

WORLD RELIGIONS

Week 5

HINDUISM

Founder: none; it evolved from a mixture of Indus Valley and Aryan beliefs.

Date founded: from pre-second century B.C.

Scriptures: Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita (Song of God)

Vocabulary:

Avatar – incarnation of gods

Brahma – The Creator God

Brahman – The Absolute; the cosmic force and consciousness of the universe

Brahmins – the highest caste; originally priest, now all in some high position

Dharma – religious and moral law that mirrors the eternal cosmic law; the search for truth

Karma – the debt owed to the universe for bad actions

Moksha – escape from the cycle of reincarnation (Karma eliminated by right deeds)

Nirvana – becoming one with the cosmos

Shiva – the god of blessing and destruction

Trimurti – the ‘trinity’ gods of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

Vishnu – defender god of the eternal law of the Absolute

History

Basic Beliefs

The Four Stages of Life

All paths lead to ‘God’

Karma, Caste and Reincarnation

Religious Dimensions

Experiential

Mythical

Doctrinal

Ethical

Ritual

Social

Points of Contact with Christianity:

God

The World and Humanity

Sin and its penalty

Salvation

Jesus Christ

NOTES

Questions for Discussion

1. You are on a long train journey and you find out the stranger sitting next to you is a Hindu. Upon further inquiry you find out that he looks both ways before he crosses a street, he drives his car on the left side of the road, he locks his doors at night, indication that maybe he doesn't quite believe that all is illusion. He admits there is evil in the world as well as good and is not quite sure how both could be the manifestation of one Absolute which would have to be absolute good and absolute evil. You sense that he may be beginning to doubt some of what he believes. How would you help him see the truth of Christianity and how it does match the reality in which we live?
2. Hindus believe that sin is committed against oneself, not against God. This also seems to be the prevailing view of sin in the 21st century West. This view of sin equates consequence with penalty and thereby rules out the concept of forgiveness. How would you try to convince someone of the difference between consequence and penalty and why forgiveness is necessary in all human relations as well as being the only antidote for sin?
3. How might Paul's address to the Areopagus in Acts 17: 22ff be used to witness to a Hindu?