

Christianity and Freedom

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Christianity and Freedom in India: Colonialism, Communalism, Caste, and Violence

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The Christian community in India is relatively small, yet its contribution to civil society has been substantial, at least from the perspective of those who consider Western secular, democratic forms of governance ideal. At the same time, however, the influence of this small community provokes anxiety among the guardians of "traditional" Indian society. For them, the Christian community represents a threat to essentially Indian social structures and cultural norms, and a potential fifth column within the Indian nation (because of Indian Christians' putative "foreign" loyalties and alliances with Western Christians). These anxieties have given rise to attempts to circumscribe Christian freedoms (particularly the freedom to evangelize), political and legal harassment, and even acts of violence.

This chapter explores these issues in four parts. The first provides contextual demographic data on the Indian Christian community, as well as a history of the development of tensions between India's Christians and Hindus. In the second part we look closely at the sources and severity of the social, legal, political, and violent pressures felt by the contemporary Indian Christian community. The third section focuses on the effects of these pressures on Indian Christian life and practice, and on Indian social and political life more generally. Finally, the last section provides a catalog of Christian contributions to Indian civil society, particularly in the form of projects and institutions involved in education, medicine, poverty amelioration, and human rights activism.

The structure of the chapter is not intended to read as a warning about what might be lost if the Christian community continues to be subjected to pressure. It is certainly true that the challenges faced by the contemporary Indian Christian community do present the possibility that their contributions to civil society could be lost or limited in substantial ways. Even so, a simple warning such as this would be inappropriate for at least two reasons. First, for the sake of balance, we must proceed without assuming in an a priori fashion that Christian contributions to Indian society have been useful or positive from all perspectives. There is indeed, as

we discuss later, a robust public debate about that very issue in India today. Second, it would be inaccurate to assume that the pressures experienced by Christians in contemporary India have led them to withdraw from the public sphere. In fact, as we detail in the following, in many cases Indian Christians' experiences of harassment and violence have provoked them to become *more* engaged in civil society, and not only in their own interest, but also on behalf of other marginalized, oppressed, and threatened peoples.

We have been indirectly conducting research on the topic of this chapter for more than five years, both through our own ethnographic investigations and by engaging with relevant archival, statistical, and secondary scholarly resources. In recent years, however, our research has had direct bearing on the subject matter of this chapter. From 2011 to 2013, we conducted interviews with more than two hundred people in and around the villages surrounding Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Bhubaneswar, Kandhamal, Sambalpur, Pune, Goa, Bangalore, Mangalore, Chennai, Trichy, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Dehra Dun, and Hyderabad.¹

CONTEXTUAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Official Indian census data suggest that Christians constitute approximately 2.4 percent of the Indian population, but many believe that the censuses significantly underestimate the size of the community. There are a number of reasons why this may be true. First, the census questions themselves have, for complicated reasons, occasionally discouraged members of India's lower-caste communities from registering themselves as Christian. Second, many low-caste Christians avoid registering themselves officially as such in order to continue taking advantage of government reservations (in academic institutions, the civil service, legislatures, etc.; see later discussion) for which official conversion to Christianity would make them ineligible. Other Christians profess their faith only secretly, in order to avoid the negative ramifications of doing so more openly in their families or villages. Still others express devotion to Christ, but do not claim exclusive devotion to Christianity. Statisticians who rely upon the reported membership of Indian Christian churches and denominations arrive at much higher numbers than the official count. Johnson and Ross, for example, estimate that India's 58 million Christians constitute 4.8 percent of the population. For a variety of reasons, this figure seems to us the most reasonable.² Similarly, statistics on growth vary considerably. Johnson and Ross estimate that the Indian Christian community grew by roughly 2.75 percent annually between 2000 and 2010, a period during which the Hindu community grew only 1.46 percent per year. Mandryk, on the other hand, suggests that the Christian population is growing at an annual rate of 3.7 percent.³

With 8 million members, Roman Catholicism remains the largest denomination in India. Boasting 2 million members, the Church of South India is a distant second. The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, Seventh-Day Adventists, Oriental Orthodox Churches, United Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and Believers Church (associated with the American Mission, Gospel for Asia) each claim between 1 and 2 million members, with the Church of North India just below that mark.⁴ Roughly half of India's Christians are now associated with evangelical, charismatic, Pentecostal, and other independent "renewalist" churches and denominations.⁵

The history of Indian Christianity begins with the St. Thomas, or Syrian Christians. These Christians trace their history to the evangelical work of St. Thomas the apostle, who, they believe, arrived in what is today Kerala in 52 CE. Such a trip would have been possible for a first-century Jew, and certain noncanonical Christian scriptures can be read to suggest that Thomas visited India on his missionary journeys. But the myth cannot be historically verified. What is more certain, however, is that settlers and missionaries from the Church of the East (the Nestorian Church), who followed East Syrian liturgical rites, established a Christian presence in southern India by around the third century CE.⁶ The ancestors of these Malayalam-speaking St. Thomas Christians had achieved a relatively high status within South Indian society already by the sixth century. They then rose to prominence as a high-ranking warrior and merchant community in the medieval period, when they competed for and received local "honors" (*mariyatai*) from, and the patronage of, petty kings along the southwestern Malabar Coast.⁷

Their high social and religious status was facilitated, in part, by the fact that their religious cult apparatus, which focused on the shrines of charismatic, thaumaturgical saints (many of them from Syria), resembled and was intimately related to that of local Hindus and Muslims. Moreover, the "honors" bestowed on St. Thomas Christians entailed their participation in acts of worship during Hindu ceremonies and festivals sponsored by local rulers. For these reasons, the St. Thomas Christians were relatively well integrated into South Indian society during this period, and they were treated as a community of high social and ritual rank.⁸

After the end of the fifteenth century, however, a number of social and political processes conspired to disintegrate India's Christians from their social, cultural, and religious milieu. The most obvious and important of these processes was colonialism. The Portuguese arrived in South India in 1498 and allied themselves with St. Thomas Christians. The alliance offered certain benefits to India's ancient Christians, but it also associated them forever after, in the minds of other Indians, with the excesses of Portuguese imperialism (e.g., the Inquisition). At the same time, missionaries associated with or protected by Portuguese political authority began converting large numbers of low-caste Hindus to Christianity, with the effect

of slowly undermining the high social status the Indian Christian community had previously enjoyed.

These trends continued into the era of British colonialism, which made itself felt on the Malabar Coast when the Hindu states of Travancore and Cochin became British East India Company (BEIC) tributaries in 1795. Economic and political processes set in motion by the BEIC threatened the viability of the St. Thomas Christian community's traditional occupations, eroding its status even further.⁹ In the meantime, evangelical BEIC residents and British missionaries had set about reforming what they considered the unacceptably syncretistic nature of St. Thomas Christianity. However, it was the St. Thomas Christians' syncretism and openness to participating in the rites and celebrations of non-Christian local rulers that had preserved their integration and relatively high status within local economies of purity and pollution.¹⁰ In addition, as had their predecessors, Christian missionaries enjoying the protection of the BEIC also converted large numbers of low-caste Hindus to the faith. Consequently, by the halfway point of the nineteenth century upper-caste Hindus along the Malabar Coast began to consider St. Thomas Christians to be a ritually polluting caste and withheld honors from them in local Hindu festivals.¹¹ Hindu-Christian riots resulting from honors contestations became more and more regular in areas with large St. Thomas Christian and upper-caste Hindu populations.¹²

The association of Christianity with colonialism, the Europeanization of St. Thomas religious belief and practice, and the growing numbers of low-caste converts to Christianity had a profoundly negative effect on the perception of Indian Christianity, and on relationships between Christians and Hindus. The deterioration of Hindu-Christian relations was further accelerated by the rising number of missionaries at work in India after 1813, the related British involvement in colonial education and social reforms (e.g., the banning of widow burning, or suttee, in 1829), and policy changes disfavoring India's traditional landed elites. By the second half of the nineteenth century, then, India's Christians, both ancient and new, had come to be perceived by many as adherents of a "foreign" religion with suspect political loyalties. Not surprisingly, native Indian Christians were regularly targeted in the Great Rebellion of 1857.¹³ In the subsequent Hindu revival movements of the late nineteenth century, missionaries and native Indian Christians were frequently attacked, rhetorically *and* physically.¹⁴

The distinction between Christians and adherents of India's other religions was further reinforced by the British tendency to conceive of and organize India's population according to religious community – a tendency most clearly manifested in decennial censuses collected by the British. In the late nineteenth century, British administrators began to enumerate and thereby politicize religious identity, and in the early twentieth century they decided to grant separate electorates to India's

religious minorities.¹⁵ Individually, and in combination, these policies buttressed "the supposedly primordial corporate identity and structures of leadership of castes and religious sects ... thereby rendering rigid what had hitherto been more negotiable entities."¹⁶ Other factors too complex to be covered in these pages compounded the effect, for example, the development of highly politicized associational life (often organized along religious lines) in the rapidly growing urban centers of British India¹⁷ and the "fractured"¹⁸ and at times paradoxically atavistic modernity of India's urban Hindu middle classes, which impeded the development of more inclusive and interreligious countercolonial Indian identities.¹⁹

Already in the late nineteenth century, Hindus began establishing organizations to undermine or counter the influence of Christianity in India. The most important of these early organizations was the Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883).²⁰ Yet Christianity continued to grow, and conversions even accelerated in the last decades of the nineteenth century, in large part as a result of a series of devastating famines that provoked conversions and sent famine orphans into Christian orphanages (and from there into churches).²¹ Observing this trend, authors in the first decades of the twentieth century, such as U. N. Mukherji, predicted the demise of Hinduism. Other Hindus established *sabhas* ("societies"), and eventually, in 1925, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha ("Great Society"), to defend Hinduism against Christian (and Muslim) incursions. Those involved in such movements agreed that the essence and special genius of Indian identity, and the only possible source of the kind of unity that would be required to displace the British, was "Hinduness," or *Hindutva*, as articulated by V. D. Savarkar's 1923 tract, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*

In contemporary India, those who most regularly advocate the circumscription of minority religious freedoms (rhetorically or violently) are most often associated with the Sangh Parivar, the "Family of the Sangh," a collection of Hindu nationalist organizations. The constituent bodies of the Sangh Parivar were established by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organization), or RSS, which itself was founded in 1925. The RSS's founder, Maharashtrian Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889–1940), was inspired by Savarkar's notion of *Hindutva*, and his organization grew quickly throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. The RSS eventually spawned other religious, cultural, and political organizations intent on defending Hinduism and containing the Muslim and Christian "threat." These included the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, or ABVKA ("All-India Forest-Dweller's Welfare Center," founded in 1952); the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or VHP ("World Hindu Council," founded in 1964); and what became the Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP ("Indian People's Party") – India's primary opposition political party and perennial opponent of the more secularist Congress Party.²²

Those affiliated with the Sangh Parivar generally advocate more expansive legal constraints on minority religious freedoms, and more aggressively so, than those not affiliated with the Sangh. However, concerns about the spread and growth of "foreign" faiths such as Islam and Christianity are relatively widespread in contemporary India. Even Gandhi, whose inclusive conception of Indian unity contrasted significantly with the Hindu-oriented nationalism of Savarkar and Golwarkar, regularly accused Indian converts of being denationalized. He criticized missionaries for targeting lower-caste Hindus (whom he controversially considered unintelligent and gullible) and for using social services to lure impecunious Indians to the Christian path.²³ Gandhi also called into question the dominant Christian conception of conversion (as a salvation-inducing shift from one religious affiliation to another) and cast doubt on the desirability and motives of the Christian evangelical project itself.

Gandhi was assassinated by a man with links to the Sangh Parivar months after India gained independence in August 1947 and therefore had little direct effect on the development of its constitution. While still alive, Gandhi famously had given ambiguous replies to questions about whether conversion or evangelism should be banned in an independent India. In a strong statement from which he later backed away, at least to some extent, he said, "If I had power and could legislate I should certainly stop all proselytizing. It is the cause of much avoidable conflict between classes and unnecessary heart-burning among missionaries."²⁴ In many ways, then, Gandhi mainstreamed criticism of Christian mission work. He reflected an ambivalent attitude toward the liberal idea of freedom of religion, taken to include the practice of religious persuasion and conversion. This attitude remains typical even among Hindus otherwise supportive of secular governance. Such widespread ambivalence about the propriety of religious evangelism and conversion blunts the secularist critique of the Sangh's more chauvinistic and antiminority actions and proposals.

Given this widespread ambivalence about Christian evangelizing, it is perhaps not at all surprising that the Constituent Assembly – the body charged with developing independent India's constitution – entertained the idea of a constitutional ban on conversion when debating India's constitution. In the end, the ban did not pass, in large part because of objections from Christians and more generous and secular-minded Hindus in the assembly. When the Drafting Committee finally forwarded the draft constitution to the Constituent Assembly in February 1948, it included the following statement: "Subject to public order, morality and health ... all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion." Debate erupted, as it had earlier in the process, over the inclusion of the right to "propagate religion," and many Hindus expressed concern that it would undermine and even threaten the very survival of Hinduism. However, Christians and their non-Christian allies were able to garner

enough support for the wording to have it included as article 25 in the constitution.²⁵ Thus, Christian voices were clearly instrumental in ensuring that robust religious freedoms were enshrined in the Indian constitution. Nevertheless, many Hindus left the debates feeling that Christians had taken advantage of the Hindu majority's generosity, and this feeling undoubtedly tinted debates about missionaries and conversion in the following decade.

For example, in the decade after independence, Sangh groups and other Hindu *sabhas* prompted several states to conduct inquiries into the tactics and legality of Christian missionaries. The most famous of these resulted in the publication of the influential *Christian Missionary Activities Inquiry Committee Report* (1956), widely known as the Niyogi Committee Report (after the name of the judge who chaired the committee). The Niyogi Committee, which was sponsored by the Madhya Pradesh state government, conducted and transcribed hundreds of interviews with members of all religious communities around Madhya Pradesh and present-day Chhattisgarh. On the basis of these interviews, and on its somewhat prejudiced analysis of an impressive array of missionary literature, the committee concluded that Christianity was growing rapidly (and at the expense of Hinduism). They alleged that foreign Christians sought not only the souls of Hindus, but their political loyalty as well. Furthermore, they claimed that Christians were using their superior access to Western wealth and technological prowess, manifested primarily in their medical and educational facilities, to gain access to non-Christian Indians in order to lure, cajole, or dupe them into converting to Christianity.²⁶

The committee recommended that India send home foreign missionaries focused primarily on evangelism and counseled the drafting of laws prohibiting conversion by "force, fraud, or inducement" (or sometimes, "force, fraud, and *allurement*"). This phrase, and its attendant assumptions and implied accusations, have become a touchstone of the antimissionary movement in India, and one finds the phrase used regularly, even today, in public discourse and parliamentary discussion.

The accusation that Christianity spread primarily through force, fraud, and inducement rested on the belief that missionaries frequently leveraged their greater access to Western wealth and power — through, for example, the offers of cash, loans, legal help, medical care, or education (free or at reduced rates for Christians), and so on — to tempt or oblige non-Christians to convert. Such implicit and explicit offers had occasionally been made in earlier eras of missionary work. But the assertion that they were widespread was outdated even in the 1950s and is even more so today (though a "new breed"²⁷ of well-funded, aggressively evangelistic, mostly independent evangelical and Pentecostal Indian missionaries has returned, to some extent, to missionary tactics long ago abandoned by mainstream Protestants and Catholics).

At the most fundamental level, the phrase expresses concern that the contemporary religious playing field is uneven, and that the superior wealth and power of the Western world tilt the competition in favor of religions, including Christianity, that are popularly associated with it (even if illegitimately so). Such concerns led the Niyogi Committee members to recommend a ban on conversion by force, fraud, and allurement and inspired a series of state laws (most of which are euphemistically called "Freedom of Religion" laws) enacting the proposed ban in Odisha (1967), Madhya Pradesh (1968), Arunachal Pradesh (1978), and elsewhere.²⁸ Lawmakers proposed similar policies at the national level three times (in 1954, 1960, and 1978) but failed each time to gain the support necessary for passage.²⁹

Odisha's "Freedom of Religion Act, 1967," which became the model for others, prohibits "conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means and for matters incidental thereto." While the act defined "conversion" in a relatively straightforward manner, it left spacious room for interpretation in its definitions of "force," "fraud," and "inducement." Force, for example, included "threat of divine displeasure or social excommunication." By definition, then, conversions resulting from Christian preaching about the judgment of God on sinners would be illegal. "Fraud" was defined vaguely, and in a circular fashion, as "misrepresentation or any other fraudulent contrivance." Similarly, a broad definition of "inducement," as "the offer of any gift or gratification, either in cash or in kind and shall also include the grant of any benefit, either pecuniary or otherwise," left substantial margin for interpretation. Was the offer of Christian fellowship, for example, an inducement? The promise of life within a community that (rhetorically, at least) proclaimed the equal dignity of all people? Acts of charity for the poor, even if offered to all religious people, and without any explicit strings attached? Other so-called freedom of religion laws suffered from similar ambiguities.

While to our knowledge no one has ever been successfully prosecuted under these laws, they are frequently used to harass the Indian Christian community. In fact, attacks on Christians often end only when their attackers haul them to the police, who book the victims for "forcible conversion" at the instigation of attackers. While the charges are almost inevitably dropped, Christians often are jailed for several hours, days, or even months or are forced to pay bribes or bail to secure their release.³⁰

Since the acts include language that was rejected by the Constituent Assembly and did not appear in the constitution, they were challenged almost immediately in court. The High Courts of Odisha struck down that state's law, but its counterpart in Madhya Pradesh upheld its equivalent, and eventually, the Supreme Court of India was called upon to reconcile the verdicts in the case of *Stanislaus vs. The State of Madhya Pradesh*, which was decided in January of 1977. The Supreme Court

upheld the ruling of Madhya Pradesh's High Court, and the constitutionality of the acts themselves. While the Christians who argued in favor of the right to propagate before the Constituent Assembly no doubt assumed it included the right to convert others, the Supreme Court distinguished between propagation and conversion. What the constitution's article 25 grants, the Court argued:

is not the right to convert another person to one's own religion, but to transmit or spread one's religion by an exposition of its tenets ... there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one's own religion because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion ... that would impinge on the "freedom of conscience" guaranteed to all the citizens of the country alike.³¹

As a result, therefore, there remains in India no nationally guaranteed right to seek the conversion of another person intentionally. Practically, decisions with respect to the constitutional right to "propagate" are made on the ground, by local legislatures. At the very least, the decision returned in *Stanislaus vs. The State of Madhya Pradesh* paved the way for the drafting of new state laws proscribing conversion, which several states have since done.

SOURCES AND SEVERITY OF PRESSURES ON THE INDIAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

As indicated, though these laws have rarely, if ever, been used successfully to prosecute Christian pastors, evangelists, or missionaries, the ambiguous definitions they deploy for terms like "fraud" and "allurement" have allowed for the frequent legal harassment of ordinary Christians. While the Indian constitution therefore appears, *prima facie*, to enshrine a relatively expansive degree of religious freedom, including the freedom to "propagate" one's religion, the Supreme Court's decision to distinguish the right to *convert another* from the right to propagate has effectively restricted that freedom. (Whether the right to convert another *should* be protected is of course another matter.) The restriction is manifested legally in the Court's refusal to assert that the right to convert another is a fundamental right. It is also apparent socially in the fact that India's history of judicial tergiversation and legal ambiguity has created a good deal of confusion, which, combined with the uneven and sometimes compromised application of the law, makes space for abuse and the use of existing laws to harass Christians.

If the lack of full freedom to proselytize represents one form of pressure on India's Christians (at least on the evangelistic among them), and its "Freedom of Religion" laws represent a second (again, at least on expansionist Christian communities), then India's reservation system supplies yet a third. The Indian constitution allows for positive forms of discrimination akin to affirmative action on behalf of India's

minority communities. And since independence, Indian legislatures, both national and at the state level, have preserved reservations for minority communities in legislatures, civil service, and educational institutions. Among the groups favored by the reservation system are members of India's lower castes ("Scheduled Castes," or SC) and tribes ("Scheduled Tribes," or ST). A presidential order in 1950 stipulated that "no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of a scheduled caste." And later rulings further clarified that Sikhs and Buddhists were, for these purposes, to be considered "Hindu." (No such stipulations were placed on ST identity.)

The argument in favor of the presidential order has been that officially, at least, Christians do not recognize caste, and, therefore, that low-caste converts to Christianity should no longer be considered low caste. Opponents of the order have pointed out that many SC converts to Christianity continue to suffer prejudice due to their low-caste status, at the hands of both Hindus *and* other Christians, and have argued, therefore, that that SC converts to Christianity deserve continued access to SC reservations. At the root of the issue, of course, lie unresolvable debates about whether caste is a *Hindu* or *Indian* social product.

What this means, in practice, is that SC converts to Christianity lose access to the politically and financially important reservations they enjoy before conversion. The reservation system, then, constitutes a kind of disincentive for SC Hindus to convert to Christianity.³² No doubt some who might have been inclined to convert refuse to do so for this very reason. For similar reasons, a large number of SC Hindus who do convert to Christianity refuse to acknowledge their conversion formally and continue to register themselves as Hindu in order to protect their access to reservations. This widespread dissimulation has itself been the source of significant tension between India's Christians and Hindus. The anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal, Odisha (on which, more later), was fueled in part by tensions related to the issue.³³

India's legal system therefore puts direct and indirect pressure on, or disprivileges, its Christian community (or at least its *evangelistic* Christian community) in at least three ways. As indicated, legal harassment often accompanies, or extends and exacerbates, the hardship of physical assault. Thus, to the three forms of pressure exerted on the Indian Christianity community enumerated earlier, we must add a fourth: violent attack. The violence that India's Christians experience falls primarily into two broad categories: 1) what we might call "everyday" attacks and 2) large-scale riot violence. In what follows, we briefly describe each of these in turn.

In the postcolonial era, India's Christians have never experienced the kind of violence that India's Muslims have endured. Indeed, from independence until the late 1990s, attacks on Christians were relatively rare. According to United Christian Forum for Human Rights (UCFHR) estimates, for example, only thirty-two cases of violence against Christians were officially registered between 1964 and 1996. In 1997,

though, UCFHR noted fifteen cases, and in 1998, astoundingly, the number jumped to ninety.³⁴ Between 1998 and 2007, the number of cases reported in the media rose to their current levels of around 250 to 300 attacks a year.³⁵ Our own fieldwork suggests these figures may even underestimate the frequency of anti-Christian attacks. We call these attacks "everyday" not to diminish their effects or severity, but rather to highlight the fact that they are, in a very literal sense, quite nearly a daily occurrence. Moreover, they are "everyday" in the sense of being routine or unremarkable. They are also *routinized*, even stylized.

Most of the everyday attacks target pastors, preachers, and evangelists (and their followers), sometimes in their own churches but more often while they are at work on the streets, in vacation Bible schools, or in the homes of converts or potential converts. In the usual pattern, a small group or mob of people identified by the victims as "Hindu nationalists," or members of the "Sangh Parivar," "BJP," "RSS," "Bajrang Dal," or "VHP," approaches the victims and accuses them of fraudulent or "forcible" conversion. The hostile group then proceeds to steal, destroy, or dispose of any evangelistic media in the victims' possession (along with the means of transportation – e.g., bikes, motorcycles – that allows them to travel for evangelical purposes). Next, the mob begins slapping, punching, kicking, and dragging the victims, sometimes halfheartedly, and at other times with vigor and reckless violent abandon, even mirth. The everyday attacks are only very rarely fatal, but the victims commonly receive injuries that require hospitalization. Frequently, they are then kidnapped or otherwise transported against their will to another village, or to a police station, where they often find that charges have already been registered against them (charges that almost never lead to prosecution, let alone conviction). The victims who are taken to a police station often find little protection there, and many are interrogated by the police or incarcerated for a few hours or days "for their own protection" (which in some cases may in fact be true but is often nothing more than an excuse for illegal detainment).

Whereas the "everyday" violent attacks on Indian Christians tend to target specific people or communities, the anti-Christian riots tend to be more widespread and generalized. Already in the 1980s there were occasional communal riots involving Christians. The best known and most significant of these originated in Mandaikadu village, in the southernmost coastal district of Kanyakumari (Tamil Nadu). During a popular local Hindu temple festival in 1982, rumors spread that some Christian men had molested Hindu women taking their ritual baths. Tension spread between Christians and Hindus in the location, and police intending to quiet the conflict ended up firing into a crowd and killing at least six Christians. The violence then spread to surrounding villages in the weeks afterward. At least two more persons were killed in subsequent police interventions, and another person died in Hindu-Christian clashes in the village of Kovalam, while hundreds more

were injured. Christians and Hindus alike were affected by the violence; churches, temples, schools, and convents were destroyed, and many wells were poisoned. In Pollamthurai village alone the homes of more than six hundred Catholic fisher folk were destroyed, along with valuable fishing equipment. Officially, nine Christians died in the attacks, though many believe the number to be higher. Though official figures include no Hindus among the dead, many witnesses allege that several Hindus were also killed by rioting Christians.³⁶ The Mandaikadu riots seemed an aberration to many at the time. Indeed, it was not until Christmas in 1998, in the Dangs, Gujarat, that another similar riot occurred. This time, the violence was more one-sided and targeted tribal converts to Christianity. Though none lost their lives in the attacks, rioters destroyed dozens of Christian homes, schools, and places of worship over the span of several days.

Though the "everyday" incidents of anti-Christian violence continued apace in the intervening years, no large-scale riots occurred again until the day before Christmas, in 2007, when violence erupted in Kandhamal, Odisha. Though not the first incident in the violence, an early altercation between Christians and the traveling entourage of Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati (a beloved but controversial Hindu leader known for his social and religious work among local tribal peoples, his promotion and defense of Hinduism, and his criticism of Christian evangelism) galvanized anti-Christian activists in the region and probably ensured that the riots would spread farther, and last longer, than might have otherwise been the case.

The 2007 Kandhamal violence lasted for a few days, but then broke out again eight months later, in August of 2008, after the swami was assassinated in cold blood while celebrating Krishna's birthday in his ashram, surrounded by followers (several of whom were also killed). Naxalites, the violent Maoist revolutionaries at work in large swaths of rural India, claimed responsibility, but many of the swami's followers believed Christians had carried out the attack, either alone or in league with the Naxalites. As a result, they unleashed a series of devastating assaults on Christians, Christian neighborhoods, and Christian villages. During the two rounds of violence, at least fifty people lost their lives; dozens were beaten, shot, stabbed, molested, and raped; and thousands lost their homes. At the height of the second round of violence, around 30,000 Christians were in refugee camps spread throughout the region, a number that is particularly striking given that the most recent census figures suggest that there are only around 117,000 Christians in the entire district.³⁷ Afterward, violence occurred in other states, especially in and around Mangalore and Bangalore (both in the state of Karnataka). Though most of the victims were Christian, many Hindus were also attacked and driven out of their homes. Some became refugees themselves; others lost their lives. In one attack in Kandhamal alone, a Christian mob destroyed 120 Hindu homes.

National Sangh spokespersons portrayed the anti-Christian violence as a natural (if regrettable) and therefore, in their view, at least somewhat justifiable response to Christian evangelizing and "conversion activities." On the other hand, local observers more frequently understood the attacks as a result of the sinister and concerted exploitation, by Sangh activists and local Oriya traders,³⁸ of economic competition between the mostly Christianized, somewhat more financially successful SC Pana community and the largely un-Christianized, less developed ST Kandha community. These observers also attributed the attacks to political tensions arising from the Pana community's attempt to have itself reclassified as an ST, for reasons articulated previously.³⁹

It is difficult to account for the rise in anti-Christian violence since the end of the 1990s. Some have linked it to the growing strength of the BJP, which gained greater power at the center, and in many individual states, in the elections of 1998 (but which had by 2004 relinquished many of those same gains).⁴⁰ Others have suggested that the Sangh turned its attention to Christians after concluding that its anti-Muslim agenda was no longer reaping the same political rewards.⁴¹ Others have noted that 1998 was the year that Sonia Gandhi, the Italian- and Catholic-born widow of a former Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, took control of the more secularist Congress Party, making it attractive for the Congress Party's rivals to promote and perpetuate suspicions about the "foreign" religion of Christianity. Still others have suggested the rise in anti-Christian rhetoric and violence might represent an offended response to the quite public targeting of India's Hindus by Christian evangelical and missionary groups (as exhibited, for example, by "AD2000" and the "Joshua Project").⁴² We have ourselves suggested elsewhere that the rise in anti-Christian violence is perhaps at least partially related to the increasing force of globalization in 1990s India, of which Christians are often perceived to be patsies, and for which they seem to stand, in the minds of many, as proxies.⁴³

Whatever the immediate causes, what makes it possible that India's Christians could become the focus of antiminority sentiment and violence is the widespread, anxiety-producing perception that Christianity is an ever-expansionist religion with strong political and cultural allegiances to the West. Critics argue that Christianity, if left unchecked, could threaten the current hierarchical social and cultural structures, and even the political integrity of the Indian nation, as it is believed to be doing among the separatist movements in India's Northeast. (The fact that members of these separatist movements have sometimes had Christian roots contributes to the widely held public perception that they operate with the tacit or even direct support of local Christians and Christian institutions.) While few Indians actively advocate restrictions on conversion in contemporary India, and while fewer still participate in violence against India's Christians, the concerns of those who do are quite widely

shared. For this reason, public condemnation of anti-Christian rhetoric, activity, and violence is often not as negative or forceful as one might expect, and this muted response contributes to its perpetuation.

EFFECTS OF THESE PRESSURES

If the lack of a forceful public denunciation of anti-Christian activism accounts, at least partly, for its survival and growth, so too does another, less obvious fact: Anti-Christian activism *works*. Criticisms of Christian thought, practice, and especially evangelism have provoked profound transformations in Indian Christian life and practice. Insofar as the criticisms have been civil, we might celebrate these transformations as the positive result of public debate in an open, democratic society. After all, it is through public contestation that societies attempt to achieve consensus about the good and socialize their members in accordance with collective notions of appropriate behavior. But the very uncivil legal harassment of Christians and the violence committed against them have *also* worked, and here neutral observers may have more reason for concern. In what follows, we briefly articulate a number of tangible effects of anti-Christian activism in India, grouped into three major categories: 1) demographic effects; 2) theological, liturgical, and evangelistic effects; and 3) political effects.

Demographic Effects

The primary demographic effect of anti-Christian activism has been the internal migration of Christians from areas where they are a threatened minority to places where they are no longer, or not as acutely, threatened (e.g., larger urban centers, or villages, cities, districts, and states where Christians constitute a majority). While we suspect that the everyday incidents of anti-Christian violence subtly support the out-migration of Christians from hostile regions, it is in the wake of the Kandhamal riots that we see the demographic effects of anti-Christian violence most clearly. Because of continued harassment, lost employment or educational opportunities, and threats of violence after the riots, many Christians who fled to refugee camps during the Kandhamal violence had trouble resettling in their home villages. Because of these challenges, many Christians in Kandhamal decided to resettle outside the region. A good number migrated to Bhubaneswar, the capital and largest city of Odisha, for jobs and security. Others left the state entirely, moving to nearby urban centers such as Bangalore, or to states, like Kerala and Tamil Nadu, more hospitable to Christians. If one of the goals of those who perpetrate anti-Christian harassment and violence is to Hinduize local geographies, then it is clear that the riots worked spectacularly. Kandhamal today is a much more Hindu space than it

was in 2007;⁴⁴ one report suggests that as many as twenty-five thousand Christians were permanently displaced from the region as a result of the riots.⁴⁵

Theological, Liturgical, and Evangelistic Effects

The effects of anti-Christian activism on Christian life and practice are more complex. Since the colonial period, Christian-Hindu debates have caused at least some European missionaries and Indian Christians to reconsider their prior belief in the exclusive soteriological efficacy of Christianity, whereas interacting with Hindus merely confirmed and entrenched the theological exclusivism of others. Additionally, Indian complaints about the putative "foreignness" of convert culture, worship, and theology were no doubt at least partially responsible for the Christian theological and liturgical innovations (e.g., "indigenization" and "acculturation") that began in earnest in the 1960s.⁴⁶ Moreover, it is equally clear that the lack of enthusiasm for direct evangelism shown by contemporary mainstream Indian Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians is related to their desire to maintain their status as respectable communities in predominantly Hindu India (though in this case the shift in focus from evangelism to social transformation also reflects theological and missiological trends among liberal Christians worldwide).

The same impulse that led some Indian Christians to seek theological connections with their non-Christian neighbors prompted them, after the escalation of anti-Christian violence, to seek more practical connections as well. In the aftermath of the religious violence in Karnataka in 2008, for example, Catholic bishops in the state made friendly visits to Hindu and Muslim places of worship and joined hands with Hindu swamis at Pejavar Matt in a rally against land mining. Other groups, such as the Catholic Sabha in Mangalore, have focused on making Christian celebrations including Christmas more welcoming to non-Christians and now sponsor interfaith meetings highlighting the values that Christians hold in common with non-Christians during the season. Such efforts reflect a significant change in the attitude of many Christians toward non-Christians, a change made explicit by the Catholic archbishop of Bangalore, Bernard Moras, who told us:

Building up bridges and developing respect for each other is true evangelization. That is the kingdom which the Lord expected us to build. [The] Lord has not said, "convert everyone." [Rather, he said go] and proclaim the kingdom of peace, justice, and solidarity, where all can respect and all can live together. This I personally feel is today's evangelization.... Your relationship is evangelization. Your whole life is evangelization. Removing those barriers that exist among us is evangelization. Barriers do exist among us: barriers with other religions, barriers with other denominations, barriers with the non-believers⁴⁷

Interreligious engagements like these described by the archbishop function not only to build good relationships between different religious communities but also to give visibility to existing interreligious harmony and interaction in India.

Since the 1990s, as a response to negative perceptions of their ministries, many religious communities have also begun to reconceive of their ministerial function. For example, our conversation partners in both Odisha and Karnataka insisted that Christians needed to become more inclusive, particularly in their provision of social service. Because of the violence, said one, "We make sure that every deserving person, irrespective of religion, becomes the beneficiary of our humanitarian aid. We have given aid to everyone for the construction of [homes] so that there is no jealousy on the part of the Hindu Dalits⁴⁸ and tribals against Christian Dalits and thus they cannot be easily persuaded to attack Christians by the Hindu radicals."⁴⁹ Similarly, we observed in the violence-affected village of Letingia (Kandhamal) that a Christian agency had funded the construction of a community prayer hall in which symbols of different religious traditions were visible, and on the walls of which quotations from non-Christian leaders such as the Dalit rights activist B. R. Ambedkar were inscribed. Archbishop Moras indicated his support for such efforts:

I always tell priests, "You are parish priests for everyone within the parish – maybe in a different sense but all [of them] are your parishioners, Catholics as well as non-Catholics, Hindus, Muslims and everyone.... We have to build bridges wherever it is possible so that these attacks will stop.... If you don't tackle issues you can't come together... it can be the cleanliness, water supply, road maintenance, children's education, power supply or poverty. Leave out religion. Form committees [that can] tackle the issues."⁵⁰

The evidence suggests that many Christians, and particularly Catholics in areas where Christians have been attacked, have taken the archbishop's advice to heart.

Since the 1990s, even evangelical and Pentecostal Christians have altered the way they evangelize in response to the increasingly bellicose responses of Hindus. Until the 1990s, open-air preaching in public spaces (including Hindu religious sites), often with megaphones or other amplification systems, was not at all uncommon, and evangelists in an earlier era could expect to have friendly conversations and debates with their interlocutors. But since the 1990s, largely as a result of Hindu agitation, most Christians have adopted a less antagonistic approach. In fact, Richard Howell, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India, told us that almost nobody engages in public street preaching anymore because of fear of being physically assaulted. Open-air preaching, or what we might refer to as "cold-call" evangelism, has been largely replaced by evangelistic techniques that include "Web evangelism," "friendship evangelism," and "care cell evangelism," which emphasize utilizing networks of friendship and family ties, and evangelizing only to those who

have invited the evangelist to do so. Other changes are also apparent. For example, in Karnataka, as elsewhere, the Church of South India now requires converts to sign and register an official affidavit, complete with name, signature or thumbprint, and picture, indicating that they have decided to become Christian without any inducement and of their own free will.

Without exception, Christians with whom we conversed indicated that the growing hostility of those affiliated with the Sangh Parivar was responsible for these and other changes. However, our Christian conversation partners were divided on the question of whether the changes should be considered positive or negative. Some clearly considered the earlier, freer evangelistic era the "good old days." Among those who speak ruefully of the good old days is a small subset that refuses to adjust to the new normal and that continues to engage in more aggressive forms of evangelism. For some, in fact, doing otherwise would be an act of apostasy, a failure to carry out what they construe as their Christian obligation to witness openly, regularly, and broadly. Any decent evangelist, the leader of a large Indian missions association told us, should be "going out and getting some slaps." It is clear, then, that for at least some Indian Christians what others might call "persecution" and "martyrdom" functions as a confirmation that they are acting in accordance with Christ's dictates. Those who understand their Christian duty in this way interpret their experiences as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies foretelling resistance to the spread of the gospel. In short, some Christians have maintained an assertive, public style of evangelism, while others have adapted their evangelistic methods to a more hostile social setting – perhaps even to the point of avoiding evangelism altogether. Disagreements over evangelistic methods have divided the Christian community, and the resultant disunity has left all Indian Christians more vulnerable to attack and marginalization.

Political Effects

Hindu resistance to evangelism and, in some cases, to Indian Christians' free and open worship has forced Christians to fight for their rights of religious freedom. Doing so has transformed them into active political citizens of the Indian nation. Stories told by those we conversed with in both Odisha and Karnataka provide many examples of the ways that Christians have tried, through political means and action in civil society, to overcome their victimhood and to assert their rights as legitimate citizens of India. One of the effects of recent violence against India's Christians in these contexts, therefore, has been to turn them from a state of quiescence into a more active political force.

Christians employed a variety of strategies to put pressure on state governments to act on their behalf in the context of anti-Christian violence. They engaged in

demonstrations and strikes, which brought the normal, day-to-day functioning of civil society to a halt. They transformed their church premises into hubs of political activity, and their church altars into podiums for political speeches. They enlisted support from opposition parties (both Odisha and Karnataka were governed, at the time of the violence, by the BJP and its allies/affiliates). They enlisted support from other minorities, and from Muslims in particular. They joined hands with secular-minded Hindus. They used strong language in their dealings with state authorities. They engaged cautiously in dialogue with leaders of the very same Hindu nationalist groups that had attacked them, as well as with those in charge of law and order (some of whom had been complicit in the violence). They used their networks to nationalize and internationalize the issue, in order to bring outside pressure to bear on their state and national governments.

Though India's Christians had never been completely dormant in the political domain, the experience of violence stimulated new activities and catalyzed many of the community's previously unknown or underutilized political capacities. Many of our interlocutors believed that India's Christian leaders had been rather politically inactive and naïve until the 1990s, when they realized that they could no longer afford to be neutral or indifferent in the face of mounting anti-Christian rhetoric and violence. According to the famous Catholic theologian Felix Wilfred:

Unlike [the] independence struggle [in which they were politically active], Indian Christians in post-independence India ... participated less and less in debating and discussing issues that concerned the nation and its people. The kind of debates and discussions that Christians [had previously] engaged in ... did not take place any more in Christian communities in post-independence India. This only indicates that "Christians" were becoming more and inward looking.⁵⁴

Since the 1990s, however, Indian Christian behavior has changed, and not just in Karnataka and Odisha.

One of the most obvious, earliest, and concrete Christian political responses to the experience of violence was the formation of interdenominational networks and alliances. A whole range of such networks were founded or – in the case of those created earlier – became more active or proactive after the late 1990s. The United Christian Forum for Human Rights is perhaps the most powerful and best known. But many other similar, smaller state and regional networks or associations emerged around the same time as well. These organizations reflect the perceived need of Christians to be strongly united and supportive of one another in the face of religious violence and in order to withstand the threats and attacks of radical Hindu groups more effectively.

A secondary effect of these organizations has been to increase the ecumenical spirit among India's Christians. In the context of these new organizations, mainline

churches, evangelical groups, and individual pastors joined together, began to know one another, and agreed upon certain common strategies and guidelines for their Christian practice and proclamation. In places such as Bangalore, such groups began to meet once a month for workshops or seminars on noncontroversial topics such as the Lord's Prayer, the concept of salvation, and how most appropriately to communicate the Christian message to non-Christians. These groups also deliberated on matters of concern to Christians more generally and submitted memoranda to the Karnataka government on various issues, including a successful demand for the release of a Christian minority fund of around about 500 million rupees to be used for the reconstruction of churches and in the support of struggling Christians in the state.⁵²

The Catholic hierarchy has been hesitant to engage in highly political issues, and the Catholic Bishops Conference of India's (CBCI) official appeal, just before the general elections in 2009, for the electorate to vote for a party that would promote secularism was a rare intervention. Nevertheless, the hierarchy has pursued certain strategies to help address the reality of the violence and harassment experienced by Catholics and other Christians. For example, a new portfolio of "public relations officer" (PRO) has been created in the diocesan administration and staffed with priests. The role of the office is to communicate Christian opinions and concerns to the public clearly and accurately and to build rapport with local politicians and law enforcement officers. Such PROs have been established both in Delhi, India's administrative capital, and in areas of conflict, including Bhubaneswar (Odisha), Bangalore, and Mangalore.⁵³

If the Catholic hierarchy has been reticent in engaging the structural aspects of anti-Christian violence, the Catholic laity have not, and in this regard the lay-led All India Christian Council (AICC) and All India Catholic Union (AICU) merit special mention. These two organizations have been active not only on political issues of concern to Christians, but also in advocating and supporting secular governance in India more generally. Formed in 1999, the AICC has emerged today as a significant voice in contemporary Indian politics. The AICC alliance cuts across denominational barriers to counter the growing violence and threats against Christians but also speaks out on behalf of other minorities and oppressed castes (regardless of their religious affiliation). The organization seeks "to pursue proactive and not just reactive actions to help the Christian community and other minorities, as well as Dalits, tribals and backward communities." As of early 2006, the AICC membership included more than five thousand associations, federations, denominations, institutions, NGOs, mission agencies, and Christian lay leaders. The AICC frequently cooperates with civil liberties and human rights groups and leaders. It also networks with Indian associations abroad, as well as with international

human and Christian rights groups such as the Dalit Freedom Network and Christian Solidarity Worldwide.⁵⁴

Whereas the AICC seeks to be ecumenical in outlook, the AICU is purely Catholic by definition and has a much longer history, having been formed in 1930. The organization's Web site claims that it reflects the aspirations of India's "1.6 crore [16 million] Catholic [l]aity active in more than 160 dioceses spread across the country," and states:

[The] AICU is the forerunner in all legitimate causes for Catholics in India. Its prime aim is to protect [the] national, political and social interest[s] and rights of the Catholics. [It has fought] against [the] Niyogi Committee Report, O. P. Tyagi Bill in 1978, Kerala Education Bill, [and the Freedom of Religion Act] of Orissa State, which were intended to infringe the rights of the Christians in the [c]ountry.⁵⁵

Gradually, the AICU, as has the AICC, has become more involved in broader political issues, including advocacy on behalf of India's marginalized northeasterners and Muslims.

The local manifestation of the AICU in Mangalore, the Catholic Sabha, played a major role after the violence. The Catholic Sabha was particularly instrumental in unifying and getting out the Christian vote in the 2009 postviolence Karnataka state elections, in which the state's Christians joined with their Muslim neighbors and secular-minded Hindus to defeat the BJP in seven of eight constituencies in the Mangalore region.⁵⁶ Catholic clergy in Karnataka also cooperated to ensure the full participation of the Catholics under their care in the elections by suspending all church activities except the daily mass on that day. The local bishop sent a circular to every Karnataka parish, appealing to Catholics to exercise their voting rights. Later, when an official report on the unrest in Karnataka seemed, from a Christian perspective, to absolve those culpable for the violence in Karnataka, the Catholic Sabha organized a massive silent rally and sent a detailed memorandum to the government urging it to disregard the report.

Historically, one of the most effective ways for Christians to register their concerns (as well as their contributions to civil society) has been to unite in closing down their educational institutions in order to pressure social and government actors to meet their demands. This tactic has been deployed particularly in South India, and it was among the most dramatic of the national Indian Christian community's responses to the violence in Kandhamal. The strategy has become somewhat less effective in recent years, however, with the emergence of many high-standard non-Christian private schools. Moreover, shutting down schools has sometimes provoked a backlash, since schoolchildren typically bear no responsibility for the injustices the school closings intend to protest. Thus, the closures appear to punish the innocent.

If Christian political responses to the community's marginalization, harassment, and experiences of violence have been externally controversial at times, they have also not always enjoyed the full support of all Christians. The vast majority of Indian Christians interpret the current situation as a "kairological moment," that is, a moment of opportunity, given by God, for Christians to stand firm for their faith and to be ready even for "martyrdom." Nonetheless, a small minority of Christian intellectuals sees matters differently. While they sympathize with Christians who are the unfortunate victims of religious violence, they regard the rise of anti-Christian sentiment as an occasion for introspection. They perceive the social hostilities as an opportunity for Christians to give up their parochial mind-set in order to engage more wholeheartedly in dialogue with adherents of other religions, civil society groups, and secular forces. These intellectuals would like Christians to focus attention on issues that affect the nation and its people generally (and not merely on those pertaining to Christians and their ostensible "rights").

There are some signs that Christians are becoming less parochial in their political thinking, as in their advocacy for Muslim and not-necessarily-Christian tribal and dalit rights in India, as described previously. Yet even this kind of advocacy can be easily dismissed, by critics, as more evidence of Indian Christians' putatively consistent antimajority and anti-Hindu stance. Though attacks on Christians have generated internal unity and strengthened the relationship of Christians and Muslims, they have had the equally momentous effect of creating greater suspicion, among Christians, of their Hindu neighbors – something that our conversations suggest has happened in both Odisha and Karnataka.

Christians have also attempted to build alliances and goodwill through efforts that cut across the majority/minority divide. For example, Christian involvement in land rights and antiexploitation movements has increased substantially since the 1990s. As one of our informants put it, "Earlier, Christians were not protesting against the displacement of people due to special economic zones. But now there are active protests. Why? Because, when we are attacked, we need [the] other's support. When somebody else is affected or attacked, they need our support. That realization has come now."⁵⁷ For similar reasons, many Christians have become more active in promoting regional languages. The Catholic magazine *Rakno*, for example, promotes the Konkani language, a cause supported not only by Christians and Muslims in the area around Mangalore, but also by the (Hindu) Goud Saraswath Brahmin community.⁵⁸

If the increasing harassment of India's Christians has provoked them to become more active in Indian politics, it has also stirred them to seek and nurture stronger connections with international partners. For example, in addition to its partnerships with international organizations including Christian Solidarity Worldwide (UK) and the Dalit Freedom Network (Australia, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom,

and United States), which we have already mentioned, the AICC works closely with Stefanus Alliance International (Norway) and Release International (UK). Christian rights groups have also become increasingly sophisticated in their dissemination of information about attacks on Christians. For example, John Dayal, the general secretary of AICC, and Ajay Singh, director of Odisha Forum for Social Action, played a major role in shaping the report on Freedom of Religion or Belief authored by United Nations special rapporteur Asma Jahangir after her mission to India in the wake of violence in Odisha and Karnataka in 2008. These individuals also subsequently prepared a Joint Stakeholders' Report for the United Nations Human Rights Council for its Universal Periodic Review 2012.⁵⁹

The internationalization of India's religious freedom issues by Indian Christians has had mixed results. On the one hand, many critics of Christianity in India consider it further proof of the "denationalization" and "foreign loyalties" of India's Christians. Detractors see in the intervention of the United Nations and Western Christian and Dalit rights organizations yet another instance of Western (white, Christian) neocolonialism. Nevertheless, the internationalization of these issues has also borne some results. Since India is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it can be pressured and called to account by international bodies with regard to its record on religious freedom and human rights. As Ajay Singh indicates, "International advocacy is naming and shaming; it does not possess any power or legal status. [But] India awakens only when outside people speak about what is happening here."⁶⁰

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANS TO INDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

It is important to acknowledge, at the outset, that the relationship of Christianity and democratic liberty has historically been an inconsistent one. It cannot be denied, of course, that certain of the ideals of secular, democratic governance, as they emerged in the West, derived in significant ways from Christian ideals. Nevertheless, Christian rulers, institutions, and communities have very often failed to promote these same ideals consistently. Similarly, as Amartya Sen observes, raw materials for the development of civil society – for instance, public debate and dialogue and promotion of tolerance for those with opposing views – were present in non-Western cultures and non-Christian religious traditions such as Buddhism long before they surfaced and became institutionalized in Christianity.⁶¹

Within the context of India, the inconsistent relationship of Christianity and democratic liberty is also evident. Since the colonial period, European and Indian Christians in India have advocated religious and civil freedoms in a variety of ways. However, during the age of colonialism, the transformative potential of this

advocacy was blunted by the perceived-to-be-Christian colonial regime's selective and inconsistent application of the ideals of secular, liberal democracy. British governance was certainly not "democratic" or "secular" in any modern sense. Yet Christianity has long been associated in India with the promotion of freedom, and in particular with the promotion of religious freedom, and today's Indian Christians carry on the tradition in a variety of important ways.

We have already mentioned the role that Christians played in pressing for religious freedom in the Constituent Assembly debates. In addition, Christian magazines, newspapers, and public intellectuals have also been relatively vocal and consistent defenders of religious freedom, and of secular ideals more generally. Christian groups have also been active in promoting tolerance and coexistence among India's different religions, castes, and cultures.⁶² Many values education programs in church-run schools include modules on communal harmony and involve learning about different religious traditions.

Christian Contributions to Human Development

While Indian Christians have been strong advocates for secular governance and the rights and freedoms of minorities and the oppressed (including, in many cases, members of their own congregations), their contributions to civil society in the provision and management of health care, education, and poverty-alleviation programs are unparalleled, and totally disproportionate to the actual number of Christians in India. Soon after independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru challenged the Catholic Cardinal Valerian Gracias to "involve the Catholic Church in building up a Modern India, focusing on the areas of health, education and socio-economic development."⁶³ Similarly, Nehru asked the Methodist Bishop J. Waskom Pickett "to initiate a response from the Indian Protestant and Orthodox Churches" to the situation of the grief and agony thousands of Indians faced as a consequence of Partition.⁶⁴ Christians were, of course, already heavily involved in these fields and continued to expand their contribution in the decades that followed.

Education

According to the CBCP's 2013 *Directory*, the Catholic Church has a total of 14,148 educational institutions all over India, including 4,079 primary schools, 2,123 middle schools, 3,578 high schools, 1,782 junior colleges, 232 degree colleges, 449 professional colleges, 245 special schools, 979 preprimary schools, and 681 vocational training centers. These schools operate, more often than not, in areas of great need; two-thirds of them are located in rural and tribal areas, according to a survey

taken in 2005.⁶⁵ In Catholic educational institutions, 54 percent of the students are female, and around a fifth (according to 2005 figures) are from low-caste and tribal communities. It is clear, therefore, that the Catholic Church plays a prominent role in educating not only the urban elite, but also minorities and the downtrodden sectors of Indian society. These educational opportunities provide marginalized groups the opportunity to escape the bondage of ignorance and exploitation and open doors to social, political, and economic mobility.⁶⁶

Catholic educational institutions serve adherents of all Indian religions. In fact, Catholics and non-Catholic Christians constitute fewer than a quarter of the students in Catholic educational institutions. Catholic institutions of education have always implicitly supported secularism and religious tolerance, as they have understood it. However, in the face of mounting antiminority rhetoric and violence, many have made their support more explicit and have resisted governmental attempts to circumscribe their freedom to educate how and whom they see fit.⁶⁷

Health Care

Christians have been rendering remarkable health care service to the people of India for several hundred years. Already in 1527, Catholic Christians in Cochin had established a hospital on Indian soil, and today, India's Catholics manage 5,524 health care facilities.⁶⁸ Nearly half of the Catholic medical facilities are located in just four southern states (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala), and the Catholic Church claims that the "strong presence of the Church in the health care field has had a positive impact on the health indicators of these states."⁶⁹ In addition to providing medical therapies, particularly to those who might otherwise have difficulty accessing them, Catholic medical professionals involve themselves in grassroots mobilization efforts. Their initiatives aim at improving the health of communities through educating them and by pressing the government to recognize both citizens' rights and the government's duties and responsibilities related to issues of health and healing.⁷⁰

The Catholic Health Association of India (CHAI), founded in 1943, is the largest and best-known Roman Catholic medical association, catering in particular to the underprivileged populations of India. It boasts the support of six hundred doctor sisters, twenty-five thousand sister-nurses, and more than ten thousand paraprofessionals. CHAI includes 3,410 member institutions, among which are 484 large hospitals and 2,000 medium/small hospitals, diocesan social service societies, nursing schools, and leprosaria. The contribution of CHAI to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment initiatives has been particularly impressive; CHAI claims to have reached 700,000 people with HIV/AIDS counseling and testing services and more than 2.2 million people with awareness messages. In addition, CHAI provides care

for thousands of HIV-positive pregnant women, as well as for the families of HIV/AIDS victims and survivors.⁷¹

CHAI's Protestant/Orthodox counterpart is the Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI), which was founded in 1905 as the Medical Missionary Association and is related to the NCCI. Today, CMAI allies more than 330 Christian health institutions and more than nine thousand health professionals doing pioneering work in a variety of fields, including the treatment of leprosy, tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS. As do its Catholic counterparts, the CMAI engages not only in medical therapeutics, but also in health education and advocacy.⁷²

Poverty Alleviation

For good or ill, the destitution of India's masses has frequently been used to encourage and justify foreign evangelistic and imperialistic interventions. Christians are counseled by their scriptures to look sympathetically on the impecunious. Not surprisingly, then, Christians have for many centuries been intimately involved in Indian efforts to ameliorate the plight of the poor. Innumerable are the Christian vocational training institutions, cooperatives, development agencies, land rights organizations, and legal advocacy groups that work on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised in India. Many of these groups operate independently, as the special effort or mission of single Christians, congregations, or groups of congregations. The entrepreneurial charitable activity of the quickly multiplying evangelical, charismatic, and Pentecostal congregations is worthy of special mention in this regard.

As in the case of health care, there are also large Catholic and Protestant/Orthodox associations that focus on improving the lives of India's poor. Among these, the most important, perhaps, are Caritas India, an official body of the CBCI, and the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), the social service arm of the Protestant/Orthodox NCCI.

Human Rights

Poverty amelioration efforts blend naturally into human rights advocacy. In fact, Caritas is open about its own historical shift from an early charity model of social service, to a later welfare or needs-based model, to its current rights or empowerment-based model.⁷³ The present model seeks to promote participation in local, regional, and national political bodies and processes and to educate the marginalized and oppressed about their rights and the resources to which they can lay claim. In so doing, Caritas, and other Christian service organizations like it, contribute significantly to the development of India by transforming mere passive objects of charity into engaged, self-reliant citizens.

Indian Christian involvement in the promotion of human rights has also gained greater prominence as a result of anti-Christian violence, which has prompted Christians to conceive of the infringements upon their own religious rights within a broader, more general context of human rights for all. The AICC, and organizations like Prashant in Gujarat, have been particularly strong proponents of this view, insisting upon linking action on behalf of Christians with action on behalf of other oppressed peoples as well (particularly Dalits, tribals, and women). The circumscription of Christian rights has become, in the view of Christian human rights activists like John Dayal and Ajay Singh, a mere species (rather than the most important example) of the circumscription of fundamental human rights more generally.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would like to highlight two of the points made directly and indirectly in the foregoing analysis. The first point is that the current situation of tension between Christians and Hindus in India is *contingent*, the result of historical trajectories described at the beginning of the chapter and not in any way a necessary state. There may therefore be open paths toward amelioration. There will always be tensions between majorities and minorities, but they need not be as acrimonious as they are in contemporary India.

The susceptibility of certain segments of the Hindu population to Hindu nationalist ideologies and anxieties and the willingness of politicians to exploit this susceptibility for electoral gain are certainly important aspects of the antagonism between Hindus and minorities such as Christianity in India. Hindus themselves have a great deal of social and political control throughout India. Consequently, they bear some responsibility for the current state of affairs.

At the same time, certain aspects of Hindu-Christian antagonism are under Christian control. It is of course impossible for Christians to disentangle themselves completely from the history of European colonialism in India, or from their implication in neocolonial and globalizing processes at work today. India's Christian community undeniably has stronger contacts and relationships with Westerners than most other Indian communities, and they have benefited significantly from those relationships. Nevertheless, it remains possible for India's Christians to continue working steadily toward improving their relationships with contemporary Hindus through greater respect for the piety and devotion of their Hindu neighbors, as well as through social and political projects that are truly interfaith (and not just *interminority*) in scope.

Evangelism will continue to be a sticking point in Christian-Hindu relations until the day, which will not occur soon, when there is greater consensus among

Indians about how and in what context evangelism and conversion should be legal. It seems to us that the current debate often misses the mark and is therefore quite unproductive. "Freedom of religion" or "anticonversion" laws (depending on one's perspective) are clearly sources of social and political conflict, but not because of their actual language. Few Christians would object to the notion that conversion should not come about through force, fraud, or material inducement. What they object to, rather, is the fact that India's judicial system is so easily manipulated, particularly at the local level. In the context of a pliable judiciary, "anticonversion" laws are regularly used to harass Christians who have not engaged in activities that would fall under any *prima facie* interpretation of the language in the laws. Moreover, Christians object to the fact that terms such as "inducement" or "allurement," if left without a precise definition, could be used to justify the restriction of something so seemingly innocuous as the persuasive power of a preacher's rhetoric. Might there be a way forward, then, in Christians' seeking common ground with Hindus in their concerns about the buying and selling of converts (which, it is important to note, goes on in both directions, to *and* from both Hinduism and Christianity)? Might Christians and Hindus join to condemn conversions and reconversions that result from physical threats and coercion (as they have, most recently, in the wake of the Kandhamal riots), at the same time insisting upon greater precision in the definition and scope of the words used in these laws, and greater safeguards to ensure that they cannot be used to harass innocent Christians?

It may also be the case that interfaith dialogues within India would be more productive if Western politicians, activists, and NGOs were more selective in their interventions. When Western individuals and organizations do intervene on behalf of India's Christians, they play into and perpetuate certain stereotypes about the "foreign loyalties" of India's Christians, and the meddling, neoimperialistic tendencies of Americans and Europeans. This makes it easier for opponents of Indian Christians to portray them as a threatening, denationalized minority. Moreover, in advocating the implementation of an American (or French, or British) brand of secularism in India, many foreigners fail to recognize that secularism has many varieties. Secularism is *not* religiously neutral, and the differences between one secular republic and another quite frequently amount to exactly how far a government is willing to go in regulating religious behavior, that is, in declaring certain kinds of religion illegitimate. European and American secular governments regulate animal sacrifice, the use of psychedelic drugs in worship, marital practices, and even religious clothing and jewelry. When foreign citizens draw a firm line and insist to Indians, without providing sound argumentation, that "real" secular governments cannot and should not regulate evangelism or conversion, they sound, to many Indian observers, rather naïve and jingoistic.

The second point is one adumbrated in the introduction to this chapter, namely, that we must be careful not to assume that the harassment and violence experienced by India's Christians threaten their contribution to Indian civic life. We also must not lose sight of the fact that the nature of Christian influence on Indian society is contestable. Notwithstanding the efforts of Christian institutions in the fields of health care, education, and rights advocacy, many Hindu nationalists claim that the net contributions of the Christian community in India have negatively impacted the country. On this view, Christian tendencies toward expansionism (in the form of evangelism) and Christian activism in civil society constitute a great evil, promoting forms of modernity that undermine Hindu traditional social structures and adulterate the nation's cultural and civil life. Such a suggestion seems disingenuous for a number of reasons but should be taken seriously nonetheless.

Even if we assume that the Christian contribution to Indian society has been significantly more positive than negative, we must still avoid the temptation to assume that an Indian Christian community under rhetorical and physical attack will no longer be able to contribute in the same way. In fact, as we have seen, the attacks by Hindu nationalists on India's Christian community since the 1990s have in many ways *activated* the community politically and provoked them to increase their already substantial contributions to Indian social and political life. Instances of intimidation and violence have also caused the Christian community to refine its contributions – for example, by being more inclusive in their social service, or in their interactions with people of other faiths, and by seeking partners outside their own community – in ways that many Christians consider positive.

This is not to say, of course, that there is no reason for concern. Obviously, a genocidal movement aimed at Christians *would* threaten their contribution. Measures should be taken to defuse the already deadly tension between India's Christians and Hindus. Still, the indications are that acts of large-scale violence will continue to be sporadic and geographically limited in the near-future. Nevertheless, there remain reasons to bemoan the recent experience of India's Christians. Christians in certain parts of India live in constant fear of attack. Others have lost their lives or family members to the violence. Many more, often devastatingly poor Christians, have been made even more destitute by the paroxysms of anti-Christian violence. Still others, particularly women, have suffered sexual assault or been made to feel more vulnerable to sexual violence as a result of the attacks. This is more than reason enough to be concerned about anti-Christian harassment and violence.

The point we are making is simply that we should not presume that this harassment and violence lead also, of necessity, to the loss or retrenchment of the Indian Christian community's contribution to India's social and political spheres. In fact, in what is an otherwise relatively grim and depressing story, the resilience and

commitment of India's Christian activists, educators, medical workers, and social workers constitute at least one reason for optimism.

NOTES

- 1 Both authors would like to thank the Religious Freedom Project of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University for its support of this project. Chad M. Bauman would additionally like to thank the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at the University of Southern California and the John Templeton Foundation for a generous grant that supported earlier stages of his research.
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- 3 Ibid., 143-144; and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation* (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, 2010), 407.
- 4 The ecumenical Protestant Church of South India (CSI) was established in 1947. Its northern counterpart, the Church of North India (CNI), was founded in 1970.
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- 8 Ibid., 27, 35, 69-70, 275.
- 9 Ibid., 281-284, 460; and Ajantha Subramanian, *Shorelines: Space and Rights in South India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 73.
- 10 Bayly, *Saints*, 82-85, 88, 96-98, 252; and Subramanian, *Shorelines*, 74.
- 11 The status of the St. Thomas Christians has since rebounded, but the same is not true of many other Christian communities.
- 12 Bayly, *Saints*, 13, 292-293, 300-302; and Subramanian, *Shorelines*, 75.
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- 17 Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured Modernity: Making of a Middle Class in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 103-104; and Freitag, *Collective Action*, 46, 53-56, 80, 94-96, 125, 284.
- 18 Joshi, *Fractured*, 2-12.
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- 20 Ibid., 174-176; and Iris Vandeveld, "Reconversion to Hinduism: A Hindu Nationalist Reaction against Conversion to Christianity and Islam," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011): 34-39.

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- 24 Robert Ellsberg, ed., *Gandhi on Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 47.
- 25 Kim, *In Search*, 51–54.
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- 31 Kim, *In Search*, 79.
- 32 Mukul Kesavan, *Secular Common Sense* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001), 70–72.
- 33 For more on this violence, see Chad Bauman, "Identity, Conversion and Violence: Dalits, Adivasis and the 2007–2008 Riots in Orissa," in *Margins of Faith: Dalit and Tribal Christianity in India*, ed. Rowena Robinson and Joseph Marianus Kujur (Washington, DC: Sage, 2010).
- 34 Sushil Aaron, *Christianity and Political Conflict in India: The Case of Gujarat* (Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2002), 47.
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- 37 National Peoples Tribunal on Kandhamal, *Waiting for Justice: A Report* (New Delhi: Peace & ANHAD, 2010), 9, 28, 37, 105.
- 38 From the moment they began working in Kandhamal, Sangh Parivar activists found natural allies in the community of mostly caste Hindu Oriya traders who had earlier begun migrating into Kandhamal from the coastal regions of Odisha for business. These Oriyas sought advantageous trading relationships with the local peoples but were often accused by them of exploitation and land grabbing. By allying themselves with the Sangh

- Parivar and with willing Kandha leaders, the Oriyas could protect their economic status by deflecting such accusations onto the Christian Pana community, which was also occasionally accused of exploiting the Kandhas as they (the Panas) began to outpace them (the Kandhas) economically, and which had also begun to threaten the Oriya community's trading dominance. See PUCL (Bhubaneswar) and Kashipur Solidarity Group, *Crossed and Crucified: Parivar's War against Minorities in Orissa* (Delhi: PUCL, 2009); and Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003); and National Peoples Tribunal on Kandhamal, *Waiting*.
- 39 For more on the Kandhamal violence, see Bauman, "Identity, Conversion and Violence: Dalits, Adivasis and the 2007-08 Riots in Orissa."
- 40 For a statistical exploration of this thesis, see Bauman and Leech, "Political Competition,"
- 41 Aaron, *Christianity*, 44.
- 42 Zavos, "Conversion," 75.
- 43 Chad M. Bauman, "Hindu-Christian Conflict in India: Globalization, Conversion, and the Coterminal Castes and Tribes," *Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 3 (2013).
- 44 On the religious effects of anti-Christian riots, see Chad M. Bauman, "The Inter-Religious Riot as a Cultural System: Globalization, Geertz, and Hindu-Christian Conflict," in *Contesting Indian Christianities: Caste, Culture, and Conversion*, ed. Chad M. Bauman and Richard Fox Young (Delhi: Routledge, 2014).
- 45 National Peoples Tribunal on Kandhamal, *Waiting*, 103.
- 46 It is important to note that at least some Hindu nationalist authors perceived these efforts as a cynical evangelical ploy more than a sincere attempt to articulate an "Indian" Christianity. See Xavier Gravend-Tirole, "From Christian Ashrams to Dalit Theology – or Beyond: An Examination of the Indigenisation/Inculturation Trend within the Indian Catholic Church," in *Contesting Indian Christianities: Caste, Culture, and Conversion*, ed. Chad M. Bauman and Richard Fox Young (Delhi: Routledge, Forthcoming).
- 47 Interview with Archbishop Bernard Moras of Bangalore in Bangalore, August 1, 2013.
- 48 *Dalit* literally means "crushed, broken down," and is used today to refer to the lowest castes, what used to be called "untouchables," what Gandhi called *harijans*, and what official British and Indian bureaucratic parlance calls the "Scheduled Castes."
- 49 Interview with leaders of Jana Vikas in Nuagaon, May 29, 2013.
- 50 Interview with Archbishop Bernard Moras of Bangalore in Bangalore, August 1, 2013.
- 51 Interview with Felix Wilfred in Chennai, August 11, 2013.
- 52 Interview with Fr. Onil D'Souza in Mangalore, August 4, 2013.
- 53 Interview with Fr. Lobo in Bangalore, August 2, 2013.
- 54 For more information, see <http://indianchristians.in/news/>
- 55 See <http://aicuindia.org/history.html>
- 56 Interview with Advocate M. P. Noronha, President of Christian Lawyers Guild in Mangalore, August 5, 2013.
- 57 Interview with Fr. Onil D'Souza in Mangalore, August 4, 2013.
- 58 Interview with Fr. Francis in Mangalore, August 4, 2013.
- 59 Cf. Odisha Forum for Social Action, *Freedom of Religion in India: A Report to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the Universal Periodic Review 2012* (Bhubaneswar: Odisha Forum for Social Action, 2012).
- 60 Interview with Ajay Singh in Bhubaneswar, May 28, 2013.
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- 62 John Fernandez, "Inter-Religious Dialogue Today: Opportunities and Challenges," *Religion and Society* 52, no. 3/4 (2007).
- 63 Oswald Gracias, "Forward," in *Silent Waves: Contribution of the Catholic Church to Nation Building*, ed. John Chathanatt and Jeya Peter (Bangalore: Claretian, 2012), ix.
- 64 It is this request that gave birth to the formation of the National Council of Churches Relief Committee, which would later become the Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Cf. www.casa-india.org
- 65 Victor Sunderaj, "Educational Institutions of the Catholic Church: A Survey," in *Silent Waves: The Contribution of the Catholic Church to Nation Building*, ed. John Chathanatt and Jeya Peter (Bangalore: Claretian, 2012), 126.
- 66 Ibid., 128–129.
- 67 Kuriala Chittattukalam, *Church in India for Nation Building* (New Delhi: CBCI, 2012), 74.
- 68 Victor Sunderaj and Martina Josephine, "Medical Services of the Catholic Church in India," in *Silent Waves: The Contributions of the Catholic Church to Nation Building*, ed. John Chathanatt and Jeya Peter (Bangalore: Claretian, 2012), 139.
- 69 CBCI Commission for Health, *Sharing the Fullness of Life: Health Policy of the Catholic Church* (New Delhi: CBCI Commission for Healthcare, 2005), 10. Also, consider the following statistics: percentage of women to receive antenatal checkup in first trimester of pregnancy: these four states' average 77.9, national average 44.9; percentage of safe deliveries: these four states' average 85.5; national average 52.3; prevalence of leprosy – cases per 10,000: these four states' average .43, national average .69. This information can be found at <http://cbhidghs.nic.in/writereaddata/mainlinkFile/Health%20Status%20Indicators-2012.pdf>, pp. 109–110.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 "The Catholic Health Association of India," last modified 2014, www.chai-india.org
- 72 For more on CMAI see: <http://www.cmai.org>
- 73 H. Beck and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, *Towards Inclusive and Equitable Development: 50 Years Journey of Caritas India, 1962–2012* (Mumbai: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2012), 22.