

**Svami Vivekananda:
From the Apostle of Hinduism
to the Religion Eternal,
the Unity of All Religions**

George M. Williams
California State University, Chico

As he walked to the stage of the Hall of Columbus before four thousand assembled delegates and visitors, Svami Vivekananda personified some surprising tensions which would take a century to unfold. Yet fittingly, he would become the symbol of the parliament itself, its key representative, for most who know about that great event.¹

Vivekananda came as a monk in the dress of a raja, having received his costume and name from the Maharaja of Khetri. The combinations of two royal coats, one of bright orange and a second of rich crimson, and two turbans, one lemon and another red, made him the easiest delegate to identify.² He was credentialed as a Brahmin sannyasin of the Shankaracharya Order from Bombay, although he actually was a kshatriya and a self-initiated follower of Shri Ramakrishna

¹Two studies on the Parliament make it abundantly clear that the Eastern speakers changed the World's Parliament of Religions from a narrowly Western meeting celebrating Western civilization's and/or Christianity's coming triumph to one where religionists of the East were vying for equality and understanding.

Richard Seager, "The World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, Illinois, 1893: America's Religious Coming of Age." Harvard Dissertation, 1986. pp. 286.

Kenten Druyvesten, "The World's Parliament of Religions," University of Chicago Dissertation, 1976.

²Interview with *Boston Evening Transcript*, September 30, 1893.

..."the Brahmin monk. ...either a lemon colored or a red turban, and his cassock... alternated in a bright orange and rich crimson."

of Calcutta.³ He had taken a vow of poverty and yet came to raise money for India.⁴ At precisely thirty years of age he would be the youngest of some sixty divines on stage and the twentieth of twenty-four speakers to express words of introduction at the opening ceremony. He joined the intellect of a scholar, the character of a chaste monk, the courage and temperament of a warrior, the restlessness of an explorer, the energy and organizational ability of a top business magnet, and the missionary zeal of a prophet. And these are qualities not easily harmonized.

I. India's Representatives at the World's Parliament of Religions

³John Henry Barrows, editor. *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular story of the World's First Parliament of Religions. Held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893.* (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893. 2 vols. "Opening Remarks" of Vivekananda of Bombay, pp. 101-102.

Walter R. Houghton (ed.), *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses at the World's Columbian Exposition compiled from Original Manuscripts and Stenographic Reports.* (Chicago: F.T. Neely, 1893, 2nd Ed., pp. 1001), "Most ancient order of monks. Swami Vivekananda of Bombay," p. 64.

Opening Comments, p.39-40. "Swami Vivekananda, of Bombay, India, a monk, responded: It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world."

Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Rev. 2nd Ed., 1966), pp. 69-70 discusses some of this problem as "due to expediency" and American ignorance of India, concluding that it "was a careless but forgivable error." [Hereafter, Burke I]

Even before the parliament Vivekananda had given different cities of origin than Calcutta. Cf., *Daily Saratogian*, Sept 6, 1893. Burke, I, 46

"A Brainy Gathering Elects Its Officers. The evening session opened at 8 o'clock. ...The platform was next occupied by Vive Kananda, a Monk of Madras, Hindoostan, who preached throughout India."

⁴The vow involved not touching money and having no purse. This perhaps explains why he wrapped up the money from his lectures in a handkerchief. Burke I, 113.

India was also well-represented with illustrious pundits, reformers, and minority religious leaders.⁵ Four posed together in one picture with Vivekananda--Narasimha Charya (Madras, "Sei Vaishnava"),⁶ Lakshmi Narain (Lahore),⁷ H. Dharmapala (Mahabodhi Society of Calcutta and delegate for Ceylon Buddhists), Virchand Gandhi (Bombay, a Jain). Manilal N. Dviveda (professor, Brahmin), Protap Chunder Mozoomdar (Calcutta, Brahmo Samaj),⁸ B. B. Nagarkar (Bombay, Brahmo Samaj),⁹ C. N. Chakravarti (Allahabad, Theosophy),¹⁰ Jinanji Jamshedgi Modi (Bombay, Parsi), and Jeanni Sorabji (Bombay, Parsi)¹¹ were present and made magnificent speeches. Pundit Dvivedi's paper on Hinduism was certainly the most comprehensive defense of Vedic religion at the Parliament and the most scholarly by the then new standards of comparative religion.¹² Vichand Gandhi, the

⁵ John Henry Barrows, editor. *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular story of the World's First Parliament of Religions. Held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893.* (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893. 2 vols. List of persons of platform at opening, 64-6 pp. One could well argue that the reason India received more than its share of attention at the WPR was this very mix of personalities.

J.W. Hanson, D.D. (Ed.), *The World's Congress of Religions: The Addresses and Papers delivered before the Parliament and an Abstract of the Congresses Held in the Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., August 25 to October 15, 1893, under the auspices of The World's Columbian Exposition.* Chicago, International Publishing Co, 1894.

⁶ Barrows I, 153. Probably also identified as "Nara Sima Satsumchya" of Madras and a Brahman, Barrows I, 137.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸ Churesh Chunder Bose, *The Life of Protap Chunder Mozoomdar*, Vols. 2 (Calcutta: Nababidhan Trust, 1940) and Sanjit Mullich, *Protap Chunder Mozoomdar in America: missionary of a new dispensation* (D.Min. dissertation, Meadville/Lombard Theological School, 1988), pp328.

⁹ Houghton, 67, 743.

¹⁰ Houghton, 62. But also identified as "G. U. Gyanendra H. Chakravarti" Houghton, 926.

¹¹ Houghton, 535; Barrows I, 125, 214-15.

¹² J.W. Hanson, D.D., ed. *The World's Congress of Religions: The Addresses and Papers delivered before the Parliament and an Abstract of the Congresses Held in the Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A., August 25 to October 15, 1893, under*

Jain, made the most militant defense of Hinduism at the Parliament in response to a particularly condescending speech of a Christian missionary.¹³ While all the Indian speakers were articulate and favorites of the throngs who came to the Parliament, Mozoomdar's oratory had the most immediate acceptance. After one of his speeches four thousand people stood and spontaneously sang "Nearer, My God, to Thee."¹⁴ And it appeared that at the Parliament itself an Occidental who spoke for India and against Christian missions was the most controversial; and that was Annie Besant, the Theosophist.¹⁵

Collectively, the speakers from India, Japan and China¹⁶ enjoyed such success that the organizers of the Parliament began using them at the end of the programs to hold the attention of the audience.¹⁷ Vivekananda would not speak many times, but as an Asian he would actually have more opportunities than most Western delegates. Gathering together all of his contributions indicates a brilliant but minor role.¹⁸

There is evidence to suggest that Vivekananda did not perceive himself to be either the star of the Indian delegation or its savior. Two weeks after the Parliament Vivekananda would write Prof. John Wright of Harvard, who was most responsible for getting him credentialed, and stated that he was

the auspices of The World's Columbian Exposition. (Chicago, International Publishing Co, 1894), pp.347-361.

¹³ pp.144-5.

¹⁴ Barrows, I, 114. Cf., Burke, I 90.

¹⁵ Winthrop S. Hudson, *Nationalism and Religion in America: Concepts of American Identity and Mission* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 286.

¹⁶ Barrows I, 115, Pung Kwang Yu "evoked such a demonstration of the sympathies of the audience as had breeted the same personage on the first day." At that time "he was greeted with such manifestations of welcome, respect, and honor, as were surpassed in the case of no other speaker on the platform. ...wild waving of hats and handkerchiefs." Barrows I, 88.

¹⁷ Burke, I, 74. "but there they sat enduring with much murmuring, expecting the next speaker might be one of the popular Orientals whose name was usually first on the bulletin board."

¹⁸ See Appendix A: Vivekananda's Speeches.

proud of his fellow Indian religious leaders and seemed even a little in awe of them and the event itself.

Dear brother I was so so afraid to stand before that great assembly of fine speakers and thinkers from all over the world and speak but the Lord gave me strength and I almost every day heroically faced the platform and the audience. ...Oh how I wished that you were here to see some of our sweet ones from India--the tender hearted Buddhist Dhammapala the orator Mazoomdar and realize that in that far off and poor India there are hearts that beat in sympathy to yours, born and brought up in this mighty--and great country.¹⁹

II. Vivekananda and the Creation of a Legend

Vivekananda's role at the Parliament must be assessed from three kind of records, the last of which will be ignored for this paper: (1) "official-type" histories of what happened "inside" the World's Parliament of Religions,²⁰ (2) reports by "outsiders" such as the American press, and (3) "hindsight storytellers" and their reminiscences after Vivekananda's fame.

Large "official" histories were compiled within a year of the Parliament. Barrow's history portrays Vivekananda as a

¹⁹Burke I 96. Ltr of 2 October 1893. What needs to be pointed out in Vivekananda's letter written closest to the event is that there is no tension with Majumdar of the Brahmo Samaj during or immediately after the WPR.

"my heart was fluttering and my tongue nearly dried up." Burke, I, 59.

Later he would elaborate further:

Vivekananda's own remembrance on his first speech: "In my first speech in his country, in Chicago, I addressed that audience as 'Sisters and Brothers of America,' and you know that they all rose to their feet. You may wonder what made them do this, you wonder if I had some strange power. Let me tell you that I did have a power and this is it--never once in my life did I allow myself to have even one sexual thought. I trained my mind, my thinking, and the powers that man usually uses along that line I put into a higher channel, and it developed a force so strong that nothing could resist it." 547

²⁰Jenkin Lloyd Jones, "Books on the Parliament," *Unity*, Vol. 32 (January 1894), pp.274-5.

young and slightly discourteous minor participant. Hanson, Houghton, and contemporaneous smaller works give no hint that Vivekananda emerged within the Parliament as a major religious leader or participant. All of these reinforce our earlier conclusion based on Vivekananda's single letter immediately after the conference that India's delegation had starved and not just he.

But to outsiders looking with other eyes Vivekananda was more than a participant; he was a symbol of something larger. Vivekananda's impact on the American press takes up three large volumes totaling 2194 pages.²¹ These are the lifework of Marie Louise Burke, a self-trained historian, who has saved every shred of evidence of Vivekananda's two visits to America. The volumes contain popular press accounts about the impact of Vivekananda's participation at the Parliament and her commentary. A different perception about Vivekananda's participation emerges after reading these "outsiders" views of the Parliament. One reason for this is that a newspaper article written about a single delegate necessarily distorts since it must foreshorten events, dissolve ambiguities and focus on its chosen figure. Just how Vivekananda emerged as the symbol for the entire seventeen day event is another study; but the fact is that he had become the person most identified with the parliament and its symbol within one year after its closure. The way he functioned as a symbol and some peculiarly American implications are sketched out in Appendix B.

The Indian press quoted American newspaper articles extensively and magnified the legendary and symbolic content

²¹Burke I, *loc. cit.*, 712 pp.; Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda: His Second Visit to the West. New Discoveries*. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973), 843pp.; and Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries. The World Teacher*. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1986), 639pp.

according to Indian needs.²² When Vivekananda returned from the West in 1897, the legend would be so powerful that it would threaten to modify and control his mission and message.

As this event itself would make all defenders of Hinduism heroes in India, the temporary unification of its delegation at the World's Parliament of Religions would soon be lost in the larger struggle for leadership of India's renaissance. Returning from the Parliament were leaders with differing agendas, some for radical displacement of the Indian tradition, others for radical reform, for the occult, or for revival of the innate superiority of India's spirituality. Only one would triumph and shape "the majority religion" for the next decades.

This young Hindu monk would find his way to center stage on the strength of his vision: Hinduism had to be represented from the ideal plane of universal religion. This sixth of ten children of Vishwanath Datta (c.1835-1884) and Bhuvaneshwari Basu (c.1841-1911) and the first among the spiritual children of the Dakshineswar priest of Kâlî, Sri Ramakrishna²³, would weave together Hinduism, Vedanta and the Religion Eternal, the *sanatana dharma*, in a message not always understood by his hearers.

Why was he so memorial? Why did so many different people hear his message differently but powerfully?

Vivekananda brought to the World's Parliament of Religions a treasury of interreligious ferment: the Hindu-Christian contact (he attended Scottish Church College in

²²One massive collection of Vivekananda's press coverage in the English language press of India can be found in the National Library in Delhi and it definitely documents this assertion. Also, it can be safely assumed by the missionaries reaction in India, their quotations, and the triumphal welcome from all of India that the Indian press sharpened the accounts given to them from American reports.

²³Interview with *Boston Evening Transcript*, September 30, 1893. quoted in Burke, I, 67-68. "He has come pamphlets that he distributes, relating to his master, Paramhansa Ramakrishna, a Hindu devotee, who so impressed his hearers and pupils that many of them became ascetics after his death. Mozoomdar also looked upon this said as his master, but Mozoomdar work for holiness in the world, in it but not of it, as Jesus taught."

Calcutta), the Unitarian-Brahmo Samaj partnership (he was caught up in the Brahmo's struggle to educate the masses and purify Hinduism²⁴), the rediscovery of India religion (he was converted from the most radical branch of the Brahmo Samaj by Ramakrishna himself) and the primacy of direct religious experience. Vivekananda had a fine 19th century general education in philosophy and science. He lost no energy in fighting evolution and current scientific trends. Nor has he threatened by or fearful of modern science.

And Vivekananda had sufficient strength within himself to grow in spite of mistakes (that lack of full honesty concerning his credentials and background) and to rise above all types of attacks.²⁵ His personal morality and spiritual character were identifiable by many Americans and Indians; his presence was unforgettable.

Vivekananda, the princely pagan, articulate and insightful but fully able to capture the essence of great ideas in memorable slogans, would personify the unresolvable tensions of the Parliament. He came as a universalist but left more a defender of a particular purified, idealized religion. He stood as a living question mark to the American "lively experiment" as the "last great hope of civilization" based upon a Christian and democratic equality of peoples and nations.²⁶ Here was a

²⁴Spencer Lavan, *Unitarians and India: A Study in Encounter and Response* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977); David Kopf, *The Brahmo-Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); George M. Williams, "Svami Vivekananda: Archetypal Hero or Doubting Saint?" in Robert Baird, *Religion in Modern India* (New Delhi: South Asia Publications, 2nd rev. ed., 1989).

For the view that Vivekananda was little affected by his Brahmo Samaj contact the most comprehensive study is S. N. Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda* (Madras: Vivekananda Prakashan Kendra, Vol. I, 1975, Vol. II, 1976).

²⁵Even though the notion of "mistakes" is objectionable to those who most recognize his greatness, I think that Vivekananda's growth must not be lost--or there is only a hagiography.

²⁶Sidney Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America*. New York: Harper and Row, 1963.

native of an older civilization who represented revitalization of its values and vision.

Here is the stuff legends can be made off.

III. Vivekananda as Preserver and Reformer

Vivekananda's well known plan to teach Indian spirituality to the West and receive in turn Western help, science and technology is part of the great legend.²⁷ Vivekananda came with a twofold program to defend Hinduism from any attack and to reform and purify it based on its highest spirituality. That reform would require help from the West and he began collecting gifts even before the parliament.²⁸

He defended India from an idealist position in the West, and in India he criticized its actual failures. But he was only able to manage the power of mass media in one direction. The American press did not collect his sayings against Puranic practices, "kitchen religion," "don't touchism," and priestcraft. But the Indian press savored every word of his message to the West. The fight that he pursued at and after the Parliament with missionaries and with Christian fundamentalists produced much to glorify Hinduism and India. He actually returned to Detroit in March 1894 at the height of the Student Volunteer Missionary Movement's second

²⁷Williams, "*Svami Vivekananda: Archetypal Hero or Doubting Saint?*" *op.cit.*

²⁸Burke I, 20-1. Ltr. from Mrs. John Henry Wright, from Annisquam, Mass. August 29, 1893. "...Kate Sanborn had a Hindoo monk in tow as I believe I mentioned in my last letter. ...He stayed until Monday and was one of the most interesting people I have yet come across. ...Then on Sunday John had him invited to speak in the church and they took up a collection for a Heathen college to be carried on on strickly heathen principles--whereupon I retired to my corner and laughed until I cried."

international convention in order to engage them at the height of their attacks on Hinduism.²⁹

While a liberal coalition was formed at the Parliament and came together again in Chicago eight months later (May 1894), Vivekananda worked with a lecture company on his own. He followed an invisible network of anti-missionary religious organizations, but did not choose to strengthen his ties with leading liberal religious organization. Former allies at the Parliament, both from India and in America, worked for a platform for cooperation in the spirit of universalism. They would be in contact for years to come with attempts such as the First American Congress of Liberal Religious Societies (held in Rabbi Emil Hirsch's Sinai Temple, Chicago),³⁰ the Free Church movement of Jones, the free religious association movement of Francis Abbot,³¹ or the International Association for Religious Freedom of Wendte.³²

The press reports of Vivekananda's defense of Hinduism and his conversion of the greatest minds in America to Vedanta preceded his return to India and made that return like no other.³³ Throngs greeted him. Maharajas competed with each other to pull him in carts to the center of towns where he

²⁹Burke I, "The Christian Onslaught," pp. 289-313 and "Return of the Warrior," pp. 314-376.

³⁰"The Union of Liberal Religious Forces," *Unity*, Vol.32 (Feb.1, 1894), pp. 340-1; "The First American Congress of Liberal Religious Societies," *Unity*, Vol.33 (May 1894), pp. 135-6. Cf. Seager, *op. cit.*, 204.

³¹Creighton Peden, "F[ran]cis E. Abbot, View of Christianity and Free Religion," a paper presented at the History Section, Collegium: Association of Liberal Religious Studies, 23pp.

³²Spencer Lavan's study of The International Association for Religious Freedom, a paper presented at ICS, Pittsburg, c.1981; Shinichiro Imaoka, "From Religious Freedom to Free Religion," in George M. Williams, *Liberal Religious Reformation in Japan* (New York: IARF, 1984).

³³Vivekananda survived a battle over his credentials and another with missionaries about his own missionary legend. For the latter, cf. Wilbur W. White (Sec of Calcutta YWCA), *Swami Vivekananda and His Guru with Letters From Prominent Americans on The Alleged Progress of Vedantism in The United States*. Madras: Christian Literary Society for India, 1897.

received the keys to cities and regions.³⁴ Later upon his return to America the American press would transmit the growing legend that "he was received [back in India] with honors to be greater than any paid to a religious teacher since the time of Buddha."³⁵

Yet the very success of his defense of Hinduism would prevent the completion of his twofold program. He would not be able to reform Hinduism. He could hardly purify the religious practices of his own fellow monks, *gurubhais* of Shri Ramakrishna.³⁶ His legend as a warrior for Hinduism became so great that he could not control it when he wanted to begin reform of Hinduism. It controlled him. He could not be a reformer in India. Even his order, the Ramakrishna Order and Mission, would misunderstand its dual role to preserve the best and reform the rest, opting instead to become the example *par excellence* of Hinduism.

IV. Vivekananda's Mission of Preservation and Reform

The message that Vivekananda came to articulate was so complex that it both contributed to the legends produced by its hearers and to religious misunderstanding. This judgement comes from hindsight and must be tempered with an equal comparison to his times. There is an element in his message that is exceptional and must be rediscovered and understood.

Vivekananda's twofold mission as preserver and reformer of Hinduism was articulated according to his ideas about his Western and Indian audiences and a complex

³⁴Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964, 9th ed.). Volume III contains most of the speeches concerning the triumphal return, "From Colombo to Alomora," pp 103ff. The "official history" *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965, 7th ed.) tells the events on pages 452-478.

³⁵Burke II, 292, quoting the *Oakland Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1900.

³⁶*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, *op. cit.*, p. 507.

heuristic which led him to teach persons according to their spiritual level. This is summarized in Appendix C.

Vivekananda used four terms for two different purposes to express his mission. Thus, eight conceptions were used by Vivekananda for the defense and renewal of Indian spirituality.

1. **[Militant] Hinduism** [pure, ideal; in the world]*
2. **[Purified] Hinduism** [real; in the world]
3. **Vedanta** [pure, ideal; in the world but somehow transcendent]*
4. **Vedanta** [real; in the world]
6. **Advaita Vedanta** [pure, ideal; transcendent yet in the world]*
5. **Advaita Vedanta** [real; in the world]
7. **Sanatana Dharma; Religion Eternal** [transcendent yet in the world]*
8. **Sanatana Dharma; Religion Eternal** [transcendent]

An asterisk indicate those concepts used almost exclusively to defend Indian spirituality from attacks by Western despisers. On a few occasions these conceptualizations were utilized in India when *guru*-baiters or Indian despisers of their own tradition attacked him. Rhetorically and heuristically, these concepts utilize a defense of the actual from the plane of the ideal. Vivekananda did not begin by utilizing any of this defensive arsenal at the Parliament. His first speech is characterized by a local newspaper as "broad as the heavens above us, embracing the best in all religions, as the ultimate universal religion--charity to all mankind, good works for the love of God, not for fear of punishment or hope of reward."³⁷ But he had anticipated from studying under

³⁷*Boston Evening Transcript*, September 30, 1893. Cited in Burke I, 67-8.

Western teachers in Calcutta that an attack would come; and he was ready.

Four conceptions--Hinduism [pure, ideal; in the world], Vedanta [pure, ideal; in the world and yet transcendent], Advaita Vedanta [pure, ideal; transcendent; classical], and Sanatana Dharma or the Religion Eternal [transcendent--yet in the world]--are all for defense. Those who write off Vivekananda as a revivalist³⁸ or Hindu chauvinist locate these passages which became the larger part of his brief life. By defending Hinduism *et. al.* from its ideal vantage point and with its best formulations and intentions, he merely pointed to its highest vision. Arnold Toynbee shortly thereafter wrote in *An Historian's History of Religion* that this was the right of all religions to present their ideal--but not their right to compare that ideal with the actualities of another religion. Ideals are compared with ideals, realities with realities. Those who attacked Hinduism compared their best and noblest intentions with India's worst, and Vivekananda came prepared, presenting its ideal as its reality.

Vivekananda's apologetic for idealized Hinduism was so powerful that it took the wind out of the Hindu reform movement, especially the Brahmo Samaj. It made them appear disloyal to India's past greatness and stripped them of any authority for leading the renaissance. Idealized Hinduism did not need any traitors who compromised it with a mix of Western religion or seemed to serve India's political oppressors. There was no need for radical reform of Hinduism, only slow and careful education of the masses and a change of attitudes toward "man-making" religion.

Theologically, this defense was a particularistic universalism, dangerously close to declaring that Hinduism, Vedanta, Advaita, the Religion Eternal were superior to all

³⁸ Agehananda Bharati, *Journal of Religious Studies* (February 1970), p.207.

others religions. And this shift came as Vivekananda fought against missionary Christianity. He accepted the "ladder model" of the sacred and forgot Shri Ramakrishna's circle of the equality of religions.³⁹ The ladder image put Hinduism--or whichever term he chose for its idealized, purified form--at the top or at the highest rung of earthly manifestations of religions. And all other religions could be accepted as lower rungs. It was ironic that it was this same condescension from Christians that brought out the militant defense of Hinduism as true, moral, equal, and good at the Parliament. (The liberal version of this type of particularized universalism--with rational Christianity as the epitome of civilization--was as irritating to him as the exclusively Christian position.)

The need was so great for a quick fix for India's inferiority and so tempting to lead the Indian renaissance that Vivekananda gave much of his immense talent to this task. Yet he would try, quite unsuccessfully, to attempt his dual mission when he returned to India in 1897. Eventually he would tire of leading the defense of Hinduism and focus on teaching higher spiritual levels for personal enlightenment. His second trip to the West in 1899 marks his resignation from the task of evolutionary reform and even his resignation from all organization leadership in the Ramakrishna Order and Mission. The official histories of the Order note that Svami Vivekananda had lost interest in these organizations several years after founding them.⁴⁰

The second set of concepts--[Purified] Hinduism [real; in the world], Vedanta [real; in the world], Advaita Vedanta [real; in the world], Sanatana Dharma; Religion Eternal

³⁹The ladder model places one religion at the top and as the best or most true of religions, while a circle or spoke model would place God at the center and all religions equally leading to God.

⁴⁰*Life of Swami Vivekananda, op. cit. and Williams, "Vivekananda," in Beard, op. cit., p. 66.*

[transcendent]--reveal the aspect of his mission which is least understood and was all but lost. Vivekananda wanted to reform Indian religions and life according to a quite demanding transcendent standard. From the vantage point of something which India had not yet become, he would call for its reform. The forgotten part of his message is how he relativized Indian spirituality and called it into account for its shortcomings from the demands of *sanatana dharma* or the Religion Eternal. Briefly, he lost control of this aspect of his dual mission because of a national need for pride in its tradition in order to lift its head from the humiliation of political servitude to begin its fight for political freedom.

Theologically, Vivekananda utilized Ramakrishna's circle of religious equality. All paths are true; all religions are true. One must carefully differentiate this from the ladder of religious superiority. Vivekananda could use these four terms and maintain the transcendent without idolatrizing it in any particular religion. The transcendent is left totally transcendent. Particular religious expressions in word, act, symbol, community were human attempts to actualize the absolute by approximation. Appendix D combines the four conceptions (Hinduism, *vedanta*, *advaita*, and *sanatana dharma*) to illustrate how they functioned (without maintaining a strict dialectic of transcendence).

This circle is the model that the most radical liberals at the Parliament apprehended in varying ways. They saw religions as humanizations of the universal or transcendent. Kinza Riuge M. Hirai and Nobuta Kishimoto would take this model back to Japan, and, while remaining good Buddhist scholars, could associate with the Japanese Unitarian Association. Their legacy would bear fruit in Shinichiro Imaoka (1880-1986) founding the Japanese Free Religious

Association.⁴¹ Nagarkar and Mozoomdar of the Brahmo Samaj already tried to work from this model of a real equality of religions. They saw the Brahmo Samaj as a particular religion of the Universal Religion, and Universal Religion could never be exhausted in its particular expressions. That is why they resisted conversion to Christianity, even that particularized universalism of British Unitarianism. This is the crux of Mozoomdar's argument with Max Müller.⁴²

Vivekananda knew the implications of Ramakrishna's circle. It meant that all religions are true: in some way approximations of the absolute, the eternal, but in cultural and historical forms. It meant that his three categories of Hinduism, Vedanta and Advaita must not be equated with the Absolute. They were only particular attempts to grasp or apprehend the transcendent. Of the four religious conceptions only *sanatana dharma* had any chance of being used in that way in which it would remain transcendent. For *sanatana dharma* to function as a metaphor for the transcendent, it could not be reduced to or be identified with any particular human expression or practice. These would not be the Religion Eternal but approximations which must change, grow and evolve. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Francis Abbot of the Free Religious Association would have expressed deep approval of the high rhetoric but would have waited for its actualization in a variety of expressions.

V. Vivekananda and Reform Hinduism in the Minority Religion Crisis

⁴¹Williams, *op. cit.*

⁴²Seager, *op. cit.*, 260-1.

The notion that Vivekananda's mission to reform Hinduisim has been misunderstood or forgotten is illustrated both explicitly and inferentially in the court cases brought against the Ramakrishna Mission and Order since 1980. Explicitly, the Ramakrishna Order and Mission stated in 1980 that it was not part of the majority religion in India.

Stemming from the lawsuit by Prof. Madhad Bandopadhyaya of the Vivekananda Centenary College against the Order and the political action more recently in Kerala the Ramakrishna Order and Mission has at the very least suffered very bad press in India. But perhaps it has had to reexamine its identity as a reform Hindu movement.

The Indian Constitution did not attempt to make India a Hindu state but created instead a special category of "the majority religion" which everyone assumed to be "Hinduism." "Minority religion" also became a category of the constitution. There are numerous sections of the Constitution of India which recognize rights of and demarcate governmental controls over these two constitutional entities [Arts. 15(1), 15(2), 16(2), 16(5), 23(2), 25-28, 29(2)]. The constitution does not define either "Hinduism" or "the majority religion." The constitution creates a state which is entrusted with jurisdiction over the majority religion. Its assumptions are grounded in the aspirations of the times and presupposes a majority of "Hindu Renaissance" legislators who would direct the reform of the majority religion.

The initial news about the court cases caused (and continues to cause) millions of Hindus great pain. Vivekananda had given Hindus a pride in a Hinduism which was not to be despised. Now the Ramakrishna Mission had declared itself non-Hindu! Each major development has brought banner headlines: "R.K. Mission [is] Leaving Hinduism" [*Hinduism Today* (March/April 1987)]; "Kerala's Ramakrishna Mission Granted 'Non-Hindu' Status"

[*Hinduism Today* (July 1989)]. One announcement reported: "When the Ramakrishna Mission opted for non-Hindu minority status to avoid government interference in Bengal in 1985, many Hindus were appalled. News analysts called it a betrayal of the Hindu cause and the principles of Swami Vivekananda..." Recently, the Kerala branch of the Ramakrishna Mission asked for minority status and received it directly by governmental decree. For most Hindus the Ramakrishna Mission had been the quintessence of Hinduism.⁴³

At issue administratively for the Ramakrishna Order and Mission was the privilege to run its schools according to the desires of the Order rather than by the vote of the various faculties of its schools. The Indian Constitution, state constitutions, law, and various departments governing education established that educational institutions of the majority religion (presumed "Hindu") would be subject to the rules of majority (presumed "Hindu") reform. Minority religious educational institutions could be administered by their own rules--democratic or otherwise. Since the faculty wanted an academic and not a monk as its president and since it might even want to hire Communists as faculty, the Ramakrishna Order was forced into court to retain control of its educational institutions.

The text of the Order's responding affidavit in 1980 would seem to affirm Ramakrishna's circle of equality of all religions but state this in such a way that it was a minority religion as well.

6. Shri Ramakrishna's cult or religion throws a new light on the concept of religion, and gives a new meaning and interpretation to all religions of

⁴³*Hinduism Today* (July 1989).

mankind, thereby enriching them with a new value. This new religion is unique by itself, and comprehends within itself each of all the other religions, and yet is not identical with any one of them.

7. The most important features of this new cult or religion practised and preached by Shri Ramakrishna, which clearly distinguish (sic.) it from all the other cults or religions, including traditional Hinduism, are as follows:--

(i) The religion of Shri Ramakrishna looks upon Shri Ramakrishna as a illustration and embodiment of the Religion Eternal which constitutes the core of all religious ideals, and permits his worship through his image (like portraits, photos, statues, etc.), relics or otherwise, with or without any ritual or ceremony.

(ii) It not only tolerates all religious (sic.) , but also accepts them all to be true, and it considers all religions to be only different paths leading to the same goal, whereas other religions claim absolute authority in all matters to the exclusion of all others.

(iii) It believes that the underlying truth in all religions is the same Eternal Truth which is the essence of the scriptures of all religions.

(iv) It preaches the harmony of all religions.

(v) It prohibits condemnation of any religion.

(vi) It enjoins no particular ritual or ceremony whatsoever as compulsory.

(vii) It enforces no restriction regarding food as in many other religions.

(viii) It recognises no privilege whatsoever due to caste, colour, creed, language, or nationality.

(ix) It recommends selfless services (sic.) to man in a spirit of worship, looking upon him as the

veritable manifestation of God, as a sure means to attain one's spiritual goal.

(x) It does not require any person belonging to any other faith to abjure the same, on initiation into or acceptance of this unique religion of Shri Ramakrishna as is so demanded by other religions.

(xi) It does not impose or require any specific ceremony by way of conversion or purification or otherwise, for initiation into this new religion, unlike other religions.

(xii) It allows its followers to participate freely in the religious ceremonies of all other religions.⁴⁴

The Ramakrishna Mission's lawyers argued that "Ramakrishnaism" (their own term) was a new and minority religion, different from traditional Hinduism, but still Hindu. When the case reached the Supreme Court, India's judges decided in 1985 that

39. The fact that Sri Ramkrishna never expressly abjured Hindu religion and his disciples had sometimes described them(sic.) as Hindu monks would not be decisive. ...

41. ...But it was Sri Ramkrishna and his disciples who gave concrete shape to the concept of Religion Universal covering not only different schools of Hindu faith but also other religions of the world.

47. Compared to the members of Arya Samaj the claim of the Ramkrishnaite (sic.) as religious minorities, in our view, stands on stronger footing. Ramkrishnaite, who are admittedly much less than fifty percent of the total population of the State, do not consider themselves

⁴⁴ Affidavit filed by R.K.Mission, District: 24-Parganas, High Court at Calcutta, C.O. No. 12837 (W) of 1980.

as a reformed sect of Hindus and they profess and practice World Religion. They do not follow Hindu moral code or accept caste system. Even non-Hindus could be followers of the faith. ...Hindu way of life requires obedience to and observance of Hindu code of life. Ramkrishnaism does not prescribe such code of life laid down by Hindu Religion. ...

48. The followers of Sri Ramkrishna have a common faith. They have common organisation and they are designated by a distinct name. Therefore, they constitute a denomination or sect within the meaning of Article 26 of the Constitution of India... As a religious denomination Ramkrishna Mission enjoys a right under Article 26(a) to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes. The Mission under Article 26(b) has also right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.⁴⁵

The Ramakrishna Mission did not win its view that it could manage its educational institutions without state interference under Article 26(a), the majority religion clause. It had to win this freedom under Article 26(b) which would expect minority religious reform to be implemented by institutions which the minorities themselves maintain or create--and are not a concern of the state. The Ramakrishna Order and Mission had abandoned the majority religion and the locus of its reform to protect its own interests. It won this right for itself and any other religious sect or denomination in India. A religious group simply needed to declare itself a sect or minority religion and legally it became one.

Inferentially, the Ramakrishna Order and Mission had been forced to say that it was new. At the same time it was a

⁴⁵Madhab Bandopadhyaya v. State of West Bengal (Oct. 1985).

reform religion. It affirmed Ramakrishna's circle of religious equality but not as unambiguous radical transcendence, since Ramakrishna is still affirmed as the embodiment of the Religion Eternal. All religions are equal and true; none is superior. Ramakrishnaism is a minority sect. It no longer should allow itself to be presented as the purest form of Hinduism, the manifestation on earth of the *sanatana dharma*. Hinduism is still understood in India as the majority religion.

By clarifying itself as a minority of 1400 monks and 100,000 lay followers, the Ramakrishna Order and Mission accepted an identity of a numerical minority, but it was still something more. It could now reexamine the role thrust upon the Order from its beginning in 1897, that of being the living example of purified Hinduism. It could still affirm that it was both a minority sect and still Hindu, but the ambiguity concerning the Eternal Religion being actualized in the Ramakrishna Mission and Order would have to be clarified. The dialectic of transcendence both saved it from being ordinary, majority Hinduism and doomed it as just a minority religious group. It could be free of defending Hinduism and free for leading in religious and cultural reform. Or, as history has cruelly done in the past, the Ramakrishna Mission and Order--having had its chance--would begin a new phase as having only the influence that its numbers and service would merit. That would mark a change from inspiration for the Hindu renaissance to modest participant.

Again inferentially, the Ramakrishna Order has been forced by the lawsuit to understand its own finitude. This small identity crisis has forced it back upon its own foundations to Ramakrishna's circle of equality and its own particularity. From the shame of having fled the locus of the majority religious reform, which it never lead anyway, Vivekananda's vision may now come to be understood: the Ramakrishna Order

and Mission's identity and destiny is one of a preserving, reforming approximation of the Unity of All Religions.

• • •

Appendix A: Vivekananda's Speeches

Day 1. Sept. 11.

Opening words by Swami Vivekananda of Bombay. **Barrows I**, pp101-2.

Hanson, 39-40. Bombay, the most ancient order of monks in the world; the mother of religion, to all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal." **Burke I**, 63

Boston Evening Transcript, September 30, 1893.

"...broad as the heavens above us, ...embracing the best in all religions, ...as the ultimate universal religion" **Burke I**, 67-68

Day 4. Sept. 14.

Evening reception by Mrs. Potter Palmer, President of the Board of Lady Managers. "The condition of women in India. **Barrows I**, 156. **Burke I**, 81.

Day 5. Sept 15.

Barrows I, 118-20. Frog story.

Day 9. Sept 19 Afternoon Session

"Hinduism" **Barrows I,124.** "Hinduism as a Religion." **Hanson, 366-376.** "Paper on Hinduism." **Burke I, 81.**

Sept. 19. unplanned remarks: [morning???

"patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity ... England the most prosperous Christian nation in the world, with her foot on the neck .. At such a price the Hindoo will not have prosperity."

in response to *Rev. Joseph Cook and Bishop J. P. Newman.* reported in the *Dubuque Times* Sept 29 1893. **Burke I, 81.**

Day 10. Sept.20.

brief speech by VK: "Christians must always be ready for good criticism..." **Barrows I,128-29.** "bread not metaphysical nonsense." **Burke I, 86.**

evening. brief speech. "Religion Not the Crying Need of India." summarized in *Christian Herald*, October 11, 1893, quoting VK: " Christian missionaries come and offer life, but only on condition that the Hindus become Christians, abandoning the faith of their fathers and forefathers. Is it right?... If you wish to illustrate the meaning of 'brotherhood,' treat the Hindu more kindly, even though he be a Hindu, and is faithful to his religion. Send missionaries to them to teach them how better to earn a piece of **bread**, and not teach them metaphysical nonsense." **Burke I,86 .**

Day 12. Sept 22.

Scientific Sessions:"Criticism and Discussion of Missionary Methods.

Sept 22. morning. "Orthodox Hinduism." Scientific Session **Burke I, 70**

afternoon in Hall III, the Scientific Session. **Barrows I, 152-54.**
Vk in Conference on the Modern Religions of India.

(**Sept. 22.** possible talk: Condition of Women in India.)
Scientific Session Burke I,86

Day 13. Sept.23

Vk gave an address. ??

Day 14. Sept 24. Sunday

Rev. George F. Pentecost of London on "The Invincible Gospel" asserting the ultimate triumph of Christianity as assured by its essential superiority to all other religions. "Some of the Brahmans of India have been here and have dared to make an attack upon Christianity. They take the slums of New York and Chicago and ask us why we do not cure ourselves. They take what is outside the pale of Christianity and judge Christianity by it." **Barrows I,143.** Then attacked religious systems of India on the point of morality. priestesses who were known as immoral and profligate. They were prostitutes ...**Barrows I,143.**

Rev. George T. Candlin of China's address :The Bearing of Religious Unity on the Work of Mission." **Barrows I,144.**

It was Gandhi, the Jain, who defended Hinduism. It is not religion but in spite of religion that abuses occur. **Barrows I, 144-5.**

Vivekananda gave semi-public lecture at Third Unitarian Church, Chicago CW VIII 200.

Day 15. Sept. 25

Vk spoke at afternoon session: "The Essence of the Hindu Religion." **Barrows I, 154.**

Day 16 Sept. 26. Evening session.

Vk made small remark, probably about Buddhism.
Barrows I,148.

Day 17. Sept 27

closing remarks: (**Barrows I, 170-1**)..not dissension."

Hanson, 944: "Much has been said on the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. . .Harmony, peace, and not dissension."

Barrows disapproval of Vivekananda's closing remarks. **Burke I, 91**



Appendix B: Vivekananda's Misunderstood Mission

Vivekananda's terminology would intend to be consistently inclusive (He would exclude no religion from truth.) and universal (He would hold that Universal Religion or Religion Eternal is apprehended variously by all religions in their particularity.). Several other academic problems have less direct bearing on his solutions to the fourfold problem involved in universality: Vivekananda's religious development,⁴⁶ his teaching with a view of the religious level of the hearer,⁴⁷ and the problems of hagiography and historical probability regarding his teachings and life.⁴⁸

Vivekananda's twofold mission as preserver and reformer of Hinduism had three different audiences--the American press, American religionists, and India. He had a remarkable influence on each, becoming as if he were a Rorschach ink blot test for all three.

Mirror of the American Experience. Vivekananda was a national phenomenon. Never had a pagan received such attention. Wherever he went he was news. Often stories appeared on the front page about his arrival, and later his speech and activities in the community. While some religious interest is evidenced, there is little understanding of his purified religious practices and philosophy. There is something deeply American that the writers are exploring.

⁴⁶*The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda: A Study in Religious Change.* New Horizons Press, 1974. "Svami Vivekananda: Archetypal Hero or Doubting Saint?" in Robert Baird (ed.)

⁴⁷"Swami Vivekananda's conception of karma and rebirth," in Ronald Neufeld (ed.) *Karma and Rebirth: Post-classical Developments.* New York: SUNY Press, 1986.

⁴⁸"The Problem of Religious Experience in the Life of Svami Vivekananda," and "Methodological Problems in Documenting Religious Change When Change is Denied: Svami Vivekananda's Early Years."

The creed of the republic sought liberty, justice, and the opportunity for happiness for all. But immigrants from Europe's warring states, national minorities, and multiplying Christian denominations and sects threatened America's creed. Religious toleration would really put to a proper test with real pagans. The old question of "how do you turn bigoted, hateful immigrants into good citizens?" paled with paganism.

Newspaper writers and the reading public used Vivekananda as a mirror to reflect on the dilemmas of freedom and toleration. Could Americans allow this dark-skinned Indian the freedom to speak against Christianity or must he be silenced? They sensed that if religions and religionists could be humanized, if the claims of religion could be brought into the realm of human activity, then even paganism could be tolerated.

Richard Seager is correct when he looks to the early proponents of pluralism and finds them as they have been effected by the Parliament.⁴⁹ But the masses and their newspapers are concerned that the creed of the republic will withstand even these religious fights.

Litmus of the American Religious Situation.

Vivekananda came to the Parliament as a liberal and a champion of a universal faith. He challenged American religious arrogance, ignorance, and hypocrisy. Vivekananda's contribution in America was less with organizations than with individuals. His breaking off contact immediately the Parliament with natural allies in the Brahmo Samaj and Theosophy, the Free Church movement of Lloyd Jones, and the quest for a Universal faith left for him no contribution to their development. He certainly did not lessen the evangelical and fundamentalist Christians desire to

⁴⁹Seager, *op. cit.*

convert heathens; he may have added to it. But he did have a personal influence on many American spiritually.

One of the most important contributions could have been to the American concern with religious toleration. He made it a function of acceptance rather than indifference.

Some of the theological issues at the World's Parliament of Religions have general equivalents in the American psyche--America's destiny, its example to the world, its political experiment as the world's last hope, its role as bastion of freedom, tolerance, quality, justice, and the pursuit of happiness.⁵⁰

Translated into Christian theological statements these notions involve some of the most sacred and deep-rooted conceits of America and America's Christians. Perhaps only three issues will suffice to indicate the permanence of the discussion and its power. They involve truth (theologized as What is religion?), equality (What is Christianity's relation to other religions--if there are more than one?), tolerance (As in, how can I allow evil and be religious?), and freedom (What is free religion?)

What is religion? Because this is a convoluted way of asking "the truth question," it raises the greatest passions. It was most convenient for Americans to answer that religion is Christianity; it "is the way, the truth and the light." To use religion as a plural, religions, as in a World's Parliament of Religions, would drive delegates *qua* theologians to look at how they were misquoting a seemingly self-evident scripture.⁵¹

Are religions equal? Can there be a real parliament with equality of the religions? This seems to be the aspect of the

⁵⁰Mead, *op. cit.*. This is such a familiar notion that this one citation will provide a suitable bibliography.

⁵¹Karl Barth would find another way around this insularity of truth. Barth would allow a plurality of religions, then exempt God's work in Christ from the category of religion, and finally judge all religions by God's revelation in Christ.

question that America's newspapers unconsciously grasped. Vivekananda's mere presence at the Parliament (i.e., the nine non-Christian religions) raised the fundamental issue of democracy. Citizenship involved equality, and Vivekananda exhibited the finest characteristics of a religious citizen. A world parliament of religions presupposed world citizenship.

By the time the theologians had asked the questions of truth and equality they had muddled the discussion with categories that could not provide an "American answer." Religious toleration would have been furthered if theologians would have found common bases for shared truth and perceived equality. But the theological language of the day sought its universals by opposing inclusive with exclusive. The category of universalism was so weak that all sides could claim to be universal. One universalist position at the parliament, a universal religion composed of all other religions, was championed by the liberals and non-evangelicals.⁵² But there were also liberals who believed in evangelizing in Christ's name.⁵³ And there were hardly any conservatives and evangelicals who did not believe in the universality of Christ's gospel. The offense of the plurality of religions could still be met with the universalism of a particular religion because of its superiority over all the rest. Universalism became the buzz word of the century and thus it would become meaningless.

The new world order of religions, recognizing Universal truth and the coming together as cooperating equal religions, realizing unity in diversity, would still be a dream of

⁵²Seager, *op. cit.*

⁵³The Universalists, probably America's sixth largest denomination at the end of the century, would not compromise their vision by officially joining the Parliament but put all their energy in the separate denominational congresses. They were a kind of liberal that would irk more than Vivekananda with their condescending notion that salvation, though universal, was only through Christ and thus from Christianity. Mozoomdar's lengthy debate with Max Müller concerned this very limitation of universality.

some leaving the parliament.⁵⁴ While the liberals celebrated their vision at the Parliament, they would still be trying to actualize it a century later. They had no better idea how to achieve it in actuality than did their political cousins trying to put together a commonwealth of equal and free nations.

The American experience demanded *tolerance* and *freedom*. Religionist have tended to ask the toleration question poorly and selfishly. When they were in the majority, of course they would not tolerate evil and untruth. The first Western conception which provided a basis for seeing the partial truth to be accepted and the process of conscience to be tolerated and defended in one's opponent was with Francis David of Transylvania.⁵⁵ Vivekananda's articulation of acceptance of the other's religion shifts the ground, incorporates the values of truth and equality, and does not compromise one's own or one's neighbor's freedom. How could it not be heard as a supporting voice for America's cultural achievement.

Religious pluralism may only provide a temporary solution to the fourfold problem. It avoids the truth question but does not compromise the values of tolerance, equality, and freedom. Since religious pluralism has often joined with indifference, religionist have assumed it weaken religious sensitivities. Vivekananda's teaching of acceptance of the truth and equality of all religions demonstrate that toleration is an intermediate value to acceptance and understanding. All that needs to be added, then, is religious freedom.

Vivekananda's theological contribution was to teach a way of theologizing without dogma. He did not have to abandon

⁵⁴In May 1894 six hundred signed the call for a fellowship to achieve this end. Seager, *ibid.*, 204. Jones invited Asians to join the Free Church movement. Seager, *ibid.*, 246.

⁵⁵Gellérd Imre, *Truth Liberates You: the Message of Transylvania's First Unitarian Bishop, Francis David* (Trans. from Hungarian by Judit Gellérd. Chico: Center for Free Religion, 1990); John Erdő, *Transylvanian Unitarian Church: Chronological History and Theological Essays* (Trans. from Hungarian by Judit Gellérd. Chico: Center for Free Religion, 1990).

the truth question but based the quest for knowledge and understanding firmly on human experience. Religious doctrines and teachings were attempts at expressing that which was apprehended of life and its transcending process of evolution and perfection or descending slide of error, failure and injury. Adequacy, appropriateness and incompleteness are part of the truth process, not indifference and irreligion.

Acceptance of this human process of the religious quest is shared among equals--worshipping together as Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Christians, atheists, *at. al.* This kind of dialogue did not occur at the Parliament; the agenda was controlled by its organizers. And it was a decidedly Western agenda.

Freedom from the tyranny of sin was offered by the Christian; the purified Hindu wanted freedom for knowledge and bliss. One seemed a contraction of the human spirit while the other expressed a longing for expansion and self-transcendence. Seeming the more beautiful, the higher good, the nobler sentiment, these are but a small apprehension of the task.

Catalyst for Indian Awakening. Vivekananda's twofold mission to defend and purify India has been assessed by abler scholars of cultural change.⁵⁶ What seems abundantly clear is that Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission and

Order came to be pigeonholed on the side of preserving Hinduism.⁵⁷ As has been mentioned before Vivekananda did not like the *bhakti* emphasis of Brahmanananda (1902-22). The

⁵⁶R. C. Majumdar (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* (Calcutta: Swami Vivekananda Centenary, 1963); R. C. Majumdar, *Svāmī Vivekānanda: A Historical Review* (Calcutta: General Printers & Publishers, 1965) and Jean Herbert, *Swami Vivekananda: Bibliographie* (Paris: Advien Maisonneuve, 1938) provide some valuable bibliographic information of the now more than 1500 monographs which have been written on Vivekananda.

⁵⁷Agehananda Bharati, *Journal of Religious Studies* (February 1970), p.207.

Order seems to vacillate between devotion/liberation and knowledge/service paths.⁵⁸

• • •

Appendix C: Vivekananda's Taxonomy of Teaching

He taught four groups: (1) Westerners ignorant of basic Indian notions and often antagonistic to them even when explained, (2) Western disciples, (3) Indian audiences with a wide spectrum of interests usually with one or two guru-baiters, (4) and Indian disciples. These audiences were divided by Vivekananda's spiritual map into differing religious tendencies, capacities, and preparations.

The wide religious, educational and philosophical range of his audiences affected the formulation of his message almost as much as a conception Vivekananda held about the tendencies of each individual. He believed that he needed to be all things to all people because a teacher must teach not only at the level of his audience but also according to the spiritual tendency of each individual in his audience. Vivekananda stated that he presented the discoveries of Shri Ramakrishna. These discoveries taught that: (1) Persons have differing tendencies (*samskaras*, *prakritis*) and require different paths (*yogas* or *margas*), (2) A teacher must teach the correct yoga to each individual, and (3) All paths (*yogas*, *margas*) are one.⁵⁹

Some of the apparent inconsistencies in his teachings are caused by these multiple points of view and the varying

⁵⁸Williams, "The Ramakrishna Movement: A Study in Religious Change," in Robert Baird (ed.), *Religion in Modern India*, *op. cit.*, pp.55-79.

⁵⁹Cf., George M. Williams, "Swami Vivekananda's Conception of Karma and Rebirth," in Ronald W. Neufeldt, *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), for a wider discussion of this problem.

contexts concerning Hinduism, Vedanta and the Religion Eternal. Vivekananda's apparent inconsistencies were articulated by him in what we might call a twofold paradoxical loop: (1) each religious tendency is true separately for those in that path (yoga); (2) all paths are one. Not only will Swami Vivekananda teach at one point as though a particular point of view is the truth, he will also teach that the harmonization of viewpoints which have been taken as mutually inconsistent by earlier Indian philosophers are really in harmony. This set of claims leads to a presentation of his views which will attempt to show unity in diversity.

This is an Indian version of the dilemma experienced by one of the universalist positions at the Parliament. That is, for religions to all share truth, there must be some universally shared ground. For each to be true separately means that they all share in something "higher than" or transcendent to any and all. This was the grand dream of Jenkin Lloyd Jones and the Free Church idea. And this was the dream that Vivekananda, Jones, Mazoomdar, Hirai⁶⁰ and other religious liberals brought to the parliament.

⁶⁰Kinza M. Riuge Hirai was one of the interpreters for the Japanese delegation and a lay Buddhist. He would join the Free Religious Association in Tokyo and become apart of the Japanese Unitarian movement, to grow into a "better Buddhist." Cf., George M. Williams, *Liberal Religious Reformation in Japan* (New York: International Association for Religious Freedom, 1984).

• • •

Appendix D: Vivekananda's Unified Use of the Four Conceptions

The four Concepts in Defense of India's Spirituality.

[Militant] Hinduism [pure, ideal, yet in the world]*

Vedanta [pure, ideal, yet in the world but somehow transcendent]*

Advaita Vedanta [pure, ideal; classical; and transcendent]*

Sanatana Dharma; Religion Eternal [transcendent but somehow also in the world]*

The Four concepts for Spiritual Reform

[Purified] Hinduism [real; in the world]

Vedanta [real; in the world]

Advaita Vedanta [real; in the world]

Sanatana Dharma; Religion Eternal [transcendent]

There is little to suggest in the first speeches of Vivekananda at the Parliament that he would become identified as the one who would attack the arrogance of Christians and espouse "an aggressive Hinduism." His first addresses were filled with so much sweetness and light as not to offend anyone. Even the most particularistic of the Christian evangelicals could reinterpret his remarks about universal religion as a universality under Christ and hear the truths within his speeches as coming directly or indirectly from his education in a Christian college and his use of the English language, which somehow helped one rise above superstition and paganism.

But once he began the brilliant defense of Hinduism at the Parliament, it would prove too much for several different and/or overlapping groups: (1) those who held the uniqueness of Christianity, (2) missionaries to India. Their positions were

quite exclusive on issues of Christian goodness and truth. The Archbishop of Canterbury refused to attend, stating: "...The difficulties which I myself feel are not questions of distance and convenience, but rest on the fact that the Christian religion is the one religion. I do not understand how that religion can be regarded as a member of a Parliament of Religions without assuming the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their position and claims."⁶¹ A minister from Hong Kong saw the Parliament as a betrayal of Christ: "...If misled yourself, at least do not mislead others nor jeopardize, I pray you, the precious life of your soul by playing fast and loose with the truth and coquetting with false religions.... You are unconsciously planning treason against Christ."⁶²

Hinduism, Vivekananda shouted, must fight for its rightful place among the commonwealth of religions. Hinduism was equal with all other religions, is as good as any, and certainly as true. It had the advantage of being based on the Vedas which are older and more spiritual than other religion's scriptures. Hinduism is the "mother of religion."

Proselytizing of Hindus was condemned, since all religions are true and Hinduism is most appropriate for Hindus. Send true Christ-men as missionaries rather than losers who learn nothing of India, stay a short time and even then with their many servants, and return to the West to slander India and Hinduism from their own shortcomings and failures.

But when Vivekananda used this conception in India it would be populated with components which met Indians' specific needs. Hinduism must again become a "man-making religion," instead of being silent in face of the exploitation and bondage of colonialism. (Statements on economic justice gave

⁶¹Burke I, p. 53.

⁶²*Ibid.*

Vivekananda a political standing which he could not erase by his denials of political innocence.)

The defense of Hinduism did not specify what was thought worthy or unworthy. It suggested to many hearers that Vivekananda advocated everything Hindu as equal, good, true. It led to a result that he did not approve: the championing of exclusive religion based of dogmas and practices derived from the ordinary and institutionalized on the real level of history.

During Vivekananda's triumphal return to India in 1897, he began to spell out the new dimensions of "Vedanta" as it is to be lived in a new age or *yuga*. This was perhaps Vivekananda's most suitable term for his Western and Indian audiences.

Yet misunderstandings arose in those hearers of Vivekananda who literalized his statements that "the Vedas are the only scriptures which teach this real absolute God"⁶³ or that Vedanta is the truest and highest of all religions. "...all other religions of the world are included in the nameless, limitless, eternal Vedic religion."⁶⁴ Vivekananda's use of his Vedantic ladder would seem to hear what it fought at the Parliament, a universalism based of the superiority of one religion. There are enough of his "militant Hinduism" pronouncements which equate Hinduism and Vedanta to fill a book. And when some swamis of the Ramakrishna Mission and Order appear to use these sayings in a sectarian way, it also appears that Vivekananda must have used them in the same way. For example, Swami Satprakashananda stated:

[The Vedas] do not advocate any dogmatic faith,
but enunciate the spiritual truths underlying all

⁶³Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, IV, 343. "So far as the Bible and the scriptures of other nations agree with the Vedas, they are perfectly good, but when they do not agree, they are no more to be accepted." From "The Vedanta in all its phases" (1897), CW III, 333.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

religious doctrines, practices, and experiences. Strictly speaking, Vedanta is not a particular religion but the common basis of all religions.

Being derived from Vedanta, Hinduism is identified with it. ...Hinduism is the Vaidika-dharma (the Vedic religion). It is also called Sanātana-dharma (the Eternal religion), inasmuch as it affirms eternal truths and finds their application in life."⁶⁵

If Swami Satprakashananda's two paragraphs are to be saved from a mixing of transcendent Vedanta with an historical Hinduism, then a single phrase, "inasmuch as," must be highlighted. But many of Vivekananda's hearers misunderstood his fiery pronouncements simply because they did not understand the logical necessities of these varying contexts. For them, it sounded like Vivekananda defended their Hinduism as being the culmination of the Vedas which was also the Religion Eternal.

A philosophical objection can be made from the vantage point of observing one century of its usage. "Vedanta," as a category to express the dynamics of the transcendent, is not adequate. It does not sufficiently point beyond historical formulations and ethnic conceits to serve its purpose. (To say this a century after Vivekananda is to build upon his contribution to interreligious communication and not to detract from it. Were he attending the anniversary of the World's Parliament of Religions in 1993 I am certain he would handle the problems of categories for multi-leveled ontologies and epistemologies differently.)

If Vivekananda were a classical *advaitan*, the unmodified conception of *advaita vedanta* as the truest expression of *sanatana dharma* would be forthcoming.

⁶⁵Swami Satprakashananda, *Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age* (St. Louis, Mo.: The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1978), p.112.

While this seems a logical position, Vivekananda's best position is *visistadvaita*. It does not vitiate real work and service of others.

Therefore, children of the Aryas, do not sit idle; awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached. The time has come when this Advaita is to be worked out practically. Let us bring it down from heaven unto the earth; this is the present dispensation.⁶⁶

If the highest religion is *advaita vedanta*, then Sankara's quietism without works is best and truest. most advanced.

Take off the name and form, and whatever is reality is He. He is the reality in everything. "Thou art the woman, thou the man, thou art the boy, and the girl as well, thou the old man supporting thyself on a stick, thou art all in all in the universe." That is the theme of Advaitism. A few words more. Herein lies, we find, the explanation of the essence of things. We have seen how here alone we can take a firm stand against all the onrush of logic and scientific knowledge. Here at last reason has a firm foundation, and, at the same time, the Indian Vedantist does not curse the preceding steps; he looks back and he blesses them, and he knows that they were true, only wrongly perceived, and wrongly stated. They were the same truth, only seen through the glass of Maya, distorted it may be--yet truth, and nothing but truth.

...Therefore, arise, awake, with your hands stretched out to protect the spirituality of the world. And first of all, work it out for your own country. What we want is not so much spirituality as a little of the bringing down of the Advaita into the material world. First bread

⁶⁶CW III 428, taught at Lahore on 12 November 1897.

and then religion. We stuff them too much with religion, when the poor fellows have been starving. No dogmas will satisfy the cravings of hunger. There are two cures here: first our weakness, secondly, our hatred, our dried-up hearts. You may talk doctrines by the millions, you may have sects by the hundreds of millions; ay, but it is nothing until you have the heart to feel. Feel for them as your Veda teaches you, till you find they are part of your own bodies, till you realise that you and they, the poor and the rich, the saint and the sinner, are all parts of One Infinite Whole, which you all Brahman.⁶⁷

Majority Religion in Modern India

When combined the fourfold concepts worked together to define majority religion in modern India. Nine descriptors would populate Vivekananda's complex notion of Indian spirituality.⁶⁸

Monism. Advaita Vedanta was the rational articulation of the Absolute and the principles of oneness. The *mayavada* doctrine of Sankara was accepted as definitive. But in the realm of multiplicity, *visistadvaita* (qualified monism) validated one's involvement in the world. Ramakrishna's radical destruction of the epistemological differences of *advaita*, *visistadvaita* and *dvaita* in his experiential harmony of all approaches can be portrayed by the model of the wheel with three spokes coming to the oneness of truth at the center. Vivekananda solution to the same problem used the model of the ladder and postulated, as Professor Nalini Devdas correctly

⁶⁷CW III, 432.

⁶⁸Cf. Williams, "The Ramakrishna Movement," *op. cit.*

observed, "a reasoned system in which *Dvaita* and *Visistadvaita* are the stages and *Advaita* is the goal."⁶⁹

The thirst for the realization of God and *Brahman* or *Shakti* or *Kali* or even in Ramakrishna as the *Avatara* of the *satya yuga* was relegated by Vivekananda to a subordinate role for intermittent periods of time after 1890. What became more important than realizing God and attaining *mukti* was his "God the poor and the miserable". But as a *visistadvaitan* the poor and God were the same, only perceived from different levels of reality. For the poor he would forego his own liberation--the traditional reason for the total renunciation of the *sannyasi*. Nor did it matter much experientially whether or not Sri Ramakrishna was really God. Epistemologically, Ramakrishna's avatara-nature vouchsafed the unity of *Brahman* and *Shakti*, for only an avatara could return from merger in the oneness of the Godhead and know its identity with the God of form. Yet Vivekananda's ladder model placed *advaita* at the top as the truest philosophical expression and relegated *avatars* to the relatively real of *vivarta* (appearance).

Monasticism. Narendra became Svami Vivekananda at the suggestion of the Raja of Khetri. When Vivekananda went to America, he claimed to be a monk of the oldest order of *sannyasis* in India, that of Sankaracharya.⁷⁰ He allowed himself to be known as a *brahmin*. He identified himself as being from Bombay or even Madras. He was credentialed to speak before the World Parliament of Religions on the basis on these verbal claims. After his remarks in defense of Hinduism and often at the expense of other Indian religious groups (the Brahmo Samaj and Theosophy, in particular), some attacked him as a liar. These attacks almost aborted his work in America, but he managed to get resolutions of support from the

⁶⁹Devdas, *op. cit.*, 32.

⁷⁰See footnote no. 2., page 1.

Raja of Khetri and from lay disciples in Madras proving that he represented pure Hinduism. His former *gurubhais* did not provide him with the needed credentials.

When Vivekananda returned to India in 1897 and asserted his leadership over the circle of Ramakrishna monks, he accommodated more to their monasticism than they did to his. (This will be treated in the next period.) When they accused him of being Western and said that his teachings were not compatible with those of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda responded "with great fervour":

How do you know that these are not in keeping with his ideas? Do you want to shut Shri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of infinite ideas, within your own limits? I shall break these limits and scatter his ideas broadcast all over the world. He never enjoined me to introduce his worship and the like. The methods of spiritual practice, concentration and meditation and other high ideals of religion that he taught--those we must realize and teach mankind. Infinite are the ideas and infinite are the paths that lead to the Goal. I was not born to create a new sect in this world, too full of sects already.⁷¹

Vivekananda's monasticism would lead the movement away from total renunciation of gold to its use for mankind. His was an "in-the-world" asceticism which was not practiced by their Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

Universalism. The nineteenth century quest for the foundation of universal religion which proved the unity of all religions was found by Svami Vivekananda in Vedanta. He equated the principle of Vedanta and *Sanatana Dharma*. These were the principles of spirituality with its realization of the One. This was the pure Hinduism.

Toleration. Sri Ramakrishna had realized all religions as true. This was experiential and grounded in the special

⁷¹*Life, op. cit.*, p. 504.

nature of his experiments with Islam, Christianity and the Hindu sects (such as *Tantra*, *Shakta*, *Vaishnava*, *Shaiva*). Svami Vivekananda, nor any other monk known to the author, ever carried out their own experiments. They all accepted the truth of all religions on the basis of their Master's work. Svami Vivekananda tried to lead in some comparative studies--reminiscent of those at the Brahmo Samaj. But no one actually went into the practice of Islam or Taoism. The Ramakrishna movement's outer form would be Hindu.

Vivekananda's message asserted that Hinduism is the most tolerant of all religions in the world. It accepted all as true. Unity was the basis of tolerance. But as the defender of Hinduism at a time when cultural inferiority was a bitter reality, Svami Vivekananda often lapsed into what Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble, a British disciple) termed his "militant Hinduism." Taken out of this historical context, many of his remarks about Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam appear hypercritical and do little to further this ideal of tolerance. But these critical remarks were often cherished more by his countrymen desiring some area of superiority than the mild statements of unity and tolerance.

Non-sectarian. Vivekananda applied the doctrine of universality to the Hindu tradition and sought to lessen any divisiveness between its sects. He wanted to lead all Indians to a purified Hinduism, diverse enough for all. Following Sri Ramakrishna's realizations about difference resting on the variety of spiritual paths (*margas*), Vivekananda taught that there were four tendencies through which mankind sought God. Hinduism was the only religion that recognized that the religious capacities of persons vary according to their inner tendencies (*samskaras*).⁷² These capacities must be channeled into a proper method or path (*yoga*), and only Hinduism taught

⁷²*Complete Works, op. cit.* VII, 98.

the four *yogas* (*jnana, bhakti, karma and raja*).⁷³ Each of these paths had the same goal, oneness with *Brahman*. (He did not seem to notice that *jnana yoga* and *raja yoga* covered much of the same spiritual territory--the non-traditional or intuitional knowledge of the Absolute⁷⁴) Vivekananda insisted that *karma yoga* was the best path for the present and even *sannyasis* should forsake other paths and work for the awakening of all.

Liberalism. Liberal religion in the nineteenth century was founded on beliefs in universal reason, in progress and in the potential of the masses--democracy or socialism. Justice, liberty and equality were liberal religion's principles. These taught that the lack of food and clothing was unjust and a social rather than a personal ill. Therefore, liberal religion sought social reform through legal redress and educational uplift for the underprivileged and downtrodden. These ideas came to Vivekananda as part of his education on Scottish Church College in Calcutta and through his involvement as a member of the Brahmo Samaj (1878-1885). These ideas were not primary concerns of Sri Ramakrishna--not in these ways. When Svami Vivekananda acted as a liberal, he called for the end of *Puranic* superstitions and for a reform of the religion of "don't touchism" (a reference to untouchability and defilement by touch) and the religion of the kitchen (a reference to the restrictions on inter-caste dining). At times he even predicted an end to the caste system itself because the principle of *sanatana dharma*, and consequently purified Hinduism, was oneness--even of caste. In the *satya yuga*, which was coming into being through the preaching of "fiery mantras" to the

⁷³*Ibid.*, V, 12, 292, 455; VIII, 152.

⁷⁴*Raja-Yoga* (*Complete Works* I, 119ff.) taught methods of "psychic control" for "the liberation of the soul through perfection." (p.124, 122) Its textual basis was Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. This comprised his major exposition of the mystical path. In *Jnana-Yoga* (*Complete Works* II, 55ff.) Vivekananda defined the way of philosophy (knowledge). Yet both of these paths utilized as the highest *pramana* direct realization.

masses, all would become *brahmins*. Svami Vivekananda was especially critical of priestcraft. He predicted it would lose its business. He was hurt deeply when his *gurubhais* resembled *puranic* priests instead of *advaita sannyasis*. He attacked their devotions on many occasions before he finally lapsed into silence:

You think you understand Shri Ramakrishna better than myself? You think Jnana is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the tenderest faculties of the heart. Your Bhakti is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. You want to preach Ramakrishna as you have understood him which is mighty little. Hands off! Who cares for your Ramakrishna? Who cares for Bhakti and Mukti? Who cares what the scriptures say? I will go to hell cheerfully a thousand times, if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in Tamas, and make them stand on their own feet and be Men, inspired with the spirit of Karma-Yoga. I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or any one, I am a follower of him only who carries out my plans! I am not a servant of Ramakrishna or any one, but of him only who serves and helps others, without caring for his own Mukti.⁷⁵

Vivekananda demanded that his *gurubhais* be "in-the-world" ascetics. He demanded that these *sannyasis* who had renounced the world to gain *mukti* must become servants of the poor and underprivileged. He called it *karma yoga*, but as Professor A. L. Basham has observed, this respect for physical work is a purely Western idea.⁷⁶ Vivekananda's genius was to establish the connection between the *Bhagavadgita's* call to

⁷⁵*Life, op. cit.* p. 507.

⁷⁶Cited from Bharati, *loc. cit.*

action with India's modern awakening, ignoring its demand that all action be given to Krishna as *puja*. This awakening linked social reform in India to liberal, progressive education of the masses. In the nineteenth century liberal religionists believed that this was the formula for world reform. It would end in a brotherhood of mankind and a commonwealth of nations.

Humanitarianism. Svami Vivekananda's liberal principles for social reform were supported by humanitarian commitments. His "Practical Vedanta" taught *karma yoga* as service to all creatures (*seva dharma*). He formulated "the Plan" for dedicated *sannyasis* to teach the masses industrial and agricultural technology, develop them intellectually, and then raise them to their true nature through the highest principles of *advaita vedanta*. He differed with Sri Ramakrishna in that he believed that even householders could be taught the principles of unity with the Absolute, the relative reality of the One (*mayavada*), and renunciation while remaining in the world of duty and toil. He believed that even *sannyasis* should give up their selfish goal of mukti and work to feed, educate, and lift the masses to their true greatness, in full knowledge of the Divine within.

Progressive. Nineteenth century liberal religion linked social reforms, humanitarianism and progressive education. Education was the key to awakening the masses of the world from the darkness of ignorance. Progressive education was universal in principle and democratic in philosophy. Vivekananda believed that proper study who help the paralyzing ills of poverty and superstitions. The basic content of these studies would be the *Vedanta*, to learn the principles of true spirituality, and Western science, to utilize the discoveries which would better material existence. First one must eat; then one can explore spirituality's heights.

Scientific. As just mentioned, Svami Vivekananda sought to bring the science of the West to India. He believed that Vedanta was the only scientific religion. Since its principles were grounded in the Absolute, there could be no incompatibility with science.⁷⁷

• • •

⁷⁷One should note that Vivekananda's reconciliation of both science and humanitarian work required an epistemological shift from *advaita's* posture toward science which would assign it to *vivarta* while *viṣiṣṭadvaita* would find science and knowledge about God compatible.