionally, karma involves a belief that the consequences of our behavior may require us to live additional lives to pay off the debt of our sins. Hence, we see the necessity in

Hinduism for reincarnation, so that we may atone for our actions over the course of many lives until we achieve perfection and liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of rebirths (*samsara*). This is certainly a system of working for one's salvation. Contrary to the doctrine of multiple lives and reincarnation, the Bible teaches that "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Also Psalm 78:39 says, concerning the Israelites, "For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again."⁶⁸ The Bible also teaches that we are saved by God's grace and mercy *alone* and not by our works of righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7, esp. v. 5).

Astrology. God says, "You are wearied in the multitude of your counsels; let now the astrologers, the stargazers, and the monthly prognosticators stand up and save you from what shall come upon you. Behold, they shall be as stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; it shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before!" (Isaiah 47:13-14).

The prophet Jeremiah said, "Thus says the LORD: 'Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them'" (Jeremiah 10:2).

Vegetarianism. The Scriptures neither command nor condemn it. Therefore, it is a choice left to each individual. Many Scriptures, including Mark 7:18-19, Acts 10:9-16,⁶⁹ 1 Timothy 4:1-5, and Colossians 2:20-23, address these matters.

Polytheism and idolatry. These are condemned throughout the Bible (Matthew 4:10). Scripture declares that there is only one true God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6). In fact, the Bible shows that other so-called "gods" are actually demons (Deuteronomy 32:16-17; Psalm 106:35-38; 1 Corinthians 10:19-21). First John 5:21 says, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."

The late founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Bill Bright, once told of an encounter he had with a Hindu student. Bright said:

"After I had finished speaking at a midwestern university campus, a group of students remained to learn how they could become Christians. Among them was a young Hindu lad from India who was pacing up and down, very angry and impatient. As we talked he said, 'I resent you Christians. I resent the arrogance with which you say that you have the only way to God. I believe that Christianity is *one* way, but only one way. Hinduism is another. Buddhism, Shintoism and others are all ways to God.' I called his attention to the writings of the great Hindu leader Mahatma Gandhi,⁷⁰ who, for all of his devotion to his religion, states in his autobiography, 'It is a constant torture to me that I am still so far from Him whom I know to be my very life and being. I know it is my own wretchedness and wickedness that keep me from Him.' This gifted young man said that he had once believed that Gandhi was God but, of course, he no longer believed this. ... He admitted also that he had not found the answer to his needs, though he was a devout follower of his religion, diligent in the reading of the sacred Hindu writings, and faithful in his times of prayer and all the ritual of his faith. He had to confess that he had never found God. I called his attention to the difference in the lives of his Christian friends. He admitted that they had something that he did not possess. It was obvious that that 'something' was the living Savior who had come to live within them and had forgiven them of their sins. ... Finally, the light came on. Now this young Hindu understood the great truth of pardon for sin through our Savior's sacrifice on the cross. Quietly he bowed his head. This dear young scholar who had sought after

God with all of his heart now prayed that Jesus of Nazareth, the risen, living Son of God, would come into his heart, would pardon his sin and become his Lord and Master."⁷¹

In the chapter on "Hinduism" in a book that he authored on world religions, Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton wrote:

"The picture of heaven painted in the Book of Revelation and in the words of Jesus offers us great joy and hope. When we stand before God, we will be asked, 'What did you do to deserve my grace?' Here is the answer: 'Nothing. I didn't do enough to build up any good karma from you. I am only saved by your mercy and love. So I'm only holding on to your grace, your forgiveness, and your righteousness, and to the work that Jesus did for me.' And God will say, 'Welcome, my child. Enter your rest.' Christians believe that when we die, we are not united with the divine Brahman like a drop of water in an ocean. Our soul is distinct from God. So we have a chance to see God face-to-face, ... At the time I began preparing this chapter, I had an opportunity to visit a family whose twenty-eight-year-old son had recently been killed. As I was driving to their home, I prayed that God would help minister through me and care for this family. Then I started thinking, *What would I offer them if I were a Hindu priest? What would I tell them would become of their son?* I could say, 'Your son will come back to try to learn his spiritual lessons. If he has more bad karma than good, his next life might be a little harder than this last one. You, his family, will never know him after he is reborn. But you can take comfort in knowing that, one day, after a long series of births and deaths and rebirths, he will be reunited with the divine Brahman.' That is not what I told this family when I came to their home. I said, 'Your son belonged to Jesus

Christ. He was not perfect. But all of Christ's righteousness [a Hindu would say his 'good karma'] was credited to your son. Jesus bore your son's sin on the cross. And there will be a day when you will see your son again, face-to-face. Until that time, your son is seeing the things we only dream about on this side of eternity.' Being able to say that made me very, very glad that I am a Christian."⁷²

In reflecting upon the definition of the word "yoga," which means "union" or "to yoke," one might remember Jesus' statement recorded in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Taking up Jesus' yoke was easy when compared with the yoke of the Jewish law as the Pharisees taught it. Taking up His yoke instead of the yoke of Hinduism is just as wise a choice. "Yoking with" by submitting to Jesus the Savior brings eternal life, while taking up the yoke of yoga and Hinduism can lead only to continued confusion and separation from God.

Endnotes:

1. Walter Martin, *The New Age Cult*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1989, pg. 13. The title page of the book also notes that Martin wrote the book "with The Research Staff of CRI." Elliot Miller, Ron Rhodes, and Dan Schlesinger are mentioned by name as those who helped. Martin also lists them on the book's "Acknowledgments" page, along with Craig Hawkins, and some unnamed others on the staff "who assisted in the preparation and editing of this volume."
2. Ronald Enroth, editor, *Evangelizing the Cults: How to Share Jesus with Children, Parents, Neighbors, and Friends Who Are Involved in a Cult*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Vine Books, 1990, pg. 21, italics in original. This quotation is taken from the chapter on "Hinduism" by Mark Albrecht.
3. Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, revised edition, 2001, pg. 91.
4. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *The Facts on Hinduism in America*. Eugene, Ore.:

- Harvest House Publishers, 1991, pg. 7.
5. John Bowker, editor, *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pg. 430, s.v., "Hinduism."
6. Ibid.
7. *So What's the Difference?*, op. cit., pg. 91.
8. Elliot Miller, "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part One: Yoga in Its Original Eastern Context)," *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 02, pg. 14.
9. George W. Braswell, Jr., *Understanding World Religions*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, revised edition, 1994, pg. 35.
10. Ibid., pp. 34-35, italics in original.
11. Ibid., pg. 40.
12. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, op. cit., pg. 102, s.v., "Astrology."
13. *So What's the Difference?*, op. cit., pg. 94, italics in original.
14. Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler, general editors, *Who Made God? And Answers to Over 100 Other Tough Questions of Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2003, pg. 155, italic in original. This quotation is from the question, "Why Is There Such a High Degree of Interest in Eastern Religions among Westerners?" by L. T. Jeyachandran.
15. See further, J. Greg Sheryl, "Paramahansa Yogananda: Purveyor of a Different Jesus and a Different Gospel," in this issue of *The Quarterly Journal* (pp. 4-13).
16. Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Yoga of Jesus: Understanding the Hidden Teachings of the Gospels*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2007, pg. vii. Also, Paramahansa Yogananda, *The Science of Religion*. Los Angeles: Self-Realization Fellowship, 2001, from the back cover.
17. Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, revised and expanded edition, 1985, pg. 353.
18. *The Facts on Hinduism in America*, op. cit., pp. 9-10, italics in original. Citation in the above passage is from A.L. Basham, "Hinduism," in R.C. Zaehner, editor, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, pg. 237).
19. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, op. cit., pg. 22, s.v., "Advaita Vedanta."
20. Ronald Enroth, editor, *A Guide to New Religious Movements*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2005, pg. 45, emphasis added. This quotation is from the chapter on "Yoga and Hinduism," by Vishal Mangalwadi with Ronald Enroth.
21. Ibid., pg. 46.
22. "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part One: Yoga in Its Original Eastern Context)," op. cit., pg. 17.
23. Ibid., pg. 12, italics in original.
24. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
25. Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D. and Larry Payne, Ph.D., *Yoga for Dummies*. Hoboken,

- N.J.: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 1999, pg. 14, bold in original.
26. "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part One: Yoga in Its Original Eastern Context)," op. cit., pg. 17.
27. *Yoga for Dummies*, op. cit., pg. 18, italics in original.
28. Ronald L. Carlson, *Transcendental Meditation: Relaxation or Religion?* Chicago: Moody Press, 1978, pp. 41-42.
29. Ibid., pg. 42, italics in original.
30. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, op. cit., pp. 793-794, s.v., "Raja- or as[h]tanga-yoga."
31. Ibid., pg. 415, s.v., "Hatha-yoga," italics in original. The entry from the same source on "Gorakhnath, Goraksa, or Goraksanatha" notes that he was "A Hindu yogin of c. 10/11 cent CE" (ibid., pg. 383).
32. *A Guide to New Religious Movements*, op. cit., pg. 43, italic in original.
33. Elliot Miller, "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part Three: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Response)," *Christian Research Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 04, pp. 35-36. Miller's quote is citing Dru Sefton, "Is Yoga Debased by Secular Practice?" *Newhouse News*, July 15, 2005, document available at: http://one.truthministries.com/yoga_article.html.
34. Ibid., pg. 33.
35. *A Guide to New Religious Movements*, op. cit., pg. 43.
36. Rabi R. Maharaj with Dave Hunt, *Death of a Guru*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1984, pg. 208. (Formerly published under the title, *Escape into the Light*.)
37. Stan Guthrie, "Hinduism Gains a Foothold in America," *Christianity Today*, Feb. 8, 1993, pg. 50.
38. Habel Verghese, *Search For Inner Peace*. Van Nuys, Calif.: Bible Voice Inc., 1977, pp. 81-85. This book, written by a Christian from India, contains much otherwise helpful material; however, I do differ with him on this matter.
39. Some of these Christian authors would be recognized by many readers of the *Journal*, were I to name them here. Not only so, but some of these same Christian authors have beneficial ministries to the Body of Christ. This just shows that, as Christians, we must still "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21), regardless of who it is that is doing the teaching.
40. Brooke Boon, *Holy Yoga: Exercise for the Christian Body and Soul*. New York: Faith-Words, 2007.
41. Susan Bordenkircher, *Yoga for Christians*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006.
42. *Holy Yoga: Exercise for the Christian Body and Soul*, op. cit., pg. 29.
43. Ibid., pg. 31; see also, pg. 5.

44. *Ibid.*, pg. 211.
45. "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part Three: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Response)," *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38; *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, Vol. 12, pg. 846, s.v., "Yoga"; and *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, *op. cit.*, pg. 1058, s.v., "Yoga."
46. "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part Three: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Response)," *op. cit.*, pg. 37.
47. *Ibid.*, pg. 38, italic in original.
48. Irving Hexham, *Pocket Dictionary of New Religious Movements*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002, pg. 120, s.v., "yogic religions."
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, pg. 7, s.v., "Abramic religions."
51. *Holy Yoga: Exercise for the Christian Body and Soul*, *op. cit.*, pg. 33.
52. *Ibid.*, italics in original.
53. E-mail correspondence from Brooke Boon on file, dated Sept. 15, 2007.
54. "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part Three: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Response)," *op. cit.*, pg. 34.
55. *Ibid.*, pg. 32, italic in original.
56. *Ibid.*, pg. 35.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Concerning its spelling as "Aum," Dr. Winfried Corduan explains, "Sanskrit does not have a separate vowel for o" (*Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998, pg. 345, endnote 12, italic in original).
59. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, *op. cit.*, pg. 713, s.v., "Om or Aum."
60. *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, *op. cit.*, pg. 209, italics in original.
61. *Yoga for Dummies*, *op. cit.*, pg. 301, italics in original.
62. *Death of a Guru*, *op. cit.*, pg. 208.
63. "The Yoga Boom: A Call for Christian Discernment (Part Three: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Response)," *op. cit.*, pg. 40.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*, pg. 41.
66. *A Guide to New Religious Movements*, *op. cit.*, pg. 43.
67. Pat Zukeran, general editor, *World Religions Through a Christian Worldview: A handbook to analyzing the world's religions from a Christian worldview perspective*. Richardson, Texas: Probe Ministries, 2008, pg. 228.
68. My thanks to my college friend Benjamin Williams for pointing out this verse to me as a biblical refutation of reincarnation.
69. It is true that this vision was symbolic of the inclusion of the Gentiles, whom Jews considered unclean, in the Church. However, in Mark 7:18-19, Jesus had already declared all foods clean. Thus, even the symbolism in Acts 10:9-16 coincides with this truth.
70. "Mohandas K. Gandhi" (1869-1948) was his actual name. "Mahatma" was a title of respect, and means "great soul." The passage that Bright gives here occurs near the end of the Gandhi's brief Preface to his autobiography.
71. Bill Bright, *Ten Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity: Introduction: The Uniqueness of Jesus*. San Bernardino, Calif.: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1968, pp. 9-10, italic in original.
72. Adam Hamilton, *Christianity and World Religions: Wrestling With Questions People Ask*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005, pp. 46-47, italics and brackets in original. In quoting this story, I am not necessarily endorsing all that Pastor Hamilton says, either in this book or elsewhere.



EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

articles described Jackson in costume going door-to-door in Dallas and Birmingham visiting for the Jehovah's Witnesses.

All of this was concurrent with Jackson releasing songs and music videos such as "Thriller" and "Billie Jean." Picking up on this inconsistency, *The New York Times* observed, "At the same time, perhaps more than anyone else he emplies [sic] the music, videos, fashion and much else that is frowned upon by the hierarchy of his church." With such contradiction, PFO wrote to the Watchtower Society in 1984 and asked them how a Jehovah's Witness should respond when presented with the glaring hypocrisy of Jackson's lifestyle, public persona, and musical art merchandise — specifically his occult-based "Thriller" music video. We wrote, "Certainly, a good Jehovah's Witness would not want to present himself in this kind of light."

The Watchtower responded that, "The Society has been advised that Michael Jackson is a baptized member of the Christian congregation. However, his being one of Jehovah's Witnesses should not be construed by anyone to mean that either the Society or the congregation with which he is associated approves or endorses the music that he sings or plays, or all aspects of his life-style." (Interestingly, to our knowledge, PFO received the only

letter from the Watchtower which specifically identified Michael Jackson by name. When other counter-cult ministries wrote similar letters of inquiry to the Watchtower organization, the Society responded with "an entertainer associated with Jehovah's Witnesses.")

Yet Jehovah's Witnesses knew that evasion would not suffice. The editors of *People* magazine revealed, "A spokesman for Michael Jackson's congregation confirmed that he is a member in good standing and that he attends most of the meetings. However, the elders of his congregation are concerned about Jackson's public image and performances, including his recent forays into rock video" (Jan. 23, 1984, pg. 4).

The negative publicity for the Watchtower was beginning to mount. Some former Jehovah's Witnesses heightened the Watchtower's embarrassment with claims of a cult within the cult. *US* magazine stated, "The Jackson appeal, however, has gone too far in some ways, according to [former Jehovah's Witness Gary] Botting, who says an 'MJ cult' has developed within the Witnesses. The cult believes that Jackson is the Archangel Michael, who is described in the Book of Daniel: 'And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people'" (Oct. 8, 1984, pg. 69). Botting also contended that the Watchtower's "leadership was reluctant to alienate Jackson because the singer has helped bring contributions and credibility to the faith by what many consider his exemplary habits,

including abstinence from sex, liquor and drugs" (ibid.). Given the vast financial resources of the Watchtower, through donations from its millions of members and sale of its publications, Botting's comments appeared to be an overstatement — public image to the Watchtower is much more important than the financial gains brought about by Jackson.

In May 1984, the Watchtower tackled the Michael Jackson issue head on. In its *Awake!* magazine the Society featured an article entitled, "Young People Ask... What About Music Videos?" in which it argued that these "videos often are bizarre." While not identifying Jackson as one of its own, the periodical stated:

"In another popular video, *Thriller*, the performer is seen to transform first into a 'cat person,' then a dancing 'monster.' Evidently not wanting viewers to conclude that it promoted spiritism, the film begins with the disclaimer: 'Due to my strong personal convictions, I wish to stress that this film in no way endorses a belief in the occult. — Michael Jackson.' Nevertheless, it was so realistic that some who saw it admitted that they were horrified at first. What was this short film intended to convey? And how does the performer, Michael Jackson, feel about it in looking back? 'I would never do it again!' says Jackson. 'I just intended to do a good, fun short film, not to purposely bring to the screen something to scare people or to do anything bad. I want to do what's right. I would never do anything like that again.' Why not? 'Because a lot of people were offended by it,' explains Jackson. 'That makes me feel bad. I don't want them to feel that way. I realize now that it wasn't a good idea. I'll never do a video like *that* again!' He continues: 'In fact, I have blocked further distribution of the film over which I have control, including its release in some other countries. There's all kinds of promotional stuff being proposed on *Thriller*. But I tell them, "No, no, no. I don't want to do anything on *Thriller*. No more *Thriller*!"' (May 22, 1984, pp. 19-20, italics in original).

Concerning Jackson's statements in the Watchtower publication, *The New York Times* wrote, "Norman Winter, a press agent for Mr. Jackson in Los Angeles, declined to discuss the singer's religious beliefs or the authenticity of the quote in *Awake!*" (Aug. 29, 1984, pg. 15).

A related matter of Jackson's personal actions which conflicted with strict Watchtower doctrine was found in a brief celebrity report which appeared in the *Fresno Bee* newspaper. For most, the significance would be missed. The article stated: "**Mother's Day** is Sunday and many famous children are offering special advice or are doing something for their mothers. ... And of course, everyone is wondering what **Michael Jackson** is going to give his mother, **Katherine**, Sunday. The rock superstar gave her a red Rolls-Royce with a white ribbon on it for her birthday last week, eliminating that for a present" (May

10, 1984, pg. A2, bold in original). Jehovah's Witnesses condemn as creature worship the celebrating of birthdays and other holidays, including Mother's Day, and denounce those who give gifts for such occasions.

In 1987, without much fanfare, Jackson separated himself from Jehovah's Witnesses. According to a *Los Angeles Times* report, "A representative of the Los Angeles congregation where Jackson belonged said that the entertainer 'disassociated' himself from the congregation and 'no longer wants to be known as a Jehovah's Witness.' ... A form letter from the Witnesses' Brooklyn headquarters, dated May 18, also stated that the organization 'no longer considers Michael Jackson to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses'" (*The Denver Post*, June 7, 1987, pg. 20A).

Jackson's departure from the Watchtower presented yet another enigma — this one for family members. Within weeks of the pop star's retreat from the Watchtower, a federal appeals court in San Francisco upheld the practice of shunning former members by Jehovah's Witnesses. According to an Associated Press report, "The practice was applied recently to singer Michael Jackson. ... When Jackson left the church recently, the members who were ordered to shun him were reported to include his mother" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 13, 1987, pg. 6D).

Like Jackson, his mother Katherine appeared to also show disregard for Watchtower teaching which restricted her personal freedom. *Star* magazine reported, "'This definitely means more anguish for Katherine,' says a close family friend. But although her religion is the basis of her life, she will not shun Michael. 'She loves her kids and has always defended them. She will, however, go through a long, living hell because of this,' the friend says. Another source close to the family agrees: 'Katherine believes that family ties are stronger than church ties and Michael was her son long before he became a Jehovah's Witness'" (June 23, 1987, pg. 5).

In the two decades that followed, Jackson made no true advancement or reform in his spiritual pilgrimage. Following his brief encounter with the Watchtower, Jackson moved within the circles of Hindu philosopher Deepak Chopra and psychic Uri Geller. More recently, Jackson reportedly became a member of the Nation of Islam. His conversion came amid his arrest and subsequent charges against him of child molestation — of which he was later found not guilty. Jackson's older brother Jermaine hired members of the sect to work in Michael's inner circle in various jobs, including bodyguard. Jermaine joined the group in 1989.

It all ended very sadly with Jackson on a bizarre path of self-destruction. Yet the answer to removing the enigma of Michael Jackson's — or any other Jehovah's Witness' — spiritual pursuit was so very easy: "Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38).

The Words of the Lord, recorded through the prophet Jeremiah, continue to ring clear: "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

—MKG

While Coleman will appear on the *Hour of Power* program, "it hasn't been determined how much she will preach," a church spokesman told the Associated Press.

—MKG

LAWSUIT CHARGES DOLLAR CASHES IN

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

The 58-year-old Coleman had been serving as the director of the church's family ministries. Juan Carlos Ortiz, who stepped in as an interim pastor following the ousting of Robert A. Schuller, will continue his role as a teaching pastor.

Schuller's ministry posted a statement on its Website saying that in the wee hours of one morning God spoke to the 82-year-old Schuller, telling him, "Don't worry. I have called your daughter Sheila, too. She is equipped and she will be your legs."

According to the *Orange County Register*, Coleman said her taking over the reins of the leadership of the church founded by her father was unexpected. She told the newspaper, "Our church didn't even start ordaining women until 1973. I'm proud of my dad for doing this, and I hope I can serve as a role model for younger women who want to get things accomplished in this church."

Televangelist Creflo Dollar has been accused of ripping off a spiritual text messaging service created by a former employee. A lawsuit filed in June in California accuses the Atlanta-based pastor, his son, and other ministry staff of "breach of nondisclosure agreement, fraud, unjust enrichment, civil conspiracy, breach of contract and misappropriation of trade secrets," according to the Associated Press.

Devone Lawson of Marina del Rey, Calif., said he spent a year in 2004 with Dollar's World Changers Church International developing a program which sent daily inspirational text messages to the cell phones of church members and subscribers. Lawson said that Dollar and his ministry then stole his idea and established another text messaging service, which was called "Word on the Go."

The AP report said, "Attorneys for Lawson estimate the \$4.99 per month subscription service generates more than \$50 million a year in revenue."

—MKG

PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH — STATEMENT OF BELIEF

- I. THE BIBLE AS THE DIVINELY INSPIRED, INERRANT WORD OF GOD: IT IS IN ITS ENTIRETY THE SOLE AUTHORITY FOR ALL MATTERS OF CHRISTIAN BELIEF AND PRACTICE.
- II. THE ONE TRUE GOD. IN THE ONE TRUE GOD THERE EXIST THREE PERSONS, BEING: THE FATHER, THE SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- III. JESUS CHRIST: HIS DEITY, HUMANITY, VIRGIN BIRTH, SINLESSNESS, DEATH AND BODILY RESURRECTION; WHO WILL PERSONALLY AND VISIBLY RETURN AGAIN TO EARTH.
- IV. THE PERSONALITY AND DEITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
- V. THE EXISTENCE AND PERSONALITY OF SATAN, HIS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO GOD, AND HIS POWER OVER THE UNREGENERATE.
- VI. THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF ALL MEN WHICH MAKES THEM HOPELESSLY LOST WITHOUT THE NEW BIRTH OBTAINABLE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.
- VII. THE FINAL ESTATE OF MAN: FOR THE SAVED, EVERLASTING LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND FOR THE UNSAVED, EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.
- VIII. THE GOSPEL BY WHICH WE ARE SAVED BEING SUMMED IN THE DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.
- IX. THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, CONSISTING OF THOSE WHO HAVE RECEIVED JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR. A LOCAL CHURCH IS AN ORGANIZED ASSEMBLY OF BELIEVERS UNITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF CARRYING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST.
- X. THE GREAT COMMISSION OF CHRIST BEING TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN, BAPTIZING AND DISCIPLING THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED.



Books in Review

TAKING A STAND FOR THE BIBLE

by John Ankerberg and Dillon Burroughs
Harvest House Publishers, 222 pages, \$12.99

It often has been said that the Bible is like an anvil which, over the centuries, has been pounded and beaten by hammers of disbelief and objection. Yet it stands undamaged, while the critics' hammers crumble. John Ankerberg and Dillon Burroughs' latest book helps the reader understand why the Bible has stood up over time.

While not an exhaustive treatment of the subject matter, Ankerberg and Burroughs provide a terrific synopsis in each chapter, which should spur the reader to deeper study. Here are some of the topics:

- Biblical inspiration — and why it is crucial to hold to the verbal, plenary, and clear components of divine inspiration.
- The five rules of how the New Testament books were accepted (or canonized).
- Guidelines for handling perceived contradictions and errors in the Bible.
- Ten key facts that support the reliability of the contents of the New Testament.
- The necessity of complete — or full — biblical inerrancy and the fallacy and danger of the idea of limited inerrancy.
- Statements in Scripture that have been affirmed by modern science.
- Seven key teachings about Jesus Christ which make Him unique among all other religious leaders.
- How archaeology affirms the truthfulness of the Bible by confirming as accurate its descriptions of events, places, and peoples.

The importance of archaeological evidence is stressed as the authors observe: "the fact that Luke has been established as such a careful writer means that fully one-fourth of the entire New Testament, on the basis of his accuracy alone, bears the same marks of authenticity. It was also this same careful historian, the physician Luke, who reported that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead 'by many convincing proofs' — and that

he carefully investigated the evidence for this from the beginning (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3)" (pg. 147).

Two modern Bible-related issues are also examined in the book. The first of these contemporary subjects is a review of and response to the King James Only controversy, the belief that the KJ version of the Bible is the only legitimate and trustworthy English translation of Scripture. The second is an analysis of and answer to Bart Ehrman and his best-selling book, *Misquoting Jesus*. The neo-orthodox Ehrman argues that we cannot know what the original New Testament Scriptures said because they were changed over the early centuries of Church history.

Incorporated within the pages of the book are several charts and informational sidebars (e.g., "Interesting Facts about the Bible," pg. 15 and "A Sampling of Jesus' Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecies," pp. 82-83). The layout and content of this publication make it a wonderful source from which to draft Sunday school or Bible study lessons about the important and essential aspects of Scripture.

The book draws extensively from various Christian scholars, including several of those interviewed by Ankerberg for his award-winning television broadcast. Included are such notables as Dr. Norman Geisler, Dr. Gleason Archer, Dr. Gary Habermas, Dr. Darrell Bock, and Dr. Daniel Wallace. However — in this reviewer's opinion — there were a couple scholars who would have been better left unquoted: Dr. Craig Blomberg (pg. 97) and Dr. N.T. Wright (pp. 164, 167, 189). Blomberg, in his book on Mormonism (*How Wide the Divide?* co-authored with Latter-day Saint Stephen Robinson), has stated that the biblical texts were subjected to a process similar to that which yielded changes or corrections in successive editions of Mormon scriptures. And Wright is a major conduit through which the new perspective on Paul teaching (i.e., we have seriously misunderstood the Apostle Paul regarding salvation by faith alone) has entered the evangelical Church. Despite all the commendable scholarship by these two men, Blomberg and Wright should now be used with caution and qualification, if at all. What is brought into *Taking a Stand for the Bible* by these men could have been drawn from other competent and respectable sources.

Notwithstanding the above personal caveat, *Taking a Stand for the Bible* is a great primary resource for any Christian from which to draw "remarkable evidence that affirms the Bible's integrity and reliability."

—MKG

Editor's Note: The publications featured in PFO's *Books in Review* section are available from **Personal Freedom Outreach** (P.O. Box 26062, Saint Louis, Missouri 63136). Please add \$2.50 to the price listed for shipping and handling. Due to occasional price changes by the publishers, the retail amounts listed are subject to change without notice. These publications are also available to those who help to financially support the work of PFO. Please see our funds appeal flyer for details.