

A Book Review of

Disciple Making Among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow

by Timothy Shultz

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In ***Disciple-Making Among Hindus***, Timothy Shultz argues for effective disciple making movements among higher caste Hindus, they should concentrate on understanding the particular dharmic values of the local Hindu society and/or community in which believers in Christ live, so that the gospel addresses and clarifies their local dharma (or “community”, xii, 12-13). The word “*Hindu*” originally identified the geographic area east of the Indus River and eventually referred to the people of this region with its religious connotations emerging only after interactions with Islamic and Christian rulers (8-9). Shultz defines Hinduism as a religio-cultural way of life where one must use care in precisely defining its *local* religious and cultural aspects (7-11). Thus, Shultz argues that the gospel may be translated into various Hindu contexts and understands Hinduism as a comprehensive and organic unity of values or *dharma* (8, 11).

However, Christians face a disorienting learning curve in bringing the gospel to Hindu contexts, as Hindus have difficulty in comprehending the universality of God’s kingdom and assume that they cannot adopt a lifestyle devoted to Jesus’s exclusively (23, 27-8). Many Hindus will tolerate unashamed devotion to Jesus, until a friend witnesses to them, which can lead to relational distancing, spiritual blinding by Satan, or confused hatred (33-5). Shultz argues that believers should become like a Hindu to win the Hindus, which includes properly pronouncing names, participating in Hindu food culture, developing Hindu forms of courtesy, and learning Hindu family dynamics, worship forms, deities, festivals, scriptures, philosophy, and language (36-40). In other words, one ought to develop as close to an “insider” knowledge of Hindu culture and life as possible. Effective witness to higher caste Hindus is built over time through learning cultural expectations which improve communication, clarifying various Hindu misconceptions about Jesus, and allowing Hindus time to respond to Jesus (40-1). Shultz finds that Hindus build a positive response to the gospel through *practice* rather than *knowledge* (41). Thus, he encourages empowering ***devotion*** to Christ ***instead of conversion*** (76).

Shultz’s process of discipleship requires patience and conformity of believers’ lifestyles, practices, and culture to the Hindu context where they are ministering, which places high demands on their cultural adaptation, flexibility, and humility. It also requires significant theological reflection to avoid syncretism (xv). However, Shultz draws a clear boundary in directing one’s service, devotion, and worship to Christ alone and clearly explaining this devotion to Hindus when asked (79). He also acknowledges the inevitable need for repentance, as one knowingly or unknowingly may cross into idolatry in their holistic engagement with Hindu culture. His interpretations of the person of peace, being all things to all people, and the polytheistic nature of Corinth provide excellent reflection for faith practice and ministry among Hindus (44, 36,

104). Believers must remain attentive to how the family shapes the lives of Hindu people in their gospel presentations rather than targeting a specific individual for conversion (17).

Shultz also notes examples where faith in Christ did not take root among Hindus and avoids promising sure success (47-52). Shultz may fail to sufficiently illuminate the positive effect that the Hindu context can have on a Westerner's discipleship, as it allows one to question their own cultural assumptions and practices. For that reason, I question Shultz's complete resistance to bringing Hindu families of disciples into Western Christian communities. I understand his reasoning, as many Christian cultural minorities find themselves impressed into various cultural practices that are unnecessary for their growth and complete devotion to Christ. However, the Gospel speaks to the eschatological reconciliation of all people groups and cultures. Thus, with great care and thoughtfulness, it may be possible to unite these communities, over time, in their worship of Christ in a manner that sufficiently challenges each group's cultural presuppositions and values.

Undoubtedly, exploration of the practical dimensions of communal reconciliation requires time, oversight, reflection, ideally the use of small, approximately equal-sized groups from each cultural context, visible leadership from each community, exploration of the historical interaction between the groups, and visible signs of communal repentance. This point is not central to Shultz's argument, however, it factors into his concluding chapter, which states that the believer in Christ will have to choose between their Hindu community and Christian community to live a more integrated life within one of them (123). Shultz's years of deep involvement with Hindus greatly informed this work. And, my suggestions related to Shultz's approach would require the involvement of a unique Christian community with unique leadership, that is willing to have their practices and culture challenged by Hindu followers of Jesus.

Overall, I appreciate the attentiveness, clarity, and rigor of Shultz's model of discipleship and hope that its application steadily grows Hindus and Western Christians in greater devotion to Jesus. This book will stretch your thinking, and, hopefully lead to deeper engagement between believers and Hindus.