

RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN: A RESPONSE TO THE HINDUTVA CULTURE IN MODERN INDIA

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 23 August 2008, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leader Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswathi and four of his disciples were murdered in the Kandhamal district in the state of Orissa. Despite immediate pointers that Naxalites were the culprits (they did claim responsibility later), VHP and Bajrang Dal activists quickly blamed the Christians, took the law into their own hands, unleashing violent, unchecked attacks on Christians during August–September 2008. An estimated fifty-eight Christians have been killed (sometimes hacked to death or burned alive), over fifty thousand Christians dislocated (either hiding in the jungle or living in relief camps), numerous houses, churches and Christian institutions damaged or destroyed, and many Christians forced to reconvert to Hinduism. Such actions are on the verge of being an ethnic cleansing of Pana Christians. Although the root cause of this (and similar) conflicts is not entirely (or even primarily) religious, religion is often used to rally the troops on either side of any divide.¹ Behind this conflict

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¹ Ammu Joseph, “Conflict over Conversions”, *The Hindu* (28 Sep 2008). Cf. Ram Puniyani, “Introduction: Religion, Power and Violence” in *idem* (ed.), *Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), 12-13; Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006), xv-xvi. The communal violence in Orissa was not simply religious – between Hindu activists and Christians – but also had economic and socio-political causes. In the Kandhamal district of Orissa, there has been a longstanding conflict between the majority Kandh Tribals (Scheduled Tribe), who have by and large embraced Hinduism, and the minority Pana Dalits (Scheduled Caste), who

is a nationalistic and militant ideology or culture called “Hindutva”.² This recent outburst of religious-communal violence is symptomatic of much religious violence that India has witnessed particularly in the last two decades and the trigger for the present essay.

Many Christians, Muslims and Hindus alike have been quick to condemn the violence demonstrated by Hindutva activists and the slow-moving Orissa state government. However, rather than analysing the particular violent acts of these Hindutvawadis or the (lack of) intervention by the government, I will focus on the *ideology* that drives these people to commit such violent acts. I will specifically do so through a Johannine lens. The justification for choosing the Gospel of John to relate and respond to the Hindutva culture in modern India is threefold. First, John’s Gospel *par excellence* elucidates that the Jew Jesus of Nazareth, founder of the Christian movement, is persistently persecuted and eventually executed by fellow Jews. Second, Jesus forewarns his followers that they will face similar persecution from the world at large – to which both history and India unfortunately testify. Third, I contend that the concept of religious violence in John’s Gospel corresponds remarkably to that in modern India.

The aim of this essay is to study and compare the cultures behind the religious violence that can be observed in both the Gospel of John and modern India. I shall attempt to demonstrate that John’s Gospel can inform us about the religious violence and its underlying ideology that is prevalent in some parts of India.³ In keeping with the book’s focus, the main issue we must address is whether it is possible to create a “culture of peace” in

are mainly Christian and more advanced socio-economically than the former group. Bajrang Dal and VHP activists explored this tension, stirring up the tribal Kandhs to attack mainly the Christian Panas.

² “Culture” indicates both the ideology and the particular people who represent that ideology in their social behaviour.

³ I will limit myself to the religious violence between Hindu activists and Christians, and not examine the violence (whether or not religious) between Muslims and Hindus or other forms of violence such as terrorism.

the contemporary context of violence in India. In addition, we attempt to answer the following questions: How does John portray religious violence in his Gospel – what is its nature, how is it expressed and what are its causes? How does John expect Jesus’ followers to respond to religious persecution? How does religious violence in John’s first-century context and India’s contemporary context compare? Before addressing these issues, we must understand the Hindutva culture.

2. UNDERSTANDING HINDUTVA CULTURE

We will briefly outline the essentials of the Hindutva ideology, bearing in mind that the precise nature of Hindutva remains ambiguous even among its followers.⁴ In contrast to the ancient religion Hinduism, Hindutva is a recent political movement (since the 1920s), promoted by the umbrella organization Sangh Parivar, which is led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and comprises the VHP, Bajrang Dal and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – the official political arm of the Sangh.⁵ Jyotirmaya Sharma explains that the Hindutva worldview was created as a reaction to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western Indology which caricatured Indian culture and Hinduism. To counter this, Indian thinkers Dayananda Sarawati, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and Vinayak Damodar Sarvarkar sought to redefine and reform Hinduism. Their ideas, which ironically contain a strong European influence, produced and shaped the present-day Hindutva ideology. Of these four intellectuals it was Sarvarkar who politicized Hinduism, coined the term “Hindutva” and gave it its aggressive and radical shape.⁶

⁴ Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003), 1-2. For an in-depth study of Hindutva and related issues of religious violence, see the attached bibliography.

⁵ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005), 49-52. The BJP-led coalition government was in power between 1998 and 2004.

⁶ Sharma, *Hindutva*, 3-8. Sharma observes that the Hindutva ideology of the above-mentioned quartet of intellectuals share six common characteristics (*Hindutva*, 8-12).

Another important figure is M.S. Golwalkar who led the RSS for thirty-three years. Although Golwalkar did not add any substantially new ideas to the Hindutva worldview, he was perhaps the most influential ideologue of Hindutva in its present-day aggressive and radical form.⁷ Golwalkar asserted that India had to be a Hindu *rashtra* or nation, in which the Hindu must become sovereign in any way. Muslims and Christians are non-Hindus, foreigners, enemies of the nation, and they should either become Hindu and behave accordingly or be fought and driven out of the nation.⁸ Sharma observes that Golwalkar was also strongly influenced by European thought, to the extent that

⁷ Sharma, *Hindutva*, 7; *idem*, *Terrifying Vision: M.S. Golwalkar, the RSS and India* (New Delhi: Viking, 2007), xviii. Many people present Golwalkar's views on the basis of his alleged book *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939), but Sharma points out that Golwalkar did *not* write this book but controversially appended his name to it (*Vision*, xix). Sharma bases his analysis of Golwalkar entirely on Golwalkar's complete works published by Dr Hedgewar Smarak Samiti (*Shri Guruji Samagra* [Vols. 1-12; Nagpur, 2005]).

⁸ Sharma, *Terrifying Vision*, 43-45, 59-60, 67-69, 77-87. Even though Golwalkar did not write *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, the following extract shows that his views closely resemble those in the book: “[Who is a Hindu?] All those not belonging to the national, i.e. Hindu race, Religion, Culture and Language, naturally fall out of the pale of real ‘National’ life. We repeat: in Hindusthan, the land of the Hindus, lives and should live the Hindu Nation (pp. 43-44)...[How should non-Hindus behave?] The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation; let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with the foreign races who have chosen to live in our country (pp. 47-48)... [How should an old nation deal with non-Hindus?] To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitics Races – the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for Races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by (p. 35).”

ironically “there is nothing Hindu or ‘Bharatiya’ – essentially Indian – in Golwalkar’s entire ideological universe”.⁹

The Hindutva worldview divides people into insiders (“we”, Hindus) and outsiders (“the other”, non-Hindu Indians), thereby marginalizing minorities.¹⁰ The “we” largely comprises the elite and middle classes, seeking to retain clandestinely the Brahminical hegemony and political privileges that they have been enjoying for centuries.¹¹ Hindutva is opposed to pluralism – averse to “the existence of minority communities as distinct entities forming an integral part of India” and to its members having political rights of an Indian citizen.¹² The Hindutva ideology of the RSS and BJP negates both the idea that the Indian state must provide security and prosperity to all, and the idea that in a modern polity, a citizen is not defined by religion, race or ethnicity but by political and economic rights and civic duties.¹³ In its very essence, Hindutva is, ironically, anti-national since it aims to divide the country by polarizing people along their religious identities, and its proponents hope to profit

⁹ Sharma, *Vision*, xxii. Many have observed a resemblance between Hindutva and Fascism or Nazism (Ram Puniyani, *Fascism of Sangh Parivar* [Bombay: Ekta, 1999]; Siddharth Varadarajan, “Chronicle of a Tragedy Foretold” in *idem*, *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy* [New Delhi: Penguin, 2002], 21; Anand Teltumbde, “Hindutva Agenda and Dalits” in Puniyani [ed.], *Religion*, 212-14; Sharma, *Vision*, xlii-xliii). Some note the close similarity between the RSS slogan “one nation, one culture, one people” and the Nazi motto “ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer”.

¹⁰ Hence, Hindutva is not only a threat to Christians, but also to Muslims (cf. the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 and the Gujarat riots in 2002), tribals, Dalits and any other group that is not considered “Hindu” by Hindutva ideologues. See further, Sumit Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), ch. 8; Lancy Lobo, *Globalisation, Hindu Nationalism and Christians in India* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002), chs. 1, 3; Prakash Louis, “Hindutva and Weaker Sections: Conflict between Dominance and Resistance” in Puniyani (ed.), *Religion*, 157-75; Teltumbde, “Hindutva”, 208-24; Sarto Esteves, “Violence against the Cross” in Puniyani (ed.), *Religion*, 277-89.

¹¹ Lobo, *Globalisation*, 9, 44-58.

¹² Manjari Katju, “Mobilization for Hindutva” in Puniyani (ed.), *Religion*, 187.

¹³ Varadarajan, “Chronicle”, 15.

politically from such polarization.¹⁴ The Hindutva vision of establishing a Hindu *rashtra*, i.e. a nation based on Hindu identity and culture, thus defies and threatens India's concept of a secular democracy.¹⁵ Indeed, Hindutva's agenda of Hindu religious nationalism appears a war against "Western" secular nationalism.¹⁶

Hindutva can only thrive by defining an enemy – whether real or imaginary – whereby this "other" must either become Hindu (with force if necessary) or be eliminated.¹⁷ Consequently, Hindutva is a confrontational, violent and oppressive ideology. As Amartya Sen observes, "In addition to favouring narrowly religious certainty, Hindu political activists clearly prefer to dwell on *inter-religious confrontations*, rather than on the tradition of the peaceful presence of different faiths, side by side."¹⁸ Jyotirmaya Sharma's conclusion of Golwalkar (and by extension today's Hindutva ideology) is apt:

¹⁴ Shashi Tharoor, "Hindu fundamentals under attack", *Times of India* (28 Sep 2008). Tharoor was the former United Nations Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information in 2002–2007.

¹⁵ Cf. Robert Eric Frykenberg, "Hindutva and the Aftermath of Ayodhya: Dangers of Political Religion and Religious Nationalism" in M.T.B. Laing (ed.), *Nationalism and Hinduism: A Christian Response* (New Delhi: CMS/UBS/ISPCK, 2005), 27; T.K. Oommen, "Religious Nationalisms and Democratic Polity in India: Impossibility of Reconciliation" in Laing (ed.), *Nationalism*, 45-46.

¹⁶ Cf. Mark Juergensmeyer's observations regarding global religious terrorism (*Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* [New Delhi: OUP, 2001], 224-27).

¹⁷ For the need to invent enemies, see esp. Juergensmeyer, *Terror*, 171-78. Frykenberg also recognizes Hindutva's need for an enemy and violent confrontations ("Hindutva", 14-15). The Sangh's rationale for identifying Christians as part of the enemy is manifold: for example, (i) Christianity is perceived as a "Western" religion; (ii) Congress president Sonia Gandhi is foreign-born and Christian; (iii) Christianity is an exclusive, expansionist religion, seeking to convert Hindus and causing them to leave the Hindu fold; (iv) Christians aim to lift up the poor, tribals and Dalits.

¹⁸ Sen, *Argumentative Indian*, 49 (emphasis added).

Golwalkar found the Muslims and Christians indispensable tools to make the Hindu Rashtra he envisioned, a reality. *The enemy was the inspiration*. No tangible unity within Hindu society could be contemplated without a call to rally against the arrogance and insolence of the enemy. On the shoulders of the demonic “other” rested Golwalkar’s utopia as also the instrument created to realize the dream of the Hindu Rashtra, namely, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.¹⁹

3. RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

John draws a great deal of attention to the themes of conflict, opposition, persecution and the resulting religious violence. We shall first outline the cause and nature of religious violence, before we examine how John wants Jesus’ followers to respond to it.

3.1. The Cause of Religious Violence – A Conflict between Two Worlds

John’s Gospel presents conflicts between various groups at various levels. It essentially describes the conflict between the world “from above”, represented by Jesus and his followers, and the world “from below”, represented primarily by “the Jews”. In the coming of Jesus into the world, heaven has penetrated earth, the divine has entered into human history. This causes conflict, opposition, persecution and religious violence. While John 5–12 and 18–19 predominantly describe the conflict between Jesus and “the Jews”, John 13–17 informs the reader that Jesus’ followers will face the same scenario – whether it is a conflict between a so-called “Johannine community” and post-A.D. 70 Pharisaic Judaism, or between Christians and the world at large.²⁰ This needs further explanation.

¹⁹ Sharma, *Terrifying Vision*, 88 (emphasis added).

²⁰ Since the 1970s, most Johannine scholars have accepted (parts of) the hypothesis suggested by J.L. Martyn (*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*

John's Gospel indicates that the main cause for religious violence is the conflict between two worlds or cultures, each with distinct rulers, ideologies, characteristics, values and behaviour. John's dualistic worldview presents two mutually exclusive worlds or realms – the world “from above” or heaven, and the world “from below” or the earth. God, Jesus, the Spirit, revelation, life, light, grace, truth, knowledge, freedom and glory belong to the world above; the devil, the world, “the Jews”, flesh, darkness, blindness, lack of knowledge, death, lies and sin belong to the world below. John paints a bleak picture of the world below: it does not have (a saving) knowledge of God (5:37-38; 7:28; 8:55; 15:21; 16:3; 17:25), is enveloped in darkness (1:5; 12:46),²¹ enslaved to sin (1:29; 8:24, 34),²² and

[Louisville: WJK, 2003³ (1968¹))] that John's Gospel presents a two-level drama in which the story of Jesus is retold to tell the story of the so-called “Johannine community” which was in conflict with Pharisaic Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. However, this view has problems. First, if the genre of the Gospels is that of an ancient Graeco-Roman biography (R.A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004²]) provides the compelling case for this), then John's Gospel primarily tells the story of *Jesus* rather than the Johannine community. Second, there is no evidence for the existence of a Johannine community – it simply is a hypothesis. Third, Jesus warns his followers in 15:18–16:4a not of the hate and persecution of “the Jews” but of *the world* (cf. 17:11-19). In fact, the term “the Jews” is entirely absent from John 13–17 (except for the isolated reference in 13:33). Thus, the conflict between Jesus and “the Jews” appears to be paradigmatic for the conflict that *all* his followers will face in the world in *any* time and context – whether Johannine Christians versus the Jewish Synagogue, Pauline Christians versus Judaizers, Christians in Rome and Asia Minor persecuted by Roman emperors like Nero, Domitian and Marcus Aurelius, or Christians facing persecution in many countries today. For further criticism of the Martyn-hypothesis, see Daniel Boyarin, “The Ioudaioi in John and the Prehistory of ‘Judaism’” in J.C. Anderson et al. (eds.), *Pauline Conversations in Context: Essays in Honor of Calvin J. Roetzel* (JSNTS 221; Sheffield: SAP, 2002), 217-22; Tobias Hägerland, “John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama?”, *JSNT* 25 (2003): 309-22; Edward W. Klink III, “Expulsion from the Synagogue? Rethinking a Johannine Anachronism”, *Tyndale Bulletin* 59 (2008): 99-118.

²¹ I explained elsewhere that this darkness is particularly an *epistemic* darkness – a lack of saving knowledge about God – for which the solution is life-giving light provided and embodied by Jesus. This epistemic darkness is also expressed by the concept of “blindness” and the lack of sensory and cognitive perception –

controlled by the devil (12:31; 14:30; 16:11).²³ His verdict in 3:19 is damning: “the light [Jesus] has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” The world, according to John, is therefore in need of a saving or life-giving knowledge about God (cf. 6:63; 17:3).

Since people do not naturally possess this life-giving knowledge – they neither belong to the world of God nor have access to this divine world (1:18; 3:13; 5:37-38) – the solution, then, must come from the world above. As John 3:16-17 states, the Father sent the Son into the world to save it. Or, as John explains in his Prologue (1:1-18), the divine response to the world’s crisis was illuminating revelation; the Logos-Light came into the world to enlighten its darkness through the revelation of God. Jesus functions as the sole mediator between the two worlds because there is no natural contact between them (e.g. 1:51; 3:6, 13, 31; 8:23; 14:17; 18:36). As such, Jesus reveals the reality of the world above to the world below (3:31-32). The world at large, however, did not recognize or accept Jesus but those in the world who did receive, i.e. believe in, him, became part of God’s family (1:10-13; cf. 3:3-8).²⁴ People are naturally “from below”, from this world (3:6; 8:23, 47), and in order to enter into the world “from above” or kingdom of God they need

people do not “see” or “hear”, i.e. understand (Cornelis Bennema, “Christ, the Spirit and the Knowledge of God: A Study in Johannine Epistemology” in M. Healy and R. Parry [eds.], *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God* [Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007], 107-33).

²² For John, the primary sin is to disbelieve in Jesus (8:24; 16:9). Jesus indicates that the people from the world below are enslaved to sin, to which the antidote is the liberating truth found in his teaching (8:23, 31-36).

²³ The devil instigates people to do evil deeds (cf. “the evil one” in 17:15 and evil deeds in 3:19; 7:7), influences Judas to betray Jesus (13:2, 27), and controls “the Jews” and their behaviour (8:44).

²⁴ John’s Gospel presents two opposing families and fathers (God’s family versus the devil’s), and people’s behaviour rather than their claims reveals to which family they belong (8:39-47).

to be born “from above” – from the Spirit (3:3-6).²⁵ The Spirit is thus the boundary marker of the world above, in that those who are born of the Spirit belong to the world above. This spiritual birth does not happen automatically but when one responds in belief to Jesus and his life-giving revelation.

Many scholars have recognized that John narrates his story of Jesus within the wider framework of a cosmic trial or lawsuit.²⁶ In this trial, “the Jews” prosecute Jesus for his divine claims to provide eternal life, to work on God’s behalf and to have a unique relationship with him. As in any trial, it is crucial to have credible witnesses and to keep their testimony going lest the case be lost. Therefore, Jesus appoints his disciples to be his witnesses in the world after his return to the Father. Besides, Jesus forewarns his disciples that, as his representatives in this world, they too will find themselves on trial. At one level, Jesus is on trial and “the Jews” are the accusers; at another level, however, there is a subversive trial taking place in which the world, its ruler the devil and its representatives will find themselves in the dock with the Spirit as prosecutor and Jesus as judge (cf. 5:22, 27-30; 12:31, 48; 16:8).

I explained elsewhere that the term “the Jews” does not refer to the entire Jewish race but to a particular religious group of Torah- and temple-loyalists found especially, but not exclusively, in Judea. “The Jews” is a composite group with the chief priests or temple authorities as its core or leaders and the Pharisees as the influential laity.²⁷ “The Jews” are religious fundamentalists with closed minds: they rigorously examine the Scriptures to find life but ironically reject Jesus who the

²⁵ The aphorism in 3:6 means something like, “the one who is born naturally belongs to the natural world ‘from below’, and the one who is born of the Spirit belongs to the spiritual world ‘from above’”.

²⁶ See esp. A.E. Harvey, *Jesus on Trial: A Study in the Fourth Gospel* (London: SPCK, 1976); A.A. Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness* (SNTSMS 31; Cambridge: CUP, 1977), 78-127; A.T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000).

²⁷ C. Bennema, “The Identity and Composition of *hoi Ioudaioi* in the Gospel of John”, *Tyndale Bulletin* 60 (2009): 239-63.

Scriptures say can give life (5:37-47); they perceive Jesus' truth as untruth and blasphemy (5:17-18; 6:41-42; 10:33); convinced that Jesus is a sinner, they cannot see and only stumble further into darkness (9:24-41); the political-nationalistic motivation of the main leaders of "the Jews" causes them to sacrifice the one who can truly liberate them (11:47-53); they assume that killing Jesus' followers is an act of worship (16:2). "The Jews" is partially synonymous with the world: Jesus accuses "the Jews" of belonging to the world (8:23); both respond with rejection (1:10-11; 8:24, 43-47); and both are governed by the devil (8:44; 12:31; 16:11) which explains the murderous intentions and lies of "the Jews" regarding Jesus (8:44, 55). "The Jews" as a group and "the world" as a system are hostile to Jesus and remain unchanged in their attitudes.

We must now explain how the conflict between Jesus and "the Jews" continues. Jesus asserts that neither he nor his kingdom is from the world below (8:23; 17:14; 18:36). Yet, although Jesus' kingdom is not from this world – its source is not "from below" – it exists and operates *in* this world. Jesus' or God's kingdom (cf. 3:3, 5) is a kingdom "from above" which has penetrated the world below and its citizens are Jesus' followers. Jesus liberates people *from* the world – not in the sense that they are taken *out of* the world but in that they no longer belong *to* the world – only to send them back *into* the world to continue his mission (17:6-21). Jesus thus constituted in this world a new community "from above" which consists of people who are liberated from sin and the oppressive rule of the devil. Jesus' alternative society operates subversively in this world, challenging oppressive structures, injustice and untruth. The demand for an exclusive allegiance to Jesus and his rule will inevitably clash with loyalties to regimes and ideologies "from this world" and continue the conflict.²⁸

²⁸ For further elaboration, see especially Cornelis Bennema, "The Sword of the Messiah and the Concept of Liberation in the Fourth Gospel", *Biblica* 86 (2005): 49-57.

3.2. The Nature of Religious Violence

John's Gospel describes various expressions of religious violence against Jesus and those who side with him:

- *False accusations and slander.* "The Jews" insult Jesus, accusing him of being a Samaritan and demon-possessed (8:48; cf. 7:20), and charging him as a sinner (9:24).
- *Social-religious exclusion or ostracism.* "The Jews" had agreed that everyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah would be excommunicated from the synagogue, which entailed exclusion from the social-religious life of that day (9:22). This decree caused fear and prevented some from confessing (9:20-23; 12:42), while those who confessed their belief in Jesus experienced or would experience such expulsion (9:34; 16:2).
- *Hate.* The world hated Jesus because he testified about its evil works (7:7) and consequently his followers will also experience the world's hate (15:18-19; 17:14).
- *Persecution.* Jesus is persecuted by "the Jews" (5:16) and therefore his followers will be persecuted by the world (15:20).
- *Interrogation, intimidation, ridicule and physical abuse.* Jesus was interrogated by both the Jewish and Roman authorities, at whose hands he experienced intimidation, ridicule, physical abuse and torture (18:22; 19:1-3). The man born blind was interrogated by "the Jews" and experienced intimidation, ridicule and physical abuse (9:24-34).
- *Injustice.* Jesus received an unfair trial (18:14, harking back to the decision of the Sanhedrin in 11:47-53, already hints at this; cf. 7:50-52) because Pilate, who realized that Jesus was innocent, was manipulated by "the Jews" and chose to sacrifice justice to ensure his political survival (19:4-16a). In fact, neither "the Jews" nor Pilate established their case against Jesus (18:19-24; 19:4).

- *Murderous attempts.* “The Jews” made several attempts to kill Jesus during his ministry (5:18; 7:1, 19; 8:37, 40, 59; 10:31-33; 11:8). Besides plotting Jesus’ death (11:47-53), the leaders of “the Jews” also plot to kill Lazarus since his being raised by Jesus caused fellow “Jews” to defect and go over to Jesus’ side (12:10-11; cf. 11:45).
- *Murder.* “The Jews” eventually succeeded in their plan to kill Jesus (19:15-16a), and Jesus forewarned his followers that some may be killed too (16:2; cf. 21:18-19).

3.3. The Response to Religious Violence

Having explained the cause and nature of religious violence that Jesus’ followers will face, we must now examine how John wants them to respond to religious violence. Jesus did not condone a violent response from his followers (18:11) or respond violently himself (18:22-23) – even though he questioned or challenged the violence used against him.²⁹ The Johannine response to violence has two components: (i) something is given to the believer; and (ii) something is expected of the believer.

3.3.1. The Believer’s Provided Equipment – the Spirit, Peace, Joy and Protection

Regarding the first component, Jesus promises the Spirit, peace, joy and protection to the believer in order to face persecution and violence.

The Spirit (14:17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15; 20:22).³⁰ John presents a scenario of an ongoing cosmic trial in which Jesus’ followers are caught up and in which they should not be “orphaned” or defenceless (14:18). Therefore, Jesus will give his followers the Spirit-Paraclete, who will be their legal aid –

²⁹ Only Jesus’ action in the temple can be marked as violent (2:14-15).

³⁰ For the giving of the Spirit in 20:22, see Cornelis Bennema, “The Giving of the Spirit in John’s Gospel: A New Proposal?”, *Evangelical Quarterly* 74 (2002): 195-213.

both the term “Paraclete” and the functions of the Paraclete have strong forensic overtones. The Spirit-Paraclete will equip and empower believers for their salvific mission in this world primarily in two ways. First, as a Teacher, the Paraclete will guide the believer into all truth – truth being the content of Jesus’ teaching (16:13a; cf. 8:31-32) – which means that the Paraclete will explain the meaning and significance of Jesus’ teaching. Second, as an Advocate, the Paraclete will prosecute the world in that he will convict it regarding sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8-11). The *aim* of the Paraclete’s convicting the world is soteriological. First, as Jesus’ aim was to save and not to condemn (3:17), and as Jesus was the first paraclete (14:16), it is natural to assume that the mission of the Paraclete, as a continuation of Jesus’ mission, is salvific. Second, the Paraclete cannot directly convict the world (14:17) but channels this conviction through the disciples’ testimony (15:26-27) – a testimony that is aimed at evoking belief (17:20). Therefore, the Paraclete brings a case against the world, with the intention that people will repent and come to believe in Jesus. The twofold role of the Spirit-Paraclete as Teacher and Advocate is thus combined: *as a Teacher*, the Paraclete will continually explain the significance of Jesus’ teaching to the believer and hence prepare the believer’s testimony to the world, so that, *as an Advocate*, the Paraclete will convict the world through the believer’s testimony.³¹

Peace (14:27; 16:33; 20:21, 26). Jesus foretold that in the world believers will face persecution but in him they will have peace (16:33). The peace that Jesus promises is more than freedom from anxiety and fear (although that is certainly included as 14:27 indicates). It is almost equivalent to the

³¹ For the Spirit’s role of equipping the believer, see Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel* (WUNT 2.148; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002 [repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007]), ch. 5 or, briefer, *idem*, *Excavating John’s Gospel: A Commentary for Today* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 157-60, 171-77; *idem*, “Christ”, 118-19.

Hebrew *shalom*, meaning “wholeness” or “salvation”. Jesus’ peace is radically different from what the world has to give. At that time, the only peace on offer was the *pax Romana*, which was no peace at all because Roman rule in first-century Palestine caused oppression, turmoil, conflict, injustice and resistance.³² Besides, Jesus’ promise of peace is not for the world but *for his followers* as a means to withstand persecution (cf. Lk. 2:14). Since peace in Jewish thought was an essential feature of the messianic kingdom (Isa. 9:6-7; 52:7; Ezek. 37:26), peace is a characteristic of the world above rather than the world below. More precisely, peace on earth is only available where the world above has penetrated the world below – in Jesus’ alternative society. Indeed, as 16:33 explains, it is only *in Jesus*, i.e. in *relationship* with him, that one can experience peace.

Joy (15:11; 17:13). I have suggested elsewhere that joy in John’s Gospel does not simply refer to a human feeling of happiness but to a divine emotion that believers experience when they participate in and fulfil God’s work in this world.³³

Protection (17:11-19). While Jesus was with his disciples, he was able to protect them and watch over them – except for Judas. Now that he is about to leave this world, his disciples will need protection. The disciples especially need protection against the hate of the world and the devil (I take the Greek phrase *ek tou ponērou* in 17:15 to mean “from the evil one” rather than “from evil”). The reason the disciples require protection is that they do not belong to the world – they belong to Jesus and are no longer part of the system of the world. Jesus does not request his Father to take the disciples out of this hostile world but to protect them as long as they are in it. In fact, Jesus deliberately sends them into this hostile world, for they must continue his salvific mission. This protection does not mean that believers will never be persecuted or harmed (this Jesus made very clear)

³² See esp. R.A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

³³ Bennema, *John’s Gospel*, 178-80.

but that he will keep them in a relationship with him which even death cannot destroy.³⁴

3.3.2. The Believer's Expected Activity – “To Testify to the Truth”

The second component of the response to violence is something the believer is expected to do. The main Johannine response to persecution is “*to testify to the truth*”.³⁵ During his trial before Pilate, Jesus states that the very reason for his coming into the world was “to testify to the truth” (18:37). “Truth” in John’s Gospel denotes the divine reality of the world above. Jesus has come from the world above and can testify to what he has seen and heard there (3:31-32). Jesus’ testimony to the truth is shorthand for his entire ministry during which he taught about the divine reality. In his ministry, Jesus communicated God’s words, which contain truth that liberates, cleanses and saves (3:34; 6:63; 8:31-32; 15:3; 17:17). Jesus’ testimony to the truth is thus the revelation of God and himself in terms of their identity, character, mission and relationship. All who belong to the truth belong to Jesus and have heard his voice and accepted his life-giving words (18:37; cf. 5:25; 10:3-4, 16). Jesus is both the embodiment and dispenser of divine saving truth – he is what he gives and gives who he is (1:14, 17; 14:6).

The phrase “to testify to the truth” also occurs with reference to John the Baptist. Jesus’ statement to “the Jews”, “You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth” (5:33), harks back to the events in Bethany described in 1:19-27, when the

³⁴ Lazarus’s coming out of the tomb in response to Jesus’ call (11:43-44) indicates that even death is no hindrance to hearing the Good Shepherd’s voice (10:3-4), and his raising foreshadows the future bodily resurrection of the believer (cf. 5:28-29).

³⁵ In addition, the believer is also encouraged to remember (Jesus’ teaching) – a Spirit-facilitated remembrance which enhances understanding and belief (14:26; 16:1, 4a). Examples of Spirit-enhanced remembrance can be found in 2:22 and 12:16. See further, Bennema, *John’s Gospel*, 172. This remembrance would include Jesus’ words that he has conquered the world (16:33) and its ruler, the devil (12:31). John later reminds believers that they too share in this victory (1 Jn 2:13-14; 4:4; 5:4-5).

same “Jews” had sent a delegation to question John. John had not remained silent but testified truthfully and apparently “the Jews” had even rejoiced in his testimony for a while (5:33, 35b). In fact, the aim of John’s testimony was to produce belief (1:7) – and it did (1:35-39; 10:41-42).

The concept “to testify to the truth” also applies to Jesus’ followers. Jesus mentions in 15:26 that “the Spirit of truth” will testify regarding him – a testimony in which the believer will partake (15:27). “Spirit of truth” is shorthand for the Spirit that communicates truth – he takes the truth that is available through Jesus and proclaims it (16:13-15). As such, the Spirit empowers and prepares the believers’ testimony by communicating to them the truth that is in Jesus’ teaching (14:26; 16:13). In effect, Jesus commands his followers to counter the false accusations or “untruth” of the world with their Spirit-empowered proclamation of the divine reality in terms of Jesus’ identity, character, mission and relationship with God (cf. 16:8-15). The believer’s testimony, like John the Baptist’s testimony, is expected to elicit belief (17:20). Finally, as Jesus testified to the reality that he had seen and heard in the world above, so his followers can testify to the divine reality only to the extent that they themselves have understood and experienced it. Thus, “to testify to the truth” is not simply a cognitive activity (believers must know/understand it) but also a volitional (they must do it) and empirical one (they must have experienced it; it must be personal knowledge). As a unique example, John’s Gospel is a written testimony to the truth as John has personally known it, intending to produce belief (19:35; 20:31; 21:24) – and history confirms that many have accepted it.

“To testify to the truth” is especially relevant in the context of religious violence. This is why Jesus’ command to his followers to testify (15:27) is especially given in the context of the world’s hate and resulting persecution (15:18–16:4a). While John the Baptist and the man born blind testified to the truth under pressure and facing possible persecution (1:19-28; 9:24-34), others were too afraid to testify (the parents of the blind man in

9:18-23, the authorities in 12:42, Joseph of Arimathea in 19:38) or provided false testimony (Peter in 18:15-27). John's Gospel thus does not condone passivity (lest the testimony fall silent and the cosmic trial of Jesus be lost), but advocates an active "testimony to the truth".³⁶ "To testify to the truth" is to testify about Jesus as the embodiment and dispenser of truth as the saving content of his revelation/teaching about the divine reality.

The Johannine directive of testifying to the truth is a form of *dialogue*. During his trial, Jesus asserted that he spoke openly to the world – in the temple and in synagogues (18:20; cf. 6:59; 7:14; 8:59; 10:23) – and indicated that his entire ministry was a testimony to the truth, i.e., the revelation of the divine reality "from above" (18:37). Indeed, Jesus had dialogues with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the crowds and especially "the Jews" in John 5–10 about the divine reality or truth. Thus, Jesus' testimony to the truth was a communication of truth through dialogue. This kind of dialogue however, will inevitably lead to conflict rather than to peace because those "from below" prefer "untruth". When Jesus testified to the world about its evil works, it provoked a hateful reaction because the world did not want its evil works to be exposed but preferred to remain in darkness (3:20; 7:7).

Despite the inevitability of conflict, Jesus' intention in coming to this world was salvific – he did not come to judge or condemn the world but to save it (3:17; 12:47). However, encountering Jesus' testimony of truth demands a choice – to accept or reject it – and each choice has its own consequences. People who accept Jesus' revelation or teaching experience the liberating, saving truth and the new birth that brings them into the world above, but those who reject it remain from the world

³⁶ This is not to judge Pana Christians who fled into the jungle to escape the murderous attempts of the Hindutva mobs – Jesus was often elusive (8:59; 10:39; 12:36). In fact, their refusal to reconvert to Hinduism and to stay in the jungle or in relief camps *is* their testimony to the truth. Besides, other believers should also testify to the truth *on their behalf*, for instance by speaking up publicly for justice.

below, in darkness, enslaved to sin, under condemnation and eventually experience death (1:10-13; 3:18, 36; 8:31-36). While Jesus' proclamation of truth exposes the darkness and sin of those "from below", it has at the same time the capacity to enlighten their darkness and to liberate them from enslavement to sin if it is accepted. At the same time, Jesus knew enough about humanity (cf. 2:24-25) to realize that his coming would cause division and conflict rather than peace (cf. Mt. 10:34-39; Lk. 12:49-53).

The believer is expected to emulate Jesus and thus to adopt the mode of dialogue to communicate the truth. Besides, based on Jesus' words of truth, the believer's Spirit-empowered testimony has a soteriological aim. Nevertheless, people will react differently to it and Jesus' followers will therefore also experience the world's hate and persecution. Although Jesus' followers should not seek conflict, conflict will inevitably follow because their testimony to the truth will be radical, penetrating and contain an intrinsic demand for a decision.³⁷

4. A COMPARISON BETWEEN JOHANNINE AND HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY

Having outlined the Johannine concept of religious violence, we are now in a position to compare it to the situation in India. First, the Johannine conflict between Jesus and "the Jews" (and by extension between the Jesus movement and the world), and that between Christians and Hindu nationalists in India is in its very essence *a conflict of worldviews or ideologies* – a clash between the world above and the world below. Both "the Jews" and Hindutva adherents (i) are driven by religious-nationalistic zeal or fanaticism; (ii) express themselves violently (aggressive, abusive language and violent actions); (iii) espouse religious fundamentalism and bigotry. Employing the Johannine

³⁷ Cf. Paul's exhortation to live in peace with everyone *so far as it depends on you* (Rom. 12:18) and his expectation of conflict because of his message (2 Cor. 4:5-10; Gal. 5:11). See also Lk. 2:14 and 12:51.

benchmark, Hindutva is an ideology “from below” because it propagates hate (of everything non-Hindu), violence (the enemy needs to be subjugated or eliminated), and oppression (it does not allow for a plurality of faiths and identities). John might have assessed Hindutva adherents similarly as Jesus evaluated “the Jews” in 8:44.

Second, at the heart of the conflict in John’s Gospel and India is *the issue of religious identity* or “family”. For John, the conflict between Jesus and “the Jews” was an intra-Jewish dispute – the heated debates remained debates “within the Jewish family”.³⁸ Jesus’ fierce language probably came out of a deep concern and compassion for his kinsfolk rather than indifference or hate. At the same time, these debates were about families at another level – a spiritual level. Especially 8:39-47 brings into sharp focus the existence of two mutually exclusive families and their fathers, where Jesus indicates that “the Jews” belong to the family of the devil rather than God’s family. Although Jesus and his opponents shared the same national identity, there was a debate about religious identity. While Jesus claimed an identity “from above”, his opponents only granted him an identity “from below” (6:41-42). In contrast, when “the Jews” claimed Abraham and God as father, Jesus indicated that the devil was their father (8:39-44). In short, the conflict between Jesus and “the Jews” was about their religious identity. It must also be noted that, for John, the term “the Jews” does not denote national but religious identity – they were a subset of the Jewish people at that time, namely the religious fanatics (cf. section 3.1). Similarly, Hindutva does not represent Hinduism as a whole – its proponents are a Hindu minority and its ideology does not reflect Hindu thought at large. Besides, the conflict between Hindutvawadis and Indian Christians remains an intra-Indian debate – even though the Hindutvawadis consider Christians “foreign” and hence want to deny them their national

³⁸ Calling Jesus “a Samaritan” (8:48) is meant as an insult rather than a challenge to his national identity.

identity. The issue between the Hindutva ideologues and Indian Christians is one of religious identity: according to Hindutva, Christians (along with Muslims and others) are not considered “Hindu” and hence should be excluded from India as a Hindu *rashtra*. Indian Christians, however, favour the present secular democracy in which there is place for a plurality of religious identities.

Third, there is *a strong parallel between the manifestation of religious violence* in John’s Gospel (see section 3.2) and the recent conflict in the Kandhamal district in Orissa (which is typical of other religious conflicts in India). Christians were falsely accused of the murder of the Swami. As a result, Christians were subjected to the hate, intimidation, persecution and violence (including murder and rape) by Hindutva activists. Christians have been ostracized and socially excluded from their village communities – they have relocated to the jungle or relief camps and can only return if they deny their faith and reconvert to Hinduism (there have even been reports of forced reconversions). Meanwhile, the authorities appear to have failed to do justice.

Fourth, there is *a difference in the concept of peace*. The Hindutva concept of “peace” would be the realization of a homogeneous Hindu *rashtra* – one nation, one people, one culture, one religion – through a process of religious-cultural homogenization which would include violence and eliminating the enemy. The peace that Jesus has to offer, however, is of a different kind – a wholeness that can only be experienced in relationship with him (cf. section 3.3.1). Besides, Christian peace reflects unity in diversity. God’s world or Jesus’ community “from above” is heterogeneous in that there is place for all people from all cultures. Jesus constituted under his leadership one flock comprising of people from both the Jewish and Gentile folds (10:1-18), where cultural or national identities are not necessarily lost (cf. the multicultural assembly before the heavenly throne in Rev. 7:9-10). The Samaritans in 4:39-42 and “the Greeks” in 12:20-22 are examples of those who were called

out of the Gentile fold into Jesus' new community, but they remained Samaritan and Greek. What unites people is the unity of the triune God (Father, Son and Spirit) in which believers partake (17:11, 20-23).

5. APPLYING THE JOHANNINE RESPONSE TO INDIA

How will the Johannine mandate “to testify to the truth” in response to religious violence work specifically in today’s Indian context where the Hindutva culture and its resulting religious violence is increasing? We will provide a few suggestions.³⁹

Proclaim the divine reality but be realistic and prepared. Christians in India must realize that inevitably there will be conflict, opposition and persecution in one form or another – whether ostracism from family, neighbours, colleagues at work or village communities, or physical assault from anti-Christian elements in society. Since the world hated Jesus, it will hate his followers too. The Johannine directive “to testify to the truth” essentially means the proclamation of the divine reality, which includes the truth about humanity (it is enveloped in epistemic darkness and enslaved to sin) and the truth about God (he loves humanity and is able to save). Just as Jesus’ dialogues with his fellow Jews often led to conflict, a dialogue between Christians and Hindutva proponents will inevitably lead to conflict because their worldviews are mutually exclusive. However, Christians should not aggravate Hindus or present a false or partial gospel. Besides, without compromising their “testimony to the truth”, Christians must be sensitive and should avoid (or reinvent) expressions such as “winning souls for Christ”, “evangelism/mission”, “church planting” and “conversion” since these have acquired political and intimidating connotations for Hindus.⁴⁰ Perhaps phrases like “introducing people to Jesus” (cf. 1:35-51;

³⁹ For a more general Christian response, see L. Stanislaus, “A Christian Response to Hindutva” in Laing (ed.), *Nationalism*, 177-203.

⁴⁰ See further, Lobo, *Globalisation*, 138-47.

4:28-30), “becoming a follower of Jesus” or “participating in God’s work on earth” would be more acceptable.

Dialogue with and study of Hindutva. I advocate dialogue between Christians and Hindutvawadis (cf. section 3.3.2). Christians who aspire to dialogue with the Sangh Parivar should start with critical engagement, namely the study of the Hindutva religious-political agenda,⁴¹ as well as the philosophy of its intellectual forerunners – Saraswati, Aurobindo, Vivekananda and Sarvarkar.⁴² Christians must examine the Hindutva culture *both* from the inside (i.e. on its own terms) *and* from the outside (i.e. from a Christian perspective “from above”). Christians must also critically study their own culture and agenda, and learn where they have unnecessarily offended Hindus and presented a less than true testimony. When it comes to dialogue both parties should be open, respectful and willing to listen to each other, but also be allowed critical questioning and respectful challenge. For example, an adequate dialogue with the Sangh Parivar and its Hindutva ideology must address two central questions: Who is a Hindu? What is Hinduism? Equally important is the question: Who has the *legitimacy* to answer these questions? According to Sharma, “[t]he only way to confront Hindutva and

⁴¹ Amartya Sen, for example, questions two main arguments on which Hindutva ideology is based: (i) Hindus form an overwhelming majority in India; (ii) the Hindu tradition is more than three thousand years old and the beginning of Indian cultural history. Regarding the numerical argument, Sen points out that (i) in a secular democracy like India, the majority religious community (Hindus) should not be allowed to disrupt the constitutional rights that every citizen is entitled to; (ii) Indian people can also be classified on the basis of other criteria than religion (class, language, political beliefs, etc.), and the fact that only 30% of Hindus vote for Hindutva-related parties suggests that religious identity is not of primary political importance. Regarding the historical and cultural argument, Sen argues that (i) India has been a multi-religious country for a very long time, with Jews, Christians and Muslims settling in India during the first millennium A.D.; (ii) Buddhism was the dominant religion in India for nearly a millennium; (iii) Hindutva adherents intentionally invented and misconstrued Indian history to ensure unity among the Sangh Parivar about its grand vision of India as a Hindu nation (*Argumentative Indian*, 53-69).

⁴² See esp. Sharma, *Hindutva*, chs. 2–5.

its demonic agenda is to privilege the question of legitimacy and call the bluff of a set of self-appointed arbiters of faith...Every Hindu decides what is Hinduism.”⁴³ Indeed, why should the answers that the Sangh Parivar, and it must be noted that they are a Hindu minority,⁴⁴ provides to these questions be preferred above those of Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Amartya Sen?

Assert the very rights that the Sangh Parivar seeks to deny to Christians. “To testify to the truth” would include the proclamation that, according to the Preamble of India’s constitution, India is a secular democratic republic and as such promises to secure to all its citizens, *inter alia*, political justice, equality of status, and liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. Testifying to the truth would also include the assertion of certain rights laid out in the Constitution of India: for example, Article 15 expresses the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of, *inter alia*, religion, race and caste; and Article 25 states that everyone has the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.⁴⁵ The Hindutva worldview of the Sangh Parivar, which aims at a homogeneous, autocratic Hindu *rashtra*, is obviously in tension (to say the least) with India’s self-understanding and her Constitution. “To testify to the truth” would mean pointing out the inequality in the Hindu society that Hindutva endorses, which is inconsistent with India’s Constitution. For instance, Hindutva’s idea of the supremacy of the Hindu-Aryan race and of Hinduism as a religion and culture resembles Nietzsche’s concept of *der Übermensch* (the ideal superior person) which Nazi Germany used to legitimize the holocaust of non-Aryan *Untermenschen* (sub-humans) such as

⁴³ Sharma, *Hindutva*, 13.

⁴⁴ Cf. Robert Eric Frykenberg, who argues that the Sangh’s claim to represent a “majority community” is fictitious since they are “nothing other than another minority community with pretensions to dominance in the name of a mythical majority” (Preface to Laing, *Nationalism*, x; *idem*, “Hindutva”, 27).

⁴⁵ See further, Charles Prabakar and Paul Mohan Raj (eds.), *Rights and Responsibilities of the Minorities* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1999).

Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals. The Sangh also legitimizes the religious-ethnic cleansing of its identified enemies – whether Gujarati Muslims, Dalit Pana Christians or any other group that they perceive as non-Hindu. Differently, Oommen observes that Hindutva’s nationalist agenda of homogenization contains an internal contradiction because homogenization implies uniformity but also equality, whereas the Hindu social system has institutionalized inequality in the form of *varna* or “caste” – the Vedic fourfold social ranking of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra.⁴⁶

Think through the issue of religious identity. How should Christians respond to the concept of “secret” or anonymous Christianity? Is it possible to follow Jesus and remain within the fold of Hinduism? John’s Gospel appears critical about a “secret” belief in Jesus – it effectively amounts to withholding one’s “testimony to the truth” – and expects a public confession of one’s stance. For example, the bold testimony of the man born blind in 9:24-34 stands in sharp contrast to the fearful disclaimers of his parents in 9:18-23 (cf. 12:42; 19:38). Besides, Jesus leads people *out of* their respective folds *into* one new fold (10:3, 16). Believers are called out of the world they were part of in order to become part of the world above, albeit they are then sent back into the world to testify about Jesus. For example, the Samaritan woman remained a Samaritan and went back to her community to testify. Let me provide two contrasting views. Anand Mahadevan, a Brahmin convert to Christianity and editor of *Outlook Business*, recently stated:

The world would call me a convert to Christianity. I have no problems with that, though I see my faith more as a relationship with God through Jesus Christ than as a religion...I am fiercely proud of my national identity as an Indian and I am completely at peace with my cultural identity as a Hindu...[M]y conversion was not a change of religion but

⁴⁶ Oommen, “Nationalisms”, 48.

a change of heart...Hinduism was my identity, not my religion...The Christianity I acquired...is not a religion. On the contrary, it is an intensely intimate relationship with Jesus...I do have a constitutional right to practice my faith and to preach it without deception, force or bribery. It pains to see such basic rights of mankind being cruelly violated every day in this great Hindu nation.⁴⁷

On the other hand, we have the words of Y.D. Tiwari, a well-known Brahmin convert to Christianity:

When I decided to be baptized, I did not think that I was “leaving” Hindu society. I thought I was adding something new, something glorious to my Hindu heritage. I wanted to continue to live with my parents to co-operate with other Hindus in social work, to visit the temple, etc. I was like early Christians who met daily at Solomon’s porch in the temple. Soon I discovered that this was not possible.⁴⁸

In my view, becoming a follower of Jesus involves not only a spiritual relocation (from the world below to the world above) but also a social-cultural relocation because being a true follower of Jesus demands an exclusive allegiance to Jesus’ other-worldly society and its values. Although this does not necessarily cause a loss of the believers’ cultural and national identity in the world below, their main loyalty should be with their new society above – and this will inevitably lead to conflict (cf. section 3.1). According to Hindutva, “Hindu” has inextricable religious, cultural and political denotations, and hence a Christian cannot be at the same time a Hindu. According to Hinduism however, one is allowed to be a follower of Jesus. Perhaps a Hindu convert to Christianity can remain Hindu, providing “Hindu” is no longer understood as religious identity (as Hindutva demands)

⁴⁷ Anand Mahadevan, “I, the Convert”, *Outlook* (27 Oct 2008).

⁴⁸ Y.D. Tiwari, “From Vedic Dharma to Christian Faith”, *Religion and Society* 10 (1963) 117-18, cited in Plamthodathil S. Jacob, “Religious Climate in India Today: An Introspective Analysis” in Laing (ed.), *Nationalism*, 79.

and as long as one's "Hinduness" does not negate one's Christian identity. Or, perhaps one should reserve the term "Hindu" for religious identity and adopt the term "Indian" for cultural and national identity, without denying the existence of various sub-cultures which may be informed by one's religious identity.⁴⁹ For example, Indian Christians could assert that although their religious identity is different from that of Hindus, they are still Indians – both in terms of national and cultural identity. Although in my use of the term "Indian Christian", the noun "Christian" admittedly takes priority (one's religious identity is paramount), the adjective "Indian" nevertheless testifies to the ethnic plurality of the world above (cf. section 4, last paragraph).⁵⁰ Christians should also explain that the Christian identity is an inclusive identity because they are called to love each other and everyone is welcome into God's family.

6. CONCLUSION

John's concept of conflict and the resulting religious violence is complex and pervasive in his Gospel. His dualistic worldview contains two mutually exclusive worlds which came into conflict with the incarnation – the coming from the one above (Jesus) to the world below. The conflict of these two worlds is played out first and foremost in first-century Palestine as the conflict between Jesus and "the Jews" within the framework of a cosmic trial. This conflict is paradigmatic for the conflict between Jesus' followers and the world at large in any context and time. The conflict continues because Jesus instituted a community of followers – "the church" or, to adopt Johannine imagery, the

⁴⁹ Amartya Sen makes a strong case that the Indian identity should *not* be dependent on the Hindu (or any other religious) identity and that the rich tradition of heterodoxy of beliefs that Hinduism allows should be upheld (*Argumentative Indian*, 352-54). For Sen's own views of Indian identity, see his *Argumentative Indian*, ch. 16; *idem*, *Identity*, ch. 2.

⁵⁰ How will Hindutva ideologues call Hindus in the diaspora? Is "American Hindu" an oxymoron? Hindutva seems to say that you cannot be a Hindu and loyal to (or a citizen of) another nation than India.

family of God, the one flock of sheep called out of the Jewish and Gentile folds (10:3, 16) – who represent, advance and practice the values of the world above on earth.

The chief Johannine response to persecution and religious violence is “to testify to the truth”, which is the proclamation of the divine reality as it has been revealed by Jesus. In whatever way Jesus’ followers today apply this Johannine directive, they should not remain silent. Jesus intentionally sent his followers back into the world from which they were saved in order to testify about him and his truth. The believer’s testimony is potentially saving since it proclaims Jesus’ life-giving words and is expected to elicit belief. However, the world at large will be hostile towards Jesus’ followers and reject their testimony of truth. For believers who have denied their allegiance to Jesus while facing the harsh reality of persecution, there is the encouraging example of Peter. Peter denied his belonging to Jesus when faced with persecution and he defected, but John 21 tells the story of Peter’s restoration and commissioning. Thus, restoration from denial and defection is possible for those who have failed and wish to return.

Regarding the situation in modern India, we suggested that the Christian “testimony to the truth” should occur in the form of dialogue with the Sangh Parivar and its Hindutva ideology. Such dialogue will be difficult (if at all possible) and inevitably lead to conflict.⁵¹ The Hindutva proponents seek to establish a Hindu *rashtra* by polarizing Indian society on the basis of religious identity – “we” Hindus versus “other” non-Hindu Indians – wherein “the other” is the enemy who must either

⁵¹ As Sharma points out, the Sangh considers itself not answerable to anyone (it lacks accountability) and is averse to any form of discussion and debate (*Terrifying Vision*, 110). Others are also sceptical whether dialogue with the Sangh Parivar is possible or fruitful (Ram Puniyani, “Manufacturing Faith”, *Indian Currents* 14 [2002] 20; Stanislaus, “Response”, 195). Although I anticipate conflict in the dialogue between Christians and Hindutvawadis, I allow for elements of truth in other views or religions. According to the broader principle “all truth is God’s truth”, the mandate “to testify to the truth” includes recognizing and acknowledging any truth stated by anyone.

become Hindu (by force if necessary) or leave the country. Sharma concludes that the Sangh's Hindutva-based agenda regarding non-Hindu Indians amounts to nothing less than a Hindu jihad.⁵² Nevertheless, Jesus' followers should present them with the truth – both about their condition and about God's solution in Jesus.

We must now reply to the central issue: Is a “culture of peace” possible within the contemporary context of violence in India? If one supposes by this question the total absence of conflict and violence between Hindutva activists and Christians, the answer is unequivocally “No”. Both the Christian and Hindutva story show, to a certain extent, a similar dynamic in that each promotes an expansionist agenda and envisages that real peace can only be realized when “the other” leaves its perspective and fold. Just as the Christian story proclaims that true peace is found when one becomes a follower of Jesus and part of God's family, so the Hindutva story propagates that peace will be realized when everyone joins the Hindu fold. These two stories are conflicting since each party is convinced of its truth claims and endeavours that “the other” gives up its story and joins “them”. Nevertheless, while Christians (should) only *invite* others peacefully and truthfully to join their story (they are allowed to remain “other”), Hindutva proponents *demand* allegiance, often aggressively, to their story from others (they cannot remain “other”).

The Johannine mandate “to testify to the truth” shall, by and large, not lead to peace but to conflict because it is a proclamation of the divine realities “from above” which naturally clashes with the opposing realities “from below”.⁵³ Although

⁵² Sharma, *Hindutva*, 172.

⁵³ The Synoptics present a similar scenario. Jesus did not come to bring peace but division and the sword – his coming inevitably caused conflict (Mt 10:34; Lk. 12:49-53). Jesus does not want his followers to respond with violence but with forgiveness (as Mrs. Gladys Staines did after her husband and two sons were burned alive by Hindu activists in Orissa in 1999), “turning the other cheek”, “loving your enemies” and blessing their persecutors. Similarly, the Synoptics

Jesus' followers should not use violence or seek conflict, their "testimony to the truth" can be confrontational.⁵⁴ The world as "world" or system will not change and therefore the conflict will continue.⁵⁵ Yet, those in the world who are convicted by the Spirit-empowered testimony of Jesus' followers and accept the divine, liberating truth, will become part of God's family/society and experience the divine peace that Jesus promised. A "culture of peace" is the ethos of the Jesus movement in that it is primarily peace with God, then peace with those who are part of Jesus' other-worldly society, and finally the proclamation and offer of this peace to the world.

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also know about the idea "to testify to the truth" with the aid of the Spirit (Mk 13:9-13; Mt. 10:16-39; Lk. 12:4-12). Cf. the testimonies of Stephen before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 7), and Paul before the various Jewish and Roman authorities (Acts 22-26).

⁵⁴ See Bennema, "Sword", 51-55.

⁵⁵ Jesus' lack of prayer for the world in John 17 perhaps betrays his knowledge that the world as "world" will not change. Jesus' intention was not to change the world into a better place but to constitute in it a new society.

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