

FCC News & Views

Fellowship Community Church exists to glorify God by loving Him, building up His children to maturity, and evangelizing the lost.

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Why Be A Christian Rather Than a Hindu? Pastor Larry Dialogs with a Grade-School Classmate: Part III

Pastor Larry — January 11, 2012

Kelsey T.:

Back on September 14, 2011, I mentioned at the end of my rather long post that there are three basic questions every worldview must answer, and they can be judged by how they answer them. These questions are: (1) Where did we come from (who is God and who are we)? (2) What has gone wrong with the world? and (3) What must be done to fix it? But before I begin my answers, allow me to make a few observations.

Preliminary Observations

Hinduism, as I understand it, divides into three main branches called Vishnusim, Shivaism, and Shaktism, followed by six main

schools of thought (dharsana) called: Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Purva Mimamsa, and Uttara. Buddhism is also regarded as a branch of Hinduism, inasmuch as Buddha is said to be the last incarnation of Vishnu. But because he so weakened Hinduism (from Hinduism's perspective) his teaching, which is still strong in other Far Eastern countries like China and Japan, is no longer found much in India. Each of the six main schools of thought emphasize salvation through either (1) the way of knowledge, (2) the way of action, (3) the way of divine love, or some combination of the three.

The problem this presents for our discussion is that it is altogether likely that I will say something about Hinduism with

which you will not agree, because it is something a branch of Hinduism holds that you are not a part of. This will require us to share more thoroughly to make sure we are talking to each other and not over or around each other. If you know which of these schools of thought you most closely ascribe to, that will certainly help me understand how best to develop my explanations and comparisons.



(Continued on page 6)

New Years Resolutions

By: Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

I never make New Year's Resolutions anymore," the man told me. "I never keep them, anyway." I can remember



all too many resolutions I've made and let slip away, too. But I believe New Year's resolutions are worth making. Let me tell you why.

First, we all need changes. Some we find very hard to admit to ourselves. I've heard people say, "I have no regrets about my life. If I had it to do

over, I'd do it the same way again." But that attitude is way too blind and self-serving so far as I'm concerned. There is great power in confession--to ourselves, to God, to others. Owning up to our failures is the first, painful step on the road to something better. Second, when we change cal-

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January 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<p><i>1</i></p> <p><i>Elders Mtg. 8a</i></p> <p><i>Happy New Year!</i></p>	<p><i>2</i></p>	<p><i>3</i></p>	<p><i>4</i></p> <p><i>Precept 9a</i></p> <p><i>AWANA 6:30p</i></p>	<p><i>5</i></p> <p><i>Iron Men 12p</i></p>	<p><i>6</i></p>	<p><i>7</i></p> <p><i>Elders Prayer & Dinner</i></p>
<p><i>8</i></p>	<p><i>9</i></p> <p><i>Cell Group at Lee's 6p</i></p>	<p><i>10</i></p>	<p><i>11</i></p> <p><i>Precept 9a</i></p> <p><i>AWANA 6:30p</i></p>	<p><i>12</i></p> <p><i>Iron Men 12p</i></p>	<p><i>13</i></p>	<p><i>14</i></p> <p><i>Nominating Committee Mtg. 10a</i></p>
<p><i>15</i></p> <p><i>Elders Mtg. 8a</i></p> <p><i>ADCOM Mtg. 3p</i></p>	<p><i>16</i></p> <p><i>Cell Group at Lee's 6p</i></p>	<p><i>17</i></p> <p><i>Women's Group 12:30p</i></p>	<p><i>18</i></p> <p><i>Precept 9a</i></p> <p><i>AWANA 6:30p</i></p>	<p><i>19</i></p> <p><i>Iron Men 12p</i></p>	<p><i>20</i></p> <p><i>Budget Committee Mtg. 12p</i></p>	<p><i>21</i></p>
<p><i>22</i></p>	<p><i>23</i></p> <p><i>Cell Group at Lee's 6p</i></p>	<p><i>24</i></p>	<p><i>25</i></p> <p><i>Precept 9a</i></p> <p><i>AWANA 6:30p</i></p>	<p><i>26</i></p> <p><i>Iron Men 12p</i></p>	<p><i>27</i></p>	<p><i>28</i></p> <p><i>Financial Stewardship Committee Mtg. 10a</i></p>
<p><i>29</i></p>	<p><i>30</i></p> <p><i>Cell Group at Lee's 6p</i></p>	<p><i>31</i></p> <p><i>Women's Group 12:30p</i></p>				

Events of Interest

Elders Meetings

Our Elders will meet Sunday, January 1st, and 15th at 8am. Elders will also be meeting for dinner and prayer Saturday, January 7th. Speak with Pastor Larry for more information.

Administrative Committee Meeting

ADCOM will meet Sunday, January 15th, at 3p. All members are asked to make plans to attend. All regular ADCOM meetings are always open to anyone in our church who would like to sit in.

Women's Group

We invite you to join us for fellowship and our quest for spiritual growth. We meet on the 1st and 3rd (the 5th also if applicable) Tuesdays of each month here at the church.

Our next meeting will be held Tuesday, January 17th. We will begin lunch promptly at 12:30p and are listening to a chapter of audio book, Get Out of that Pit by Beth Moore, at each meeting. Group usually lasts about an hour. If you have any questions please speak with Jennifer Wollaston or Andrea Hernandez

Monday Night Cell

The cell group that meets at the Lee's home on Monday evenings will resume Monday, January 9th, at 6:00pm. If you have not yet plugged in but would like to it is never too late! For more information please speak with Robert or Laura Lee.

Precept Upon Precept

How can you not study Ephesians!? Before Paul even hints at how believers should live, he lays a rock-solid foundation: who we are in Christ! If you think you're just a cog in a machine, if you don't know your true identity, then this study is for you. We will begin a study of Ephesians in January. There are 10 lessons. If you are interested, please call Renae Noe at 699-6639. We meet Wednesday mornings beginning at 9:00 a.m.

Pastor Out of the Office

Pastor Larry will be out of the office Monday January 23rd and Tuesday January 24th. They will be attending the Annual Permian Basin Prayer Summit held at Circle 6 Baptist Camp. This is to be a tremendous time to build unity as they worship and pray together with other area Pastors. You may reach the Pastor Larry by cell phone if he is needed.

Church Business:

The Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee has been sat. This year's committee is John Gould, Tricia Boyd, Richard Hernandez, Doug Van Zandt and Pastor Larry. If you have a nomination for someone that you would like to see on a certain committee you must let one of these members know before they meet on **Saturday**,

January 14th. Committee members, please mark your calendars!

Budget Committee Meeting

The Budget Committee Meeting has tentatively been set for Friday January 20th, during the noon hour.

Financial Stewardship Committee Meeting

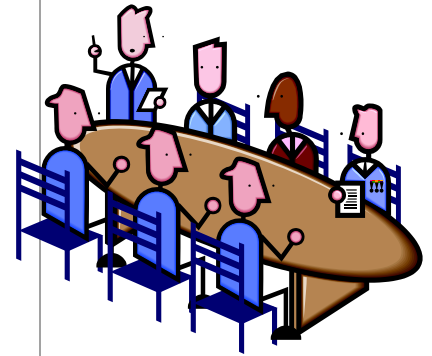
The Financial Stewardship Committee (formerly Audit Committee) will meet Saturday January 28th, at 10a.

Annual Reports

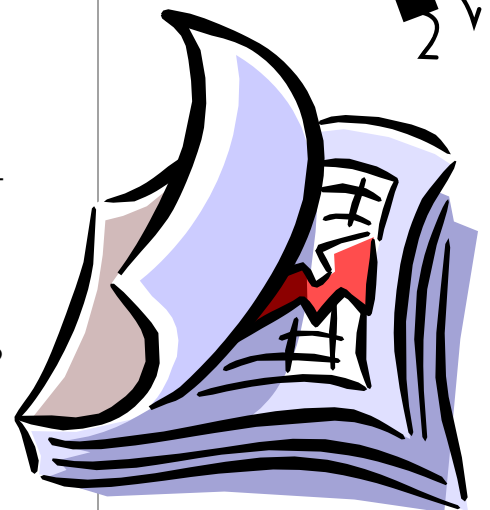
Our Annual Business Meeting is right around the corner. It is the time of year that Andrea goes crazy trying to make sure all the end of year stuff is taken care of. You could help our greatly by submitting your end of year report to the office by Friday, February 10th. Reports should be email in MS Word format if possible and sent to fccmidland@sbcglobal.net.

Annual Business Meeting

Our Annual Business Meeting will be held Sunday, February 19th, immediately following the morning worship service. *Lunch will be provided.* Please mark your calendars. All church members are strongly encouraged to stay for this very important meeting. ■



God so loved the world that He did not send a committee.



The Great

When darkness falls upon you,
and depression steps on in
when gloominess fills your
mind
and the True Light begins to
dim.

When your faith starts to crack,
under the pressures of self
doubt
and you notice you have begun
to shut the Good Word out.

When your burdens are piled
up,
and they seem to be a mile

high
when you start to question God
and you begin to ask Him ~
why.

That's when you need to trust
Him,
like you have never done be-
fore
and you must not let the enemy
enter into your heart's door.

For, Satan is the great deceiver,
he's behind every fatal
thought
and he will not be satisfied

until his every lie is bought!

~~~~~  
2 Corinthians 2:11  
"Lest Satan should get an ad-  
vantage of us:  
for we are not ignorant of his  
devices."

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TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

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endars is a good time for reassessment. How did last year go? What do I want to do differently this year? This time of year always reminds me of a passage of scripture, better understood by farmers than suburbanites: "Break up your unplowed ground, and do not sow among thorns" (Jer 4:3). It makes sense. The more land you put into production, the more prosperous you'll be. But some of us are stupid enough to try to sow seeds in land overrun by star thistle without breaking up the soil and taking care to root out the thorns as they come up. Call it laziness. Call it stupidity.

Let me ask you a serious question. What percentage of your life is producing something of value to God? How much "unplowed ground" do you have that ought to be broken up in this coming year and made useful? Reassessment. The brink of a new year is a good time for reassessment.

Third, New Year's is an excellent time for mid-course corrections. Sure, we might fail in what we set out to do, but if we fail to plan, the old saw goes,

then we plan to fail. If you're so fearful of failure that you never set up your row of tin cans to shoot at, you're not very likely to hit any at all. Failure is not the end. For the person who determines to learn from it, failure is a friend.

One of my heroes in the Bible is the Apostle Paul. Talk about failure! Throughout his life he was opposed, persecuted, shipwrecked, stoned and left for dead, deserted by trusted co-workers, slandered, and scorned. Sometimes it seemed that projects to which he had devoted years were turning to dust before his eyes. But during from one of his stints in prison, we can see from one of his letters an unwillingness to quit. "Forgetting what is behind," he wrote, "and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14, NIV) No wonder he made a mark on his world. He stopped looking back, and looked forward instead. He didn't let the fear of failure keep him from trying again.

Fourth, New Year's is a time to learn to rely more heavily on the grace of God. Now I've met

a few self-made men and women and so have you, but so often these people seem proud and driven. There is another way: beginning to trust in God's help. One more secret from the Apostle Paul: "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength," he said (Phil 4:13, NIV). And God's strength saw him through a lot--through pain, through joy, and through accomplishment.

If this last year you didn't practice relying on the Lord as much as you should have, there is no time like the present to make a New Year's resolution. In fact, why don't you say a short prayer right now--use these words if you like: "Dear God, I want the new year to be different for me." Now spell out in prayer some of the changes you'd like to see. And close this way: "Lord Jesus, I know that I'm going to need a lot of help for this. So right now I place myself in your hands. Help me to receive Your strength. Amen." Good. Now you've got a much better chance of a Happy New Year. ■

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***"If this last year, you didn't practice relying on the Lord as much as you should have, there is no time like the present to make a New Year's resolution."***



## The Pedestal Complex: Keep It Out of the Church

By: Chuck Colson

Our culture doesn't know the difference between a celebrity and a hero. Does the Church?

People used to be celebrated in our culture for accomplishing something special.

George Washington won the Revolution; Charles Lindbergh flew solo across the Atlantic; Wilma Rudolph set a world record in the 100-meter dash. Now, people are famous for, well, being famous.

That's how people like the Kardashians and Paris Hilton become celebrities. Or take the pop singer Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, otherwise known as Lady Gaga. To gather all the notoriety and money she can, the moderately talented Lady Gaga will say, sing, or do almost anything, from simulating sex in videos to blaspheming God in her songs. She was named one of the most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine. Please!

As someone who has been in the public eye for a long time — for both good and bad behavior — I can tell you that the cult of celebrity can be awkward and embarrassing. People want to get close to celebrities, no matter what they have done. That's because celebrity has little to do with worth or character or achievement. It's more about shocking people or photographing well. That's why *People* magazine relentlessly covered Princess Diana, not Mother Teresa.

Our celebrity culture not only honors the wrong people; it

actually undercuts the heroes who used to be the real celebrities — those we ought to celebrate.

No doubt you know of Tom Hanks, who starred in the movie *Saving Private Ryan*. But how about Marine Corporal Jason Dunham? He received the Congressional Medal of Honor for heroism in Iraq. On April 14, 2004, Dunham fought hand-to-hand with the enemy and threw himself on a grenade to save his fellow Marines. Dunham, just 22 years old, laid down his life for his friends. He was the first Marine since Vietnam to receive the Medal of Honor.

Now he, my friends, was a real hero. But I'll bet you seldom hear people talk about him.

Even worse, the cult of celebrity has seeped into our sanctuaries. Like the culture around us, churches too often reward the sizzle and not the steak. Too many people in the pews would rather have a celebrity in the pulpit instead of a good shepherd of souls, a good servant leader.

Not surprisingly, some pastors, certainly not the majority, become addicted to all the adulation and then try to live up to the idol we have made of them. Or worse, all the celebrity worship can make pastors feel they are above criticism and accountability. Their work for the Lord turns toxic. Like many pop celebrities, they can focus ultimately on self-aggrandizement, not on serving others.



According to theologian Os Guinness, we expect the pastor to be a shrink in the pulpit, a CEO in the office, and flawless in his family life. Heap on top of all that our desire that the pastor be a spiritual rock star, and these expectations can lead to pastoral frustration, burnout, and even financial and sexual immorality.

Is it any surprise, then, that the Church has been rocked over the last few decades by clerical scandals?

Friends, celebrity worship — in my book *Being the Body* I call it the Pedestal Complex — has no place in the Church. Let's honor and care for our spiritual leaders, of course. But let's be sure to keep them off our pedestals — for their sake and for ours. ■



*People want to get close to celebrities, no matter what they have done. That's because celebrity has little to do with worth or character or achievement. It's more about shocking people or photographing well.*



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So, having said this, let me begin with the first question.

### 1. Where Did We Come From (Who is God and Who Are We)?

This question necessarily involves the asking of two other questions: “Who is God?” and “Who are we?” This is because one cannot answer the first question without delving into the other two at least a little.

Christianity would answer these questions in the following way.

First, it would say that “In the beginning God...” This is a biblical statement that Christians believe speaks to the fact that God is eternal, and that at the beginning of the world God already existed eternally within himself and outside the limits or confines of time, so that by definition God has always existed and we have not.

Therefore, the question, “Where did God come from?” is, for a Christian, nonsensical, since God by definition has to have always been. As such, Christians believe that God has eternally existed as a personal being (as over against an impersonal force or principle) and that he will always exist without end.

According to this perspective, then, God brought out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) everything that exists by simply speaking it into existence. This happened when God said, “Let there be...” In other words, we believe God spoke this world into existence and was directly involved in the process of bringing the world as we know it into its present form.

At this point it is perhaps worthwhile to briefly mention the relation of this view to that of naturalistic evolution. As I am sure you are aware, the Christian worldview is absolutely opposed to *naturalistic evolution*, which teaches that there is no God, or, if there is, he was not in any way involved in the process of bringing about what presently exists, other than maybe starting it. Within Christianity there are those who advocate what has come to be called “Creationism,” which divides into two camps called “Young-Earth Creationism” and “Old-Earth Creationism.” On the other end of the spectrum, but still opposed to naturalistic evolu-

tion, are those who would be called “theistic evolutionists.” These believe that God may well have used evolutionary processes to accomplish his creation, but that he was directly involved in the process in at least key times and places. The Intelligent Design school of thought would predominantly be at this end of the debate. What is important to understand is that Christians are found all along this continuum, and it is only the naturalistic evolutionary position that they necessarily oppose. This is also why the Christian worldview has provided the theoretical foundation for the discovery and development of modern science. Because the world is real (as opposed to an illusion), and because it is not divine, it can be poked and prodded and measured and subjected to all sorts of tests that, rather than becoming an affront to God, bring honor and glory to God. This is far different from the Hindu worldview, and helps to explain why it has not contributed much to the growth of scientific knowledge in our world until more recently as it has become more secularized.

### “Who is God?” Can Be Partially Answered by Stating Why He Created in the First Place

Why did it happen? Why, from a Christian perspective, did God create? It happened because God is a relational being within himself (trinity) and desires (loves) to create other beings who can relationally dwell with him in eternity.

Hinduism, on the other hand, would describe God (Brahman) less as a Person with whom we can have a relationship than as a Principle of Ultimacy that constitutes all reality, including time. As such, time is perceived in terms of cycles that repeat, rather than in the linear understanding of the Judeo-Christian worldview that has a beginning and an end (goal). Brahman participates in (and even constitutes the very nature of) these cycles through various manifestations of deity, such as Vishnu, Shiva, Krishna, etc., which can even become incarnate in the form of avatars. Jesus is often considered one such avatar by Hindus. Why did Brahman do this? Because Brahman’s nature is one of play, and the world becomes the stage upon which Brahman unfolds the illusion of his play.

The number of years that have passed in this present cycle of devolution according to Hinduism, (i.e., things are not evolving to

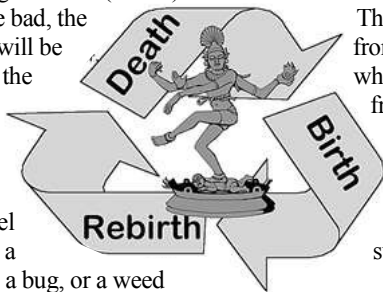
get better, but devolving to get worse—which is not to say anything about biological evolution, which Hinduism can readily embrace) are 3,893,114 as of the year 2012. How much longer this present cycle will continue until recycled is unknown for sure (see below), but when it happens, every atman (soul) will be united with Brahman in perfect union (a universal salvation). Unfortunately, the process of devolution will also begin again, so that, one would assume, Brahman begins the process of the struggle of needing to reunite atman (the individual soul) to itself and vice versa. In the meantime, each person is caught in the cycle of the illusion and must strive to grow in his or her understanding that his or her individual soul is really one with Brahman. As good karma outweighs bad, and the individual soul (atman) grows in this understanding, he or she advances in each new reincarnation to higher levels of existence and caste until he or she finally becomes one with Brahman and ends the cycle for himself or herself (until Brahman begins an entirely new world cycle, and then it all begins again?).

What is important to understand here is that God, in the Judeo-Christian worldview, is completely separate from his creation, which includes time itself, of which he stands outside and is not subject to. Hinduism, on the other hand, teaches that Brahman is the only reality, and that all other reality is a consequence of Brahman’s unfolding of itself. “The One has brought forth the multiplicity of things through an unfolding of itself; and there is nothing in the world, no animal, plant, or stone, that is not still related in this way to its origin and hence does not participate in the one absolute Being” (von Stietencron as stated in Kung, p. 188). There are, of course, schools of thought within Hinduism that teach a complete dualism (Brahman and matter co-existed in eternity, so that, in creation, Brahman overcame matter and subdued it into a less chaotic form that we call the universe), and a contingent-dualism more akin to Christianity (though not completely), which believes that Brahman alone exists, and all other matter was brought into existence out of nothing and remains somewhat separate from Brahman, although Brahman indwells it all (pantheism). The more dominate of these three schools of thought is, however, the one that results in Pantheism, where everything is ultimately God unfolding itself.

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Very strongly tied into this latter view is the idea of everything else being illusory rather than real, which represents the “problem” of our second question, which asks, “What has gone wrong with the world?” In this case, salvation (the solution offered by Hinduism in response to our third question), involves the individual soul (atman)—through meditation, good deeds, and a growing awareness brought on by asceticism—becoming aware of the illusion of this world and its independent, unique existence by understanding that atman is really one with Brahman. Until then, the individual soul is locked into a cycle of birth-death-rebirth (reincarnation) based on whether his or her good deeds outweigh the bad (karma). If the good outweighs the bad, the soul’s next rebirth will be at a higher level. If the bad outweighs the good, the atman (the individual soul) might come back at a lower level of caste, or even as a woman, an animal, a bug, or a weed (racism and sexism are inherent and endemic to Hinduism—although western adaptations have tried to mollify these tendencies).



over again. This means that God itself is tied up in the problem of the illusion, which results in God becoming gods and goddesses who are themselves flawed and devolving. The *devas* are the heavenly gods while the *asuras* are the gods of the underworld—although the *devas* are not necessarily good and the *asuras* are not necessarily evil, even though they tend in these directions. Both have a tendency on occasion to neglect their responsibilities or overstep their competencies. So in a way, they are “only too human,” having similar joys and adventures, which is what makes them accessible to humans. This view of the gods (plural) is taught in the Veda, but was later considered a lowly understanding.

This worldview differs significantly from the Judeo-Christian worldview, where God is completely transcendent from the world that he created out of nothing, and yet chose, because of love, to become fully immanent with that world through incarnation, even to the point of embracing the pain, suffering, and ignominy of crucifixion.

Hinduism also teaches a doctrine of multiple-incarnations, but in a significantly different way. Vishnu, for example, is said to have become incarnate in the world nine times in the 3,893,114 years that have passed since the present world cycle began, but “this served only to avert premature disaster; the cosmic degeneration has merely been slowed down. There is no way to stop it” (von Stietencron as stated in Kung, p. 186). The most significant of these incarnations was as Rama and then Krishna, the latter of whom is said to have lived 3,000 years before Christ and died in the year 3102 B.C. Krishna’s death marked the last of the four ages of the present world cycle. Vishnu is said to have also appeared as Buddha. Interestingly, one can apparently still find calendars in India that suggest this world cycle has 426,886 more years until it comes to a definitive end and the earth is cleansed once more with fire, wind, and water. Then there will be a new creation, order will be restored, and this cycle will be repeated countless times, as it has been before.

In the Christian worldview, time has a beginning and an end, and eternity stands outside. For this reason, we do not believe that people exist prior to their conception, but that at conception they become a living soul and



will then exist for eternity, either in heaven with God, or in hell away from God (different Christian groups hold different beliefs about the latter). So rather than being born in cycles until we get it all figured out, the Christian worldview teaches that we have but one life to live, that it is appointed unto man once to die, and then the judgment. Most Protestants believe that that judgment will ultimately be based on what we’ve done with Jesus. If we believe in him and trust in his work on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins, we’ll be saved. If not, we’ll be lost. Many Catholics believe that their salvation is based on doing certain things to show their trust in Christ and appropriate the benefit of his sacrifice as their savior.

Christians believe that God became man and dwelt among us (within an historical context that can be analyzed and tested), embracing fully all that it meant to be man, and yet living a sinless life so that he could become the holy sacrifice that pays the penalty for our sins, thus reconciling us to God. For Christians, the empty tomb provides historical evidence that Jesus was who he claimed to be, the eternal Son of God. And by his atoning sacrifice, we can likewise return to our place as children of God. This place was lost to us through our sinful rebellion against God through the first Adam, but restored to us through the obedience of the second Adam (see Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 for an explanation of these two Adams). So rather than being God’s play things, we are his beloved children whom he longs to reconcile to himself.

I am hoping in all of this that the differences in how Hinduism and Christianity answer this first question (“Where did we come from?”) are apparent. I’ll be interested in hearing back from you in this regard as we continue this dialog.

Blessings, dear friend! ■

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## On the Lighter Side

