A Qualitative Analysis of the ISKCON Movement in South Africa

by

James Bishop
BSHJAM004

SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
In fulfilment of the requirements of the degree

Masters in the Study of Religions

Faculty of Humanities
Department for the Study of Religions
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

Date of Submission: 20 October, 2021
Supervisor: Associate Professor Elisabetta Porcu

Contents

Abstract

This thesis explores the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) movement in South Africa. I employ qualitative analysis and use David Chidester's theory of symbolic exchange to analyze contestations over symbols between ISKCON devotees and proponents of competing perspectives in the contemporary South African context. I analyze the "battlefield" of symbol contestation and its many participants who wish to "own" sacred symbols, alienate others from this ownership, and how symbols are appropriated to serve specific "interests". Evaluating discourses and contestations over symbols clarify central tenets in the ISKCON movement's worldview, what the religion seeks to communicate, to whom it communicates, the strategies it employs, and its interests that are served.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I came across the ISKCON movement and its temple in my neighborhood. Over the years and on more than one occasion my eyes fell upon the temple's cream-colored brick facade, painted pink flower decorations, and its bright reddish-orange sign with the phrases "Hare Krishna" and "Open" on it.

My interest was piqued and I decided to visit the temple. The building certainly looked different from the adjacent flats and houses, and sometimes noises of banging drums and elevated voices emerged from it. Unfortunately, the day I decided to visit, the temple was closed (contrary to the sign that stipulated "Open") and there was no one to answer the buzzer.

I thought nothing more of the temple over the following years until my Masters' year in the department of the study of religions at the University of Cape Town. I wanted to study new religious movements (NRMs) and I came up with a long list of all types. I had initial concerns because many NRMs are not easy to study. They are marginal traditions usually hidden beneath the public radar and one has to dig deep to find them. I was not shy to do the hard work, I rather was more concerned if the resources (interviewees, previous studies, etc.) would be available for me to use.

I remembered my unfulfilled journey to the ISKCON temple several years earlier and decided in favor of another visit, this time in early 2020. Not an email or two later detailing who I am, what I wanted to do, and where I am from, I was sitting in the temple with its administrator. She was very welcoming and willing to answer any of the questions I had. More confident in my direction of study, I left the temple that day with a handful of Srila Prabhupada's materials and several contacts. That is when I set out on my two-year journey to write this paper.

New Religious Movements

It is helpful to begin by placing ISKCON in its appropriate background South African context as a new religious movement (NRM) before identifying the various symbol contestations in chapter 3.

The ISKCON movement, as we shall shortly notice, exhibits many of the common characteristics scholars have identified in NRMs. But what exactly is a NRM? Thomas Robbins suggests them to be "misaligned with dominant cultural and institutional patterns" to which they represent "alternatives" (Robbins 2005, 108). They constitute an alternative to more dominant and established voices in both religious and secular cultures (Melton 2004, 75).

NRMs are diverse and vary in size, constitution, leadership style, belief, practice, ritual, and more (Beckford 2003, 33; Inose 2017, 16). It is also because of their frequently small size that NRMs are often invisible. Indeed scholars are aware that these religions exist because they have observed and studied them, but many are yet unknown due to their lack of visibility (Barker 2004, 97). Some are difficult to trace and many are known only by a member's relatives and friends (Barker 2004, 97). In many cases, this gives them an invisibility to general society, which tends to reflect in the general public's interest levels. According to the scholars at Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (INFORM), of the more than 5077 movements the academic body has on file, they receive annual inquiries from the general public, students, media agencies, and fellow researchers on just forty-one groups, with interest being on those more widely known, such as Scientology, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Unification Church (INFORM 2019, 5-6).

There are questions pertaining to what exactly "new" means when talking about religious movements. Scholar Eileen Barker wonders if it is even possible to claim that anything is "new"

given that all things, including religions, make use of pre-existing components that have been handed down from the past (Barker 2004, 92). Further, when does a NRM become an old one? (Barker 2004, 99; Robbins 2005, 104). Does it take ten years or perhaps thirty for the movement to change classification from “new” to “old”?

In an attempt to answer this, Barker suggests that “newness” can apply to several categories within religions, such as their social and/or geographical location, beliefs, practices, and organization (Barker 2004, 93). Many scholars thus argue that the ISKCON movement, for example, is rightly considered a NRM because it contains several fundamentally new features, such as its social formation and geographical location (in the West), and because of its appeal to the hippie culture of the time and to predominantly young, White Westerners (Barker 2004, 93).

One criterion that has been proposed and is worth noting is that emergent religions denote first-generation religious movements primarily targeting young adults as recruits (Melton 2001, 242). This presents a discriminatory criterion of which few traditions satisfy, although it would classify very recent twenty-first-century movements such as Jediism, Kopisim, the Global Peace Foundation, and the Genesis II Church of Health and Healing, and more.

NRMs are often referred to as “movements” and “traditions”. Robbins and Bromley note that the concept of a movement has been a topic of discussion: is a “movement” best understood as a community or as an organized group? Does it refer to theological currents or perhaps to diffuse subcultural amalgamations like the contemporary New Age movement? (Robbins and Bromley 1993, 91).

According to Barker, some new religious movements might “more appropriately be called groups, others communities, and yet others organizations, societies or networks” (Barker 2014, 238). Although these categories are diverse, Barker suggests it is appropriate to use the

term “movement” without needing to make a significant distinction between them, a view with which this thesis concurs.

The term “tradition” is more nuanced and can be understood to denote a constellation of practices, beliefs, and institutions used to describe a common type of religiosity practiced by individuals and groups (Sherkat 2015, 377). Tradition accounts for the diversity of movements and groups whose members may hold to various beliefs, although some may be shared. Also important to a tradition are texts, both foundational (the *Bhagavad Gita* for the Hare Krishnas, for example) and other (the *Bible* as it is, for instance, treated as supportive of the claims made by several UFO groups who appeal to its text), actors (members of the tradition who use language, reason, and texts), dramas (stories about the activities and experiences of members), the use of reason to solve practical issues, and power relations (Asad 2009).

ISKCON as a New Religious Movement

The ISKCON movement is considered a legitimate religion and form of religious expression because it has established itself as a significant and stable minority movement contributing to pluralistic religious environments. As a legitimate form of religious expression, the movement demands to be evaluated in its broader social context.

Anil Sooklal studied the movement in Durban from a historical and South African perspective and sought to understand the attitudes of the broader local Hindu community towards the movement (Sooklal 1987). The ISKCON movement has been relevant to scholars interested in neo-Hindu movements thought to present adaptive alternatives to mainstream Hinduism (Hofmeyr 1982). The religion has been studied as an emergent phenomenon that Indian immigration has provided with valuable new resources (Vande Berg and Kniss 2008). Others

have studied the ISKCON movement from a perspective as an emergent Western religion (Urban 2015) and the scholars at INFORM wish to present an impartial analysis to those interested among the general public (INFORM 2014). These scholars are joined in their efforts to disseminate accurate information about this religion. No evidence suggests that they have an ideological ax to grind with the ISKCON movement, as has historically been the case with several scholars on the so-called "cults" of North America and South Africa during parts of the twentieth century (Hexham 2001; Schoen 2001; Dunbar and Swart 2012). The ISKCON movement is, like other NRMs, an alternative to the conventional socio-cultural and religious norms of society. In South Africa, the movement is marginal and embraced by far fewer persons than found in dominant religious traditions. It is largely unknown to the general public and is perhaps little more than a curiosity for those who are aware of it. The ISKCON movement is like other NRMs known primarily by insiders and persons close to those who are members. This marginal status does not mean that it is insignificant. Whereas most NRMs are small, often numbering far fewer than a thousand members to several thousand on the larger side of the spectrum, the ISKCON movement claims at least a million congregational devotees worldwide (INFORM 2014). It is, therefore, despite its marginal status, an established NRM in South Africa and in almost all countries it is present.

The ISKCON movement maintains a strong missionary arm (King 2012, 180). Unlike many other NRMs, it is not isolationist because it engages in various modes of public-oriented outreach. Its outreach effort targets various sites including, but not limited to, rural communities, urban settings, townships, universities, the internet, and the public square. The movement maintains a presence on South African university campuses and its social media and online presence is strong. Temples are open to the general public who are invited to attend events like

the Sunday Love Feast and worship services. In the public sphere, devotees engage in rituals and celebrations. Festivals such as the Festival of Chariots seek to bring together various local cultures to chant Lord Krishna's name (ISKCONZA n.d.[i]).[1] To the ISKCON movement's advantage when compared to other NRMs is that the religion benefits from a strong material dimension. Its temples stand resolute and devotees brandish outfits clearly marking their religious affiliation. Many onlookers view the shaved heads with topknots, *tilaka* markings, garments, bright orange robes, yellow saris, dhotis, and banging drums with curiosity.[2] The only feature tending towards isolationism are ISKCON farms that operate independently from mainstream society (Urban 2015, 209).

Much like other NRMs, despite its missionary zeal, the ISKCON movement struggles in the marketplace of religions and ideas, especially beneath the dominant position the Christian religion maintains in South Africa. Devotees are also required to compete for the hearts and minds of people, which is difficult because most embrace some form of Christianity or religious or philosophical worldview other than that offered by the ISKCON movement. This suggests that the movement is unlikely to become a mainstream religion in the country, at least in the foreseeable future. It will, however, never lack for potential converts. Like other NRMs, it attracts unconventional persons within society and those seeking existential meaning and purpose. There will always be persons wishing to reinvigorate the cosmos with spiritual

[1] The Festival of Chariots is an ISKCON event hosted annually over four days in many cities across the world (Bhakta Kishore 2018). Important to attendees is chanting the Hare Krishna mantra, although the many thousands who attend are not affiliated with the movement. During the festivities, there is music, singing, poetry, drama performances, yoga, selling religious literature, and offerings of free vegetarian food. The attendees venture through the streets according to a prearranged route.

[2] The *tilaka*, Sanskrit for "mark", is a mark created using paste or powder on the forehead signifying one's affiliation to a religious sect, in this case the ISKCON movement. The dhoti is a baggy dress wrapped around the devotee's body. Although typically worn by men in the Hindu tradition, it is also adorned by members of the ISKCON movement.

significance. Capetonian devotee Brihat Mridanga Das, for instance, finds satisfaction and intellectual fulfillment in the movement's cosmic perspective,

> "I was always looking to understand what life is about. Looking to have my questions answered and not just accepting answers whimsically… When I met the devotees, their presentation of reality, of their perspective on reality, their presentation on the whole cosmic situation and how we are in this cosmic situation and how we are related to it and to God, was completely satisfying to me" (Hare Krsna TV 2014).

Also wanting to invest the cosmos with purpose and meaning is devotee Aryan Dasa who came to accept the ISKCON religion when he opened himself to searching spiritually,

> "I was on what I call a spiritual journey. I basically gave up my life, I'm from Pietermaritzburg, I quit my job, I was sort of hankering for something else. It was time to give up and search for something bigger. I hitch-hiked and prayed to God to please guide me. My goal was to make people happier. I felt like I was stranded where I was at. But I felt there was more about the world. So I took my bag and hitch-hiked" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).[3]

Aryan Dasa ended up in Cape Town where he sat outside the train station in the CBD when two devotees approached him. At first, he thought they were Hindus and he told them he was "on a spiritual journey seeking answers." He then learned that the two devotees were actually members of the ISKCON movement and they invited him to their temple,

[3] All names of my interviewees have been anonymized for their protection.

> "I came to Rondebosch, started working. It was around 6 pm when I came here and I joined a spiritual program and they were talking about the spiritual life. The first sign inside this property was this difference, this shift in energy. I just knew this was where I was meant to be" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

Bhakta Rudra has a similar tale of being approached by devotees (Bhakta Rudra, personal email communication, 17 July, 2021). He was approached by two female members carrying books and then visited the temple in Rondebosch where he continued studying religious literature. He made friends and came to enjoy chanting the Krishna mantra: "The first time I chanted 16 rounds, all my hair stood on end and tears came to my eyes… I felt slight goosebumps and admitted that there was something there." Bhakta Rudra then moved into the temple and has stayed there ever since.

As these few testimonies show, particularly susceptible to conversion are some persons who are seeking ultimate answers in life and open to adopting a religious worldview offering a framework and answers to questions of ultimate importance. Also susceptible to conversion are persons who feel alienated from their culture and mainstream society and desire an identity found only within alternative groups. In the case of Brihat Mridanga Das, he felt alienated from the Christianity he was brought up with. For him, the Christian religion failed to answer important existential questions such as why bad things happen to good people. This motivated him to reject that religion for an alternative religious community in the ISKCON movement. He found satisfaction in the "whole cosmic situation" presented by its devotees.

Various NRMs experience challenges and the ISKCON movement is no exception. The movement faced difficulties during the apartheid era although it is today fortunate to enjoy a presence in a contemporary setting permitting religious pluralism and freedom of expression.

This need not be taken for granted since many NRMs have historically been treated with prejudice (Melton 1993, 104; Melton 2001, 243), suspicion (Barker 2001, 236; Beckford 2003, 26-31), and hostility (Hexham 2001, 281-282), and often by various groups including the state (Dunbar and Swart 2012, 606; Falkof 2012, 755), members of dominant religious traditions (Shterin 2000, 316; Wallace 2006, 12; Bromley and Melton 2012; Goshadze 2018, 2), and the general public (Krumina-Konkova 1999, 127; Schoen 2001, 272; Falkof 2012, 755). Fortunately, religious freedom and freedom of expression are enshrined in the South African Constitution and allow the ISKCON movement to exist without disturbance. This ease of existence reflects in the discourse of devotees that never suggests the movement and its member are experiencing any form of discrimination or persecution.

Today fewer members are living in temples and instead decide to live family lives in their private homes (Urban 2015, 212). This lack of interest in becoming full-time devotees living in the temple has been highlighted as a challenge by the ISKCON South Africa National Council. The Council seeks "to understand what reservations exist in our community in taking on full time service, evaluate current arrangements and propose solutions to close any gaps and make full time service a more viable option for our community" (International Society for Krishna Consciousness 2019, 4). Aryan Dasa has inside knowledge of the Cape Town temple struggling to attract devotees to live in it,

> "Especially when the movement started, there were a lot of devotees staying in centers like this. It removes a lot of distractions around. But now there are not a lot of devotees prepared to take that step. They have to balance family life, materialistic ambitions, earn money and all those things, but at the same time be devoted to God, come to the temple to service. Most devotees I think are

struggling with that. Most of them get distracted and find a lot of distraction on the outside" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

Most devotees and congregants will visit temples periodically to perform worship and a far smaller number will choose to take up residence in them. Rather than living in monastic communities and withdrawing from the world, devotees are putting much effort into publicly engaging broader audiences, which are efforts that have made the ISKCON movement arguably one of the more successful NRM to emerge in the West and South Africa.

The ISKCON Movement in South Africa and Contestations

Founded by A. C. Bhaktivedanta Srila Prabhupada (Prabhupada, meaning "one who has taken shelter at the feet of the Lord") in New York, 1966, the ISKCON movement has expanded globally, notably in the Western world, and has had a presence in South Africa since 1975 (Sooklal 1987).

The South African ISKCON community emerged gradually between 1970 and 1974 as overseas devotees, the first of whom rented a building near Cape Town's harbor (later to be converted into a temple), began visiting the country to proselytize the movement's doctrines and beliefs (Sooklal 1987, 21). The fledgling movement is said to have experienced initial growth when devotees began giving lectures at various Hindu temples in Durban (ISKCON Vaishnava Research Forum 2012). These lectures attracted several hundred interested attendees. The ISKCON movement does, of course, trace back earlier to 1953 when Srila Prabhupada, before migrating to the United States, founded the League of Devotees in India with the mission of propagating Krishna consciousness worldwide.

Srila Prabhupada surfaced from a line of gurus descended from Sri Chaitanya Mahabraphu (1486-1534). His pedagogic utilized much from Sri Chaitanya's teachings in which Krishna is viewed as the Supreme, Highest Absolute of the Godhead (Sooklal 1987, 22-24). Sri Chaitanya himself, born in Bengal, was thought to be a physical Krishna with the mission of promoting the supremacy of Lord Krishna over the other gods. It is him who is responsible for founding a line of disciples from whom the modern movement in the West and South Africa emerged.

At the age of fifty-nine, Srila Prabhupada decided to live in a monastery as a renunciant and devote himself to full-time study and translating of sacred scripture. Some years later, in 1965, Srila Prabhupada first visited the West to bring Sri Chaitanya's teachings to the English-speaking world. He spent time in Pennsylvania before moving to New York where he owned a small temple that young devotees would visit to chant with him (Karapanagiotis 2018, 77). In 1966, Srila Prabhupada formally established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and purposed his movement to fashion a society in which people dedicate themselves to the Supreme Lord Krishna. Srila Prabhupada wanted to educate humanity in spiritual knowledge, attain worldwide peace and unity, and spread knowledge of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Srimad Bhagavatam.*[4]

Srila Prabhupada's movement experienced early success. It materialized swiftly and flourished in both the United States and the United Kingdom. In the United States, it emerged at an auspicious time during developing interests in Eastern spirituality and alternative religiosity

[4] The *Bhagavad Gita* ("song of God") is the primary sacred Scripture for devotees in the ISKCON movement. It is thought to contain all necessary transcendent, spiritual truths communicated to humanity through Lord Krishna (Nadkarni 2021). The *Srimad Bhagavatam* is encyclopedic and consists of twelve books (*Cantos*) on various topics including, but not limited to, dynasties, family life, philosophy, meditation, the mystic arts, bhakti-yoga, devotional service, creation, and more (Venkatesananda 2010). Devotees believe the *Srimad Bhagavatam* will aid readers in their spiritual journey.

among many young people. The movement's popularity was further enhanced because of its emphasis on love and joyful worship, which is what many young people desired to hear, especially at a time when anti-Vietnam War protests were gaining traction. Srila Prabhupada also marketed his teachings as the simplest and most natural. It is, he taught, the easiest and most immediate way to find union with God and attain spiritual liberation in the world.

The ISKCON movement has evolved extensively by adapting to changes in its wider social context. Despite being a movement with an Indian and Eastern genesis, it has penetrated the West and South Africa quite successfully. In South Africa, one can come across devotees with shaven heads and saffron robes chanting and banging on drums (Vande Berg and Kniss 2008, 79). One finds Black and White devotees who have joined temples of which there are eleven in the country in major cities. We do not know the exact number of devotees in South Africa, but this does not take away from the ISKCON movement's strong material presence in its various temples, rural retreats and farms, and the distinctive garb and artifacts (drums, etc.) brandished by devotees. Regrettably, there is a dearth of data on this group, but we are aware, based on aging studies, that neo-Hindu movements, of which the ISKCON movement is one, have been attractive because they lack doctrinal dogmatism and offer a pluralistic approach to divine truth (Hofmeyr 1982, 146).

The ISKCON movement encountered numerous obstacles adapting to the South African socio-political context because it emerged during the racially and socially divisive era of apartheid (Champakalata Dasi 2013). When Srila Prabhupada attempted to visit the country, his efforts were resisted. Although he did manage to visit in 1975, his passport was initially declared invalid by the Indian government as a form of resistance to apartheid. But when Srila Prabhupada did manage to land in South Africa, his presence was warmly received by followers

and those with interests in him (ISKCON Vaishnava Research Forum 2012). He traveled around in a white Mercedes-Benz and lodged in the town of Westville, KwaZulu-Natal.

Local devotees strongly felt blessed by Srila Prabhupada and Lord Krishna. They believed that the founder's presence was a blessing that would assist in establishing the roots of the ISKCON movement in the country. But devotees soon incurred the suspicion of the authorities. White devotees frequently visited majority Indian areas to preach and stay there, which was not permitted by the government out of fear that it could rouse political uprisings.[5] This meant that one's preaching to race groups other than his own proved a significant risk.

The movement had its battles, but circumstances improved when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990. Mandela, who would later become the country's first Black president and first president of the post-apartheid era, visited the Sri Sri Radha Radhanath Temple of Understanding in Chatsworth, KwaZulu-Natal, and shared a meal with members (Champakalata Dasi 2013). Mandela toured the temple, dialogued with devotees on the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and learned of the various humanitarian activities the movement was engaged in. Mandela visited a temple again in 1994 during the celebration of *Diwali* along with government ministers and ambassadors. [6] Mandela also attended the Food for Life Festival (called the "Festival for the Children of the Rainbow Nation") at Durban's Kings Park Soccer

[5] The National Party (NP) government enforced policies demanding racial segregation (e.g. Group Areas Act, 1950). The majority non-White population was forced to live in areas separate from the White minority. Contact between these two groups was limited, especially as the government enforced the use of separate public facilities. Different races mixing would be treated by the state with suspicion and invite action.

[6] *Diwali* (from the Sanskrit term *dipavali*, which translates to "row of lights" symbolizing the victory of light over darkness), also called the Festival of Lights, is an annual five-day festival celebrated by Hindus, Jainists, and Sikhs. In South Africa, *Diwali* is celebrated by many citizens of Indian ancestry (Pillay 2017). The Durban Diwali Festival is quite popular and involves prayers, parades, music, fireworks, and the consumption of traditional Indian foods (Nicolle 2019).

Stadium in April 1997. There devotees put on a show of dance, music, and cultural entertainment (ISKCON News 2013). At the Festival for the Children of the Rainbow Nation, Mandela provided an earnest speech full of confidence "that our country can look forward to great things" (ISKCON News 2013). He urged his audience to contribute to building a foundation for a free and secure society, as it was particularly needed given the recent events of apartheid: "It is only three years since South Africa achieved democracy. But in that time the foundations for a better life have been laid. Now it is up to each one of us [to] help build on those foundations (ISKCON News 2013). Mandela encouraged all South Africans to have love and goodwill for one another. He celebrated the festival because it brought people together and symbolized unity in a divided South Africa that had recently emerged from an oppressive system.

This warm reception proved a marked change for the religion. The ISKCON movement committed itself to carry on the ideals established by Mandela, continue to respect "each and every individual as children of God, the Supreme Father," and nurture the principles of freedom, tolerance, and unity (Champakalata Dasi 2013).

The reception of the ISKCON movement's presence in and by South African communities and cultures is mixed. Historically, when the religion first emerged in South Africa in the early 1970s, it struggled to make inroads into the Black community which led it to concentrate primarily on the Indian, especially Hindu, demographic and, to a lesser extent, the White community. Today there still remain difficulties in marrying the ISKCON movement's worldview with the values and beliefs embraced by local cultures. Sphamandla, a Black devotee from Durban, reveals that his local community does not embrace his faith because "they do not understand all this, what it's all about. They understand if you tell them but it is not easy for them to adapt…" (Danielle 2014). Capetonian devotee Aryan Dasa feels similarly explaining

that “Most don’t understand what this is about. My family doesn’t really know. Still, when some people call the temple, they ask if this is a Hindu temple. They don’t know. It’s not the same thing” (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

Many members who feel their faith is not well understood or warmly received by their family and neighbors come to view fellow devotees as their family. Devotees spend a substantial amount of time together, engage in various daily rituals, feast in community, and some live permanently in the temple (Danielle 2014). For several months, Aryan Dasa spent significant time in community with fellow members of the faith when he lived in the temple. That was a time when he was seeking greater knowledge of his religion through a study of scripture and Srila Prabhupada’s many scriptural commentaries.

The difficulty in the ISKCON movement’s adapting to local Black communities has motivated its missionary efforts. It has a Township Preaching Program that “reaches out to local Africans twice a week with *prasādam*, *kirtan* and Krishna conscious discourses” (Madhava Smullen 2015).[7] Devotees make trips to townships like Soweto and Sharpeville, as well as to towns like Hammanskraal, Mafikeng, and Rustenburg to distribute literature and target the younger generation (Madhava Smullen 2017[a]). Several newly converted Black devotees have taken part in outreach programs in their local communities to bring more Black persons into the movement (Madhava Smullen 2015).

Here the ISKCON movement shares discernible similarities with other local NRMs in South Africa. For example, the Soka Gakkai International movement, which emerged first in

[7] *Kirtan* is a chant that praises God and attempts to facilitate an internal connection within the devotee to God (Loka-pavani Devi Dasi 2020). In ISKCON, this chant is called the maha-mantra and has the devotee repeatedly reciting the following: “Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare.”

Japan in 1930 and later introduced to South Africa in the 1980s, attracted many Black South Africans despite restrictions imposed on them by the apartheid regime (Dessì 2020). Today, roughly half of the movement consists of Black and Colored members. Targeting Black South Africans has been a deliberate strategy of the Buddhist NRM Fo Guang Shan. Their temple, Nan Hua Temple, constructed in 1992, is located in the small town of Bronkhorstspruit, Gauteng, and has created statues from dark brown wood depicting Black African Buddhas and targets impoverished areas for proselytization and aid, especially in rural and tribal settings (Reinke 2020).

Indian South Africans have historically received the ISKCON movement most positively as local Hindus welcomed its establishment in the country. Sooklal's study revealed that 80.6% of Hindus felt their religion had been strengthened by the movement's emergence in South Africa (Sooklal 1987, 34). Hindus felt their religion was bolstered through the ISKCON movement's emphasis on distributing literature, imparting knowledge about ancient Indian culture and religion, and curbing conversions to other religions. It is less clear how White South Africans have perceived the ISKCON movement. Ever since it established itself in Cape Town and Durban, the movement has made attempts to bring Whites into the fold. Devotees ventured to the Transvaal and established themselves in Johannesburg in pursuit of this goal (Sooklal 1987, 21-22). It was not much later that several students from Rhodes University joined the movement after devotees rented a house in the majority-White suburb of Yeoville.

Despite the movement's missionary efforts and identity, most South Africans have historically viewed the focus of community worship as the Church within Christian traditions and know very little, if anything, about other religions (Hofmeyr 1982, 140). There is little reason to think that most South Africans know much about the ISKCON movement either. Despite its committed

missionary zeal, the ISKCON movement maintains the status of a marginal religion in the country (Sooklal 1987, 37). Durbanite devotee Keshava Krishna Das laments that despite the answers provided by his religion and its sacred texts being available to all, "we remain isolated idealists in the eyes of society" (Keshava Krishna Das 2013). He urges devotees to get "out of our isolation shells" by actively volunteering and participating in local or national incentives calling for social cohesion, moral upliftment, and shared human interests. To not do so will ensure that "we shall remain irrelevant."

There are additional contestations of interest that apply to South Africa and Western societies generally. One devotee laments that many intellectuals do not believe in God, which, he argues, is a non-negotiable belief for devotees (Chandidas Dasa n.d.). Rather than constituting a figment of the imagination as some intellectuals assert, God is an objective fact. Another devotee laments how according to contemporary scientific thought, the "knowledge" of the *Vedas* is not taken seriously because it is merely religious (Devamrita Swami n.d.). He retorts that science is limited in explanatory scope because it cannot adequately explain the phenomenon of consciousness, which allows ancient Vedic religious truths to be married to Western modes of thought. Philosophy is also not off the cards. Karnamrita Das argues that today's philosophy in Western societies "has it backwards." He refers to René Descartes' famous *Cogito, ergo sum*, namely his famous phrase "I think, therefore I am," which Karnamrita Das argues is conceptualized incorrectly, or "backwards." It is not thinking that makes us exist; rather, it is the soul and eternal nature that exists and from which flows one's ability to think, speak, and communicate. Karnamrita Das takes this further arguing that in the same way thought is basic to person, so is their capacity to love, in particular, to love one another and Lord Krishna. He rephrases Descartes' Cogito to read "I love Krishna, therefor[e] I am."

The ISKCON movement publicizes itself as a cure to various ills experienced by many today (Karapanagiotis 2018, 77). Keshava Krishna Das writes that "we preach about big Vedic world objectives and explain how they are needed to help relieve modern society of prevailing social ills" (Keshava Krishna Das 2013). Krishna consciousness, another devotee argues, will inculcate moral principles in society and solve intractable problems (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]). As we will observe below, the devotee's desire to solve social ills is particularly relevant in the South African context where destructive and self-destructive activities are very prevalent. Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami points to his movement's stellar record of there being no drug addiction in its ranks, nor the likes of crime, unemployment, and abortion.

As should also become evident is that the ISKCON movement in South Africa is, despite the many contestations and tensions we will shortly analyze, unlike other NRMs that tend towards isolationism. Rather than isolating themselves from South African society due to perceived tensions and differences, devotees actively engage socio-cultural discourses and values in the hope to extend their presence. There is much evidence for this. For example, efforts are made to render the religion more accessible to English speakers by translating various texts into English (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]) and African languages (isiZulu, isiXhosa, and SeSotho) (Aarushi Dasi, personal email communication, 17 July, 2021). Devotees explain that it is their goal to inform non-members of their religion's teachings by distributing spiritual knowledge (Satyaraja Dasa 2011). The movement's Bhakti Yoga Society engages audiences at universities across South Africa and informs students of the teachings of the *Vedas* on the differences between the body and the soul, as well as of the concepts of reincarnation, karma, sense control, and yoga (ISKCONZA n.d.[e]).

A precedent for actively engaging audiences and bringing persons into the faith was established by Srila Prabhupada who, in an interview in 1969, stated that an essential purpose for his movement is engaging culture by training "boys and girls in the science of Krsna consciousness" (ISKCONZA n.d.[e]). He did not wish to force non-members to accept Krishna consciousness, but rather put "it before them for their judgment. Let them judge it."

With our knowledge of the ISKCON movement as a NRM and one that is located in a South African context now in place, we can progress to clarify my research theory and methodology. This subsequent articulation of methodology and theory elucidates how I selected to analyze the ISKCON movement, which is important as these form the basis of the forthcoming symbol contestation analysis.

Chapter 2: Research Theory and Methodology

This chapter outlines the overall strategy to answer the research question. The research approach, background, rationale, theory, and data collection are presented.

Research Approach

The academic study of religion is predicated on researchers bracketing their subjective value judgments. This approach employs empathy and an insider (or "insider-knows-best") perspective, both of which continue to find contemporary appeal. Empathy is the temporary suspension of making value judgments on matters of truth or ethics regarding phenomena under investigation (Chidester 1989, 26).

In the academic study of religion, scholars adopt an impartial perspective (Loobuyck 2017, 1-6) and do not concern themselves with the ultimate truth of a religion, its instruction, direction, and/or conversion (Gross 1996, 6). The researcher's personal agreement or disagreement with the religious rituals, beliefs, and symbols she is investigating is irrelevant. She is to approach her study impartially and disseminate accurate information about religious beliefs and practices. The insider perspective privileges the view/s of the religious individual/s being studied, as these are the most valuable sources of information for the researcher. The empathetic and insider perspective taken together, explains Ivan Strenski, is not an attempt to theorize about religion, such as concerning its essence, origin, or development, which were questions of interest to the discipline's classical theorists, but rather to take religion "as a phenomenon" as it is presented to the researcher (Strenski 2015, 83). This approach is appropriate for my analysis of the ISKCON movement.

A caveat must be noted: although an impartial and open-minded approach is the ideal (Capps 1995, 147), this does not suggest that an absolute value-free and objective position is possible. Attempts at being objective while gathering, discussing, and disseminating data on religion cannot mean being fully value-free as current notions of objectivity are based upon constructed and accepted conventions (Gross 1996, 12). All researchers engage their work from a particular point of view, which underscores the importance of abiding by the rules of scholarship and being as objective as possible within the limits of the system. The application of methodological frameworks attempts to facilitate this objective approach.

Research Background and Rationale

What are the reasons for me engaging the field of NRMs in this thesis? Why have I selected to focus specifically on the ISKCON movement? It has to do with the levels of religious illiteracy and lack of knowledge of various religious traditions among persons generally. This lack of knowledge is unsurprising because there are just too many religions, both conventional and obscure, to keep track of. Many of South Africa's NRMs, including the ISKCON movement, exist below the radar and often out of the public eye. This study of the ISKCON movement finds that it is largely unfamiliar and unknown to most South Africans.

I have interests in alternative forms of religion and the marginal status of NRMs in societies, including South African society. The lack of public knowledge of NRMs is a major source of fear, misrepresentation, stigmatization, and demonization, which underscores the importance of disseminating accurate facts about these groups (Robbins 2001, 172; Zablocki and Robbins 2001, 17). I wish to contribute to academic knowledge on NRMs in South Africa. NRMs have been the focus of several studies, notably in, although not limited to, the Satanic

panic in White communities during the transition from apartheid (Dunbar and Swart 1993; Falkof 2012), the ISKCON movement as a fresh and rejuvenating expression of a stagnating local Hinduism (Sooklal 1987), the occult (Kohnert 2003), and the growth of pagan religiosity in the 1990s (Steyn 1994a; Steyn 1994b) and in the early twenty-first century (Wallace 2006). But there are still many areas in NRMs that invite further exploration. I selected the ISKCON group for study because of the dearth of research on this movement in South Africa, especially when compared to other NRMs.

The most recent study to my knowledge is a 2009 article published by scholar P. Pratap Kumar of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Kumar wants to identify "strategies" used for disseminating religious ideas, especially by the religious living in areas a great distance away from their religion's place of origin. This makes relevant Kumar's study of the Festival of Chariots in Durban that becomes a vehicle for disseminating religious ideas to a broad audience (Kumar 2009, 92). The essay provides an interesting analysis of this festival (Kumar 2009, 93-104) but, simply because it was not the author's intention, has little to offer to my area of interest, namely contestations over sacred symbols.[8]

A much older article by Anil Sooklal is *The Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa* published in 1987. Sooklal provides a valuable analysis of the origin, perceptions, and practices of the ISKCON movement in South Africa but his essay is now over three decades old. Yet much has changed in the country since and over the decades. A more recent assessment of the ISKCON movement in South Africa is needed, which is why I selected this group to study. As John Gordon Melton remarks, NRMs exist "in relatively contested spaces within society as a

[8] Pratap Kumar does reference some hostility, or "minor conflicts" such as small standoffs, between Pentecostal churches in the largely Indian township of Phoenix and ISKCON devotees. This detail could perhaps be an area germane to symbol contestation analysis. But it is largely peripheral to the overall article and therefore not treated in any great detail.

whole" (Melton 2004, 75). What does this contested space look like for the ISKCON movement in South Africa?

Fieldwork

I engaged in fieldwork by visiting an ISKCON temple in Rondebosch, Cape Town. I had the assistance of a reliable and friendly temple informant who helped me acquire contacts for interview purposes. Fieldwork is important as it "may provide rich data about people's personal experiences within a religion, particular local expressions of religion, or specific ritual practice…" (Harvey 2011, 222). Fieldwork motivates the researcher to focus on the experiences and expressions of religious persons, which can be accomplished through interviews and participant observation (Harvey 2011, 217). I visited the temple on many occasions. While there, I read through texts, consumed *prasādam* dishes, and spoke to many members, several of whom were congregants. [9] I was able to conduct interviews at the temple.

Part of fieldwork is to observe "what people do" when they enact religion in ceremonial and daily life and is a means for contributing to existing academic knowledge and debate (Harvey 2011, 217). Unfortunately, beyond speaking to residents at the temple, I could not observe rituals and practices in person. The temple's worship room was permanently closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Important elements of fieldwork adhered to during my study include: being informed about the particular religious group I was studying, adopting methodological agnosticism during my study (treating religion in a value-free manner and the bracketing out preconceptions,

[9] *Prasādam* is vegetarian food that has been blessed, prepared in devotion, and sanctified by Lord Krishna.

thoughts, and beliefs), establishing rapport and trust with relevant persons, and respecting religious participants while engaging in interviews.

Research Theory

A qualitative discourse analysis method is used in this thesis. The qualitative researcher encourages participants to share information about their experiences. The focus is primarily on the participants' language and not on generating broad generalizations from data. Through entertaining the subjectivities of participants, qualitative analysis allows for more nuanced descriptions from interviewees.

Analyzing Discourse

Much of this thesis involves an analysis of discourses offered by devotees derived from various sources including video media, online articles, journal articles, books and book chapters, and interviews (Appendix A stipulates the sources in full). What is discourse? The realm of discourse is entered as soon as one begins to write, speak, or represent in any way (Burr 2003, 91; Moberg 2009, 26). Definitions of what constitutes discourse vary, but Burr provides a helpful one,

> "A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light" (Burr 2003, 64).

Discourses are constitutive in that they "construct the phenomena of our world for us" (Burr 2003, 65). Discourse constructs the world or a certain state of affairs. There is never only one discourse; rather, many discourses exist that compete, support, or relate to other discourses. Some discourses emphasize certain aspects of the world at the expense of others and each articulates the "truth" about a given phenomenon or state of affairs (Moberg 2009, 26). Because constructions of reality are never static, they change and mutate in various ways (Granholm 2013). New discourses arise to challenge existing traditions of understanding, offer new possibilities for action and can influence dominant notions of right and wrong, good and bad, normal and abnormal, and so on (Moberg 2009, 26).

According to Gordon Lynch, an analysis of discourse focuses on identifying the "subjects" or persons within the text, the actions ascribed to those persons, and the relationships described between the persons (Lynch 2005). Further, it seeks to learn how descriptions are presented in the text and what the text says, implicitly or explicitly, about how the reader should respond, act, view the world or the particular relationships. Lynch also recommends examining the cultural roots of the discourse, how they become viewed as "natural" accounts of the world, and how they support or subvert certain social institutions. The researcher should examine the discourse for potential positive and negative effects: Who benefits from the discourse? Who loses out? And what does one gain from supporting or challenging it?

Analysis Through the Theory of Symbolic Exchange

David Chidester's theory of symbolic exchange provides a useful interpretive tool for analyzing NRMs, specifically the ISKCON movement for this thesis, and the contestations over sacred symbols, their ownership, and alienation.

Numerous theorists who have studied religion and human thought have brought attention to the need to evaluate symbols (Chidester 1985, 1989; Capps 1995, 222; Magesa 1997). In religion, symbols are expressed within rituals and myths that are used to explain the origin, purpose, and meaning of the world and humanity's place within it (Magesa 1997, 3). Chidester maintains that if the researcher wishes to understand religious "worldviews" an analysis of symbolic forms is imperative (Chidester 1985, 45-48; Chidester 1989, 21). The scholar should identify how these forms are formulated, appropriated, manipulated, and mobilized to fashion a human identity as well as a place for the human being to stand and act. Chidester views the appropriation of symbols as a means to satisfy "interests" (Chidester 1989, 24). Interests constitute concerns religious believers and communities have with specific political and social realities within their contexts. One can focus on these interests as a means to understand the motivations of religious believers.

Symbols are sacred in at least two ways (Chidester 1989, 22). First, a symbol is sacred because the religious community views it as sacred. This translates to the symbol being afforded respect and reverence by those within the religious community. Second, a symbol is made sacred through claims to its ownership. This theory of symbolic exchange contains three dynamics: ownership, appropriation, and alienation.

Ownership. Religious worldviews perpetuate the "stealing back and forth of sacred symbols" (Chidester 1989, 21). The power of these symbols is evident within the personal and collective claims to "ownership" through which religious believers and communities invest them with revered sacredness. Ownership is apparent in efforts to appropriate symbols, own them, and alienate others from them. Religious worldviews, persons, and communities appropriate symbols and then make exclusive claims to their ownership.

Appropriation. This is the attempt to ascribe a symbol in one's possession with a new meaning that represents the interests of a religious community (Chidester 1989, 24). Chidester refers to the work of Janet Hodgson which looks at the historical appropriation of Ntsikana and Nxele as symbols of power within emergent African movements (Hodgson 1986).[10] Figures like Ntsikana and Nxele were not simply individuals located historically and spatially but were also meaningful and powerful sacred symbols appropriated within Xhosa religious history. These figures were appropriated to meet the religious, political, and social interests of the Xhosa people: Ntsikana as a symbol of non-violent Xhosa nationalism and Nxele as a symbol of militant resistance. Through an analysis and understanding of symbol appropriation, a researcher can comprehend African consciousness and discern its development. The appropriation of symbols in the Ntsikana and Nxele context can be extrapolated to other religious worldviews.

Alienation. This may take the form of a rejection of symbols when one group states "You own them, we don't want them." It may also be an exclusion from ownership, access, and use of symbols, a process recognizable in how Christian colonizers employed strategies rejecting African symbols through forces of coercion or persuasion, which resulted in an alienation from their traditional symbolic ground (Chidester 1989, 22). There is a loser on the battlefield of symbols as apparent in the conquered admitting defeat by declaring "We don't own them, you

[10] Ntsikana (c. 1760-1820) was one of the earliest Xhosa converts to Christianity after its arrival through English missionaries and the first Xhosa individual to compose worship music in the tradition of his newfound faith (Knight 2010). Nxele (c. 1780-1820) was a convert to Christianity who preached against witchcraft, adultery, polygamy, and warfare (Balcomb 2008, 35-36). After coming into conflict with the British, he was defeated and imprisoned on Robben Island. He eventually drowned attempting to escape. Both men became symbols for the Xhosa people: Ntsikana symbolizing submission, Nxele representing struggle (Mangcu 2012, 280).

do." From alienation emerge new strategies of appropriation and negotiations on the battlefield of symbols.

Power. Symbols are "vehicles of power" to be appropriated, owned, and operated, and their power is activated by personal and collective claims to their ownership (Chidester 1989, 21). Their power is evident in how they animate religious history, as in the case of the Xhosa religious history in the contestations over the symbols of Ntsikana and Nxele. Power symbols can clash as between, for example, Christian symbols brought to Africa by missionaries and African symbols. Symbols are vehicles of power because of the sacredness and importance persons invest in them and their intent to claim exclusive ownership. Power is apparent in how persons, groups, and communities reject symbols by giving them up or are excluded from access to them by others. As noted, there is a loser on this battlefield, although contestations over their ownership will continue (Chidester 1989, 26).

Interests. Chidester maintains that to make sense of religiohistorical analysis we need to explore "the specific religious, political, and other social interests at stake in a particular process of social and historical formation" (Chidester 1989, 24). He objects to Hodgson's notion of exploring the "needs" of religious persons which, since it focuses on human satisfaction, frustration, or gratification, is appropriate in psychology, but not in the study of religion. Rather, an analysis of interests is imperative and appropriate since religions mobilize powerful and meaningful symbols in the service of competing interests.

It is through an analysis of negotiations on the battlefield of symbols, such as in the "stealing back and forth" of sacred symbols, that interests are revealed. Interests are apparent in the strategies of negotiating power and meaning, and in legitimating claims to privileged, exclusive ownership of symbols. Various interests can be served such as power, religious,

political, and social-related ones. Chidester notes the “battle for the Bible” between the African Indigenous Church (AIC) and Whites. The AIC’s wanted to own and control the Bible to be strategically mobilized against the faith of the White man that systematically disempowered Blacks in South Africa. It served the interests of Blacks to assert their claims against opposing and conflicting forces. We can also note how within colonial history indigenous populations were alienated from their lands, resources, persons, psyches and therefore became subordinated to the interests of their conquerors. It is by noting interests that valuable analysis can be made, which is why Chidester suggests that the study of religion would do well to engage in “further detailed research on contending interests” (Chidester 1989, 24).

Chapter 3: Applying the Theory of Symbolic Exchange to the ISKCON Movement

This paper recognizes twenty-one contested symbols on the highly energized and animated battlefield of symbol contestation. The dynamics of ownership, appropriation, and alienation are apparent in the contestations over symbols between ideological proponents whom all advance discourses vying for theological, philosophical, and pragmatic superiority and dominance. It might help to provide two brief illustrations of how one might apply the theory of symbolic exchange to an analysis of symbols. These contestations will undergo additional exposition in the forthcoming analysis. We will summarily include here one doctrinal and one pragmatic contestation.

To note a doctrinal contestation, one observes dispute over the symbol of death and reincarnation between devotees and secular-materialists and philosophical naturalists. This symbol of death is disputed and it is partly through this contestation that it is rendered sacred and that interests become apparent. On the one hand, secular-materialist discourse maintains that human consciousness ends with the death of the physical body (Andrade n.d.). There is no "soul" and afterlife, and persons have just one life to live and ought to make the most of it. The discourse supplied by devotees, however, disputes this interpretation and maintains that persons undergo numerous deaths through reincarnation until they escape *saṃsāra* (the repeated process of rebirth and redeath) to live in the presence of Lord Krishna (Chandidas Dasa n.d.). Clearly, such views are in theological and ideological opposition and mutually exclusive. Both groups wish to claim ownership of the symbol of death because this establishes worldview and ideological legitimacy and superiority. Also as Chidester notices, claims to ownership of

symbols are often continuous as the battle over them rages on because no one wishes to concede them to their opponents (Chidester 1989, 26).

Pragmatically, there is contestation over the use of wealth in everyday living between devotees who devote their money to Lord Krishna and the materialist consumers who splurge on consumer products with little regard for the spiritual significance of wealth. The contestation materializing between the two groups concerns how wealth is to be utilized. And it cannot be lost on researchers how tension-inducing the allure consumer culture, which permeates Western and Western-influenced societies, can be on devotees who endeavor to live out an alternative ascetic lifestyle that privileges Krishna consciousness above all else. It is because members of the religion are so vulnerable and susceptible to falling into such traps of consumerism that devotees have churned out discourse catering for those within their movement.

Battle over symbols, the attempt to alienate others from them, and claims to their ownership are sources of tension. Tension can emerge from intellectual doubt regarding matters of faith (doctrinal and philosophical views, etc.) and the pragmatic struggles constitutive of living out one's religious convictions. For example, contestation between ideological opponents might compel many participants to question who has the correct interpretation of a symbol. And such questions and the answers given to them are consequential in that they possess significant sway over what a devotee or religionist might decide to do. What could happen, and often does, is that a devotee or religionist will decide to convert to some other worldview or deconvert away from a presently held one. Some people claim to find a faith intellectually appealing whereas others might become disenchanted and will inevitably fall away to adopt some other worldview. For the latter person, the edifice bolstering some sacred symbol (God, the soul, etc.) has imploded and the symbol can no longer be rationally accepted. Conversion and deconversion occur regularly and are not at all easy for many of those who experience it.

Tensions can be pragmatic as they emerge within the context of everyday living, such as in devotees attempting to put into practice the celibate lifestyle and avoid falling into the seductive traps of materialistic consumerism. Devotees are frequently being enticed to adopt a lifestyle that is inconsistent with, if not entirely anathema to, their religion's values and principles. There is much at stake for devotees and religionists when it comes to the dynamics of ownership and appropriation of and alienation from symbols. A devotee might experience the discomforting stresses and tensions to arise from inquiring concerning who maintains the correct interpretation of a symbol. Here the devotee is inquiring as to who maintains a legitimate "ownership" of a sacred symbol, or set of symbols, on the contested and disputed battlefield of symbols. This paper will lay bare these symbols, explore their contestations, and analyze the relevant tensions in greater detail.[11]

[11] In most cases in the forthcoming symbol analysis, two contesting views over symbols are considered. Of course, contestations will often have more than just two ways of being contested. But due to the word limit of this thesis, I necessarily had to avoid taking into consideration all such multiple views and contestations.

The Battlefield of Symbol Contestation

What follows is a rigorous analysis of contestations through competing discourses on the battlefield of symbols. Reviewing contestations will offer insight into why persons say and argue what they do. We are also interested in how the ISKCON movement's counterparts and opponents view the symbols being contested and how they contest the movement's interpretations. As reflection in chapter 4 will show, contestations occur in several domains such as the ethical, pragmatic, scientific, and doctrinal.

The following twenty-one symbols were selected for analysis as they present the most conspicuous contestations and strategies used by devotees to overcome them. The symbols appear frequently in the discourse because they are important to devotees and have invited broad reflection and engagement. We also observe the strategies that devotees employ to overcome these contestations.

Abortion

Abortion is a controversial subject in many religions and the act is typically invested with some form of religious significance whether that is considering it sinful due to being at odds with the will of a God, contrary to moral convictions, or clashing with religious principles. The ISKCON movement is explicit concerning its position on abortion. It denounces the practice because it is, in their view, an act of murder, irrespective of how early in pregnancy the fetus is aborted (Krishna.com n.d.[a]; krishna.org. n.d.[a]),

> "If there is pregnancy, they just murder (that's what it is) the child within the womb through abortion. They do not realize that according to God's law, there is punishment for killing the

> child within the womb. They will have to take birth as a child and themselves be murdered. That is the unbreakable law of Karma" (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

The movement maintains there is consciousness at all stages of physical maturity and this includes the fetus in the womb. According to Pavanesana Dasa,

> "[T]he Vedas explain clearly that the 'new' life or the development of the new physical covering of the soul begins at the time of conception. It is impossible to kill the soul, but in the material world killing refers to the slaying of the material body. So abortion at any stage is certainly murder" (Pavanesana Dasa n.d.).

Rehan Medhavi draws from the teachings of sacred scripture that strongly contend against abortion,

> "In the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, it is stated that the life of the child begins when the egg is fertilized by the sperm at conception. There is information also about the child's life before taking birth. After 7 months, the child is fully conscious even within the womb" (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

The fetus has a "spiritual spark" and consciousness, which means that it has life at conception (Krishna.com n.d.[a]). Srila Prabhupada had strong words for those who supported the practice, referring to such persons as "rascals", "degraded", "atheistic", "sinful", and merely an "assembly of two-legged animal" (krishna.org. n.d.[a]).

There is a moral and spiritual dimension involved in abortion. The practice is "as sinful as

killing a cow or a brahmana" and will have severe karmic consequences for those involved (krishna.org. n.d.[a]). The woman responsible will suffer in her present and next life. There is also a "specific hell designated for those who commit such sins" (krishna.org n.d.[a]). Those who hear of an abortion should be mindful to refrain from child-killing and take Krishna consciousness seriously. To devotees, abortion is, symbolically, more than a mere act as it entails a moral dimension (the moral evil of murder) and a spiritual repercussion of negative karma that is consequential to one's future rebirth.

The ISKCON movement's discourse addressing the topic yields insight into what it believes the motivation for abortion is. To have an abortion is to "avoid the responsibility of childbirth and child-raising…" and because people do not like pregnancy or childbirth (krishna.org n.d.[a]). Another reason is that some modern people, or "the atheistic scientist," no longer value human life that to them "is simply a lump of matter" (krishna.org n.d.[a]). People do not care about lumps of matter and there is nothing wrong with killing such an object if one deems it necessary. For devotees, human life in modern, Western societies has lost intrinsic value. Abortion is the view of "Prestigious medical practitioners [who] give this opinion… How degraded human society has become!" (krishna.org. n.d.[a]). The ISKCON movement charges that the legitimacy of abortion is based on deficient science. These scientists are "fools" who do not have real knowledge. They might pose as scientists, but they spread gibberish: "The modern scientific theory that life is a combination of chemicals is nonsense" (krishna.org. n.d.[a]). Devotees view this mindset as a considerable problem because "in Western countries there is killing even [a] grown-up child within the womb" (krishna.org. n.d.[a]).

The perspective of devotees on abortion sits in tension with South Africa's legislation on the matter. Since 1996, legislation affirms that having an abortion is legal and within the parameters of law (Mosley 2017 et al.), although there are certain boundaries (South African Government 2020). If a woman is pregnant under thirteen weeks, she is allowed to have a legal abortion. If the woman is between thirteen and twenty weeks, she may terminate her pregnancy under specific conditions such as if her mental or physical health is at risk, if the baby will have severe physical or mental abnormalities, if she is pregnant due to incest or rape, or if she believes her economic or social situation is sufficient reason for the termination of pregnancy. If she is

more than twenty weeks pregnant, termination may only occur legally if her or the fetus' life is in danger or if there are likely to be serious birth defects.

The ISKCON movement's position is incompatible and conflicting with this accepted legislation. The movement does not condone having an abortion at any moment within the development of the fetus. Whether an abortion is had before thirteen weeks or post twenty weeks, it considers it to be the murder of a life that will produce negative karmic consequences for those involved. One moral achievement cited by the movement is that its community has no cases of abortion among local devotees because they value human life (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami. n.d.[a]).

The attitudes of many within wider South African society are more favorable to the ISKCON movement's perspective. According to a major study on attitudes towards abortion, the majority of respondents feel abortion is "always wrong" in the case of family poverty (75.4%) and fetal anomaly (55%) (Mosley 2017 et al.). Over half (52.5%) find abortion wrong in both cases. Most "South Africans seem to hold positive attitudes toward availability of abortion while still harboring strongly negative attitudes toward moral acceptability of abortion or women's autonomy to choose an abortion" (Mosley 2017 et al.). Although this picture is not ideal for the ISKCON movement, devotees do view favorably those who object to abortion for whatever reason they do so. Like devotees, many South Africans disapprove of abortion on religious and moral grounds (Varga 2002; Macleod, Sigcau, and Luwaca 2011; Gresh and Maharaj 2014), although there is some leniency when an abortion is the result of pregnancy due to rape or severe fetal anomaly (Wheeler et al. 2012).

Cow, The

The symbolism of the cow was succinctly captured by Mahatma Gandhi who viewed its protection as "one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution" because through this unique animal an individual is able "to realize his identity with all that lives" (Gandhi 1921, 36). More pragmatically, Gandhi recognized the cow's value in its usefulness to people, such as it providing milk and making agriculture possible in ancient India. The cow is therefore "considered one of our mothers, as she gives us her milk and thus nurtures our health and well-being" (ISKCON 2021).

The cow is sacred and its protection is one of the major goals in the ISKCON movement, as notably expressed in Srila Prabhupada's polemic opposing animal exploitation and slaughter (King 2012, 183-184). Srila Prabhupada emphasized that animals too have souls and therefore ought not to be exploited or killed for human consumption. To kill any living being, whether human or non-human, is murder that will generate negative karma both for society and the individual. Equally, animals are never to be used for human clothing, experimentation, and entertainment.

These convictions underpin discourse condemning such acts. Harsh terms are used to describe persons who slaughter and exploit animals such as "sinners," "degraded," and "animalistic" who all are complicit in "murder" (King 2012, 185-186). No "civilized" person would kill a cow, just as they would not murder their own mother (ISKCON 2021). Consider once again the words of Srila Prabhupada,

> "[H]e who gives permission, he who kills the animal, he who sells the slaughtered animal, he who cooks the animal, he who administers distribution of the foodstuff, and at last he who eats such

> cooked animal food are all murderers, and all of them are liable to be punished by the laws of nature" (King 2012, 185).

If indeed the slaughtering of cattle constitutes murder, as devotees maintain, then many countries cannot be anything else but guilty of sustaining an industry legitimizing mass murder. The cattle and beef industry, which involves the slaughtering of cattle for human consumption, is thriving in many countries (Eichinger Ferro-luzzi 1987), including South Africa (Steyn 2018). This industry is home to several multibillion-dollar industries (e.g. finance, marketing, publications, equipment, and artificial intelligence) seeking to generate profits and provide meaningful careers.

Much here causes devotees concern, but devotees will encourage efforts in the cattle industry looking after the wellbeing of the animals through providing nutritious diets, medical on-farm services, clinics, and more. These efforts are embraced and put into practice by devotees themselves. As one researcher who visited an ISKCON farm recounts, there was a cow whose head had been half-destroyed by cancer and was being lovingly cared for (King 2012, 188). Devotees view favorably certain sectors in the cattle industry providing a more humane treatment of cattle, although the movement can never agree with the industry's goals of producing profit through the slaughtering of cattle for human consumption. Nonetheless, the cattle industry continues to produce for devotees vexation. In their view, the industry is a homicidal market legitimizing the murder of sentient life that has a soul (King 2012; ISKCON 2020).

What strategies have devotees employed to resolve these tensions? First, they identify those they believe are responsible. Devotees place blame on materialistic and capitalist-oriented perspectives and treatment of animals that "typically make their profits largely at other peoples'

expense—damaging health and the environment" (Madhava Smullen 2010[a]). They also realize the cattle industry seeks to generate as much profit and revenue as possible. It is a multibillion-dollar industry home to various industries seeking to survive in economically competitive national and global markets. Like other capitalist-orientated industries and economies, there is the immorality of greed for capital and material wealth. This emphasis on capital gain is, devotees maintain, materialistically orientated because it is transfixed on the material world rather than on the transcendent.

Also part of this strategy is to encourage as many persons as possible to focus on Lord Krishna and pursue Krishna consciousness that elevates them beyond material existence. The tension between the ISKCON movement and the cattle industry is evidenced in its strategy to sway attitudes at the general public level. To alter the habit of consuming cattle meats, the movement operates numerous accessible online websites and media promoting vegetarian and meat-free diets (King 2012). These diets are advertised as having health benefits for consumers, such as being low in saturated fat and cholesterol, all of which reduce the risk of diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and more. Devotees realize that attaining their goal of eliminating animal killing for human consumption requires a massive overhaul. They are contending not only with the habits of animal consumption of millions of people but also against economic and structural factors that will not be changed overnight.

Devotees have tried to lead by example by putting their moral and religious convictions into practice. A strategy at the practical level is how devotees have established temple compounds and farms uniquely for housing animals. Not only are these sacred spaces, but they are also locations where all life is valued in and of itself. There have been recent efforts to create more of these spaces in South Africa,

> "In Cape Town at the moment we are actually trying to get a farm somewhere in Stellenbosch. For a simple living. It was Srila Prabhupada's dream to have a sustainable living and protect the cows. It was his dream to create that society. There's one in Hungary called Krishna Valley. In South Africa, we have been struggling to start something. In Cape Town, they are in the process, they are looking for land and property to buy. It's a big project. It will probably take a few years [to create] something like Krishna valley" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

There are several ISKCON farms in the country (Aarushi Dasi, personal email communication, 17 July, 2021). Govinda's Goshala is located in the North West province and takes care of nineteen cows (Govinda's Goshala. "Situated in Brits, North West Province…" 11 June 2021, Instagram). Another farm, Sri Krishna Goshala, is located in Thornville, near Pietermaritzburg, and is a sanctuary for nine cows (Sri Krishna Goshala. "The Sri Krishna Goshala in Thornville, near…." 11 June 2021, 16:18 PM. Facebook). These farms often have websites connected to them through which interested visitors and sponsors can "adopt" a cow. Through adoption, usually requiring a sponsor to pay a yearly fee (which can exceed $1000), the animal is saved from slaughter and provided a comfortable farm life. This enables the cow to live a "cruelty-free [life] from birth to death" (Rivard 2009).

Death

For many, the death of the body signifies more than physical death itself. Death, to many of the religious, has spiritual significance opening the door to some other reality, whether that be

an afterlife or the transmigration of the soul to live a new existence on Earth or in another realm. For others, physical death symbolizes the end to existence and presents the total elimination of consciousness.

Devotees do not consider death to be the end of conscious existence. Rather, it entails reincarnation, which is a central tenet in the religion's doctrinal dimension. But it is also here that there is significant contestation between devotees embracing a 'hard' (my word) form/type/notion of reincarnation and others (usually Westerners) who hold to a 'soft' (also my word) form/type/notion, as I explain below.[11]

We can note how devotee Pavanesana Dasa, who embraces the hard form, takes issue with the soft form. We define the 'soft' version in Pavanesana Dasa's own words, which is the "common understanding" of reincarnation as simply being born again as someone else (Pavanesana Dasa, n.d). Seeking to correct this view, he begins by noting that each person possesses a spirit-soul that is distinct from the physical body.

Pavanesana Dasa articulates the 'hard' form, the view held by devotees. According to this form, the spirit-soul is the real and eternal person, or "I", that never changes and undergoes reincarnation in an endless cycle of rebirth. How one is reborn in her next life is determined by her actions. Pavanesana Dasa refers to the *Bhagavad Gita* that teaches this spiritual truth: "Whatever state of being one remembers when he quits his body, O son of Kunti, that state he will attain without fail" (8.6). This hard form of reincarnation constitutes various components: there is the "gross body" composed of space, Earth, water, fire, and air that eventually dies; there are the soul and the subtle body that leaves the gross body when it perishes; the soul is

[11] I do not make truth claims by attaching the 'hard' and 'soft' labels to these different views; rather, I use them to identify and distinguish between two different forms or interpretations of reincarnation.

transported by the subtle body into a particle of male sperm that is placed within a woman's womb. This is, in Pavanesana Dasa's view, the correct and faithful interpretation of reincarnation.

But this 'hard' form and doctrine of reincarnation is in contestation with the 'soft' form embraced by most Western persons holding to a belief in reincarnation. Although reincarnation is fundamental to the doctrinal web of devotees, it is a belief held by only a minority, although a significant minority, of Westerners. Its acceptance hovers around 20% on the higher end (Harding, Phillips, and Fogarty, 1986; Ashford and Timms 1992) and around 10% on the lower (Donahue 1993; Davies 1997). Evidently, most do not hold to any belief in reincarnation because they live in cultures significantly influenced by Christian religiosity and secularism, both of which view reincarnation as a deviant belief that people ought not hold to (Walter and Waterhouse 1999, 187).

But those who do hold to such belief do so in the soft sense, which is, for Pavanesana Dasa, to have a very general interpretation and understanding lacking nuance as expressed in the hard type. As his criticism suggests, this soft version lies in tension with the understanding embraced by devotees. One reason is that the soft version lacks clarity. Whereas devotees are clearer and in agreement on how to understand the doctrine of reincarnation, many others in Western settings are ambivalent. For example, many who believe in reincarnation do so simply because they find the idea appealing. Others see little need to integrate belief in reincarnation with other religious beliefs and many have little issue placing it alongside already held Christian convictions. Others find that it does not influence daily life and practice at all. Most do not attach their belief in reincarnation to specific religions and seem to hold it loosely, rather than dogmatically (Walter and Waterhouse 1999, 187). In reaction to these views, Pavanesana Dasa

charges that reincarnation "has remained a vague concept for most people" (Pavanesana Dasa n.d).[12]

In South Africa, belief in reincarnation is commonly held by new agers, also known as proponents of New Age spirituality. In her analysis of the New Age movement in South Africa, Steyn observes how many practitioners believe they have extensive power to create their own reality (Steyn 1994a, 95). The new ager has power over life, which includes power over reincarnation and future rebirths. The notion of reincarnation is attractive because it offers unlimited chances for attaining perfection. If one makes a mess of her current life, she knows she has the opportunity once again in a future rebirth to live an improved existence and strive for perfection.

It is not difficult to see devotees in the ISKCON movement strongly contesting this interpretation. First, they object to notions of creating reality. Reality is not something that can be created on a whim, especially not for satisfying one's spiritual desires. Rather, reality, including spiritual reality, is a fact of existence. For the devotee, reincarnation and many other doctrines in their worldview are brute facts reflecting reality in actuality. The doctrine of karma can no more be willed into or out of existence than can the laws of nature. This reflects in the words of Aryan Dasa,

> "That's the law of nature, it's not based on belief. So, if I believe in karma or not, it is not somehow going to change. Even if you don't believe in karma, you are still going to get a reaction. Even if

[12] Regarding Christians and belief in reincarnation, recent research indicates that "new age beliefs," one of which is belief in reincarnation, are not uncommon among those who identify as Christian (Gecewicz 2018).

> you don't follow the Hare Krishna philosophy, even if you are atheist, there is still karma. It is basically universal" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

Srila Prabhupada also pressed this point when he identified karma as a universal law: "Just as the 'Law of Gravity' acts on all people, regardless of their caste, creed, and so on, the 'Law of Transmigration', being a Law of Nature, acts on all. It does not matter whether one knows about the law or not, or whether one believes it or not. The law will act relentlessly, continuously, and unavoidably, life after life" (Prabhupada 2018, 121-122).

A major issue devotees have with some New Age conceptualizations of reincarnation is that it espouses the soft notion. Because of their desire for inclusivity and religious pluralism, many new agers tend to exhibit a lack of critical skepticism of religious claims and beliefs (Steyn 1994a, 97), which can lead to many spiritual ideas being accepted uncritically. Not only can this include beliefs pertaining to channeled messages from angels and control over destiny, but also ideas of physical immortality and reincarnation. This leads Steyn to suggest that the New Age proponents can be perceived as "trivialising the sacred" (Steyn 1994a, 97).

But as devotees will retort, spiritual reality cannot (and should not) be trivialized (Sooklal 1987, 27). To trivialize a belief is to fail to take it seriously on its own terms, hence one cannot embrace cardinal doctrines like reincarnation in this way, or just because the idea sounds attractive. For devotees, reincarnation is a brute fact of existence that is independent of human feeling. One sees this in how, to devotees, much about reincarnation is particularly unattractive since it is built upon the conviction that one is trapped in gross material existence from which he is attempting to escape. This would appear to offset claims that reincarnation, at least for devotees in the ISKCON movement, is a symptom of wishful thinking or affirmed just because it sounds nice. Pavanesana Dasa wants us to realize this important spiritual truth and this underlies

his attempt to articulate the hard conception of reincarnation according to his religion in some detail.

Another major contestation emerges in devotees rubbing up ideologically with religious skeptics and secular-materialists. These proponents have a presence in South Africa, especially within tertiary institutions and philosophy departments. For most secular-materialists, reincarnation, like most other religious beliefs, is evidence of archaic superstition that many people have not yet outgrown. The secular-materialist is convinced that there is no soul or any form of life after death. If there is no soul then there certainly cannot be any transmigration of it out from the gross body into a male sperm that will produce a new conscious existence. We delve deeper into this contestation below through an analysis of the contestations over The Soul, a topic that brings to the fore questions regarding substance dualism, physicalism, and life after death.

Distinction

For devotees, distinction is not merely reducible to the differences between phenomena, such as people, races, or cultures, but is symbolic of a spiritual problem that must be overcome through establishing unity. Devotees disapprove of distinctions, especially inequitable ones emerging from cultural, geographical, and religious factors,

> "People are claiming, "This is my England," "This is my India," "This is my Germany," "This is my China." No! Everything belongs to God, Krsna. Not only this planet belongs to Krsna, but all other planets in the universe" (ISKCONZA. n.d.[g]).

All belongs to Lord Krishna which makes it illegitimate for persons to refer to any object as "mine." One might as well excise self-referential terms such as "my" and "mine" from one's vocabulary since these suggest an attachment to the physical world and the material objects within it. One is to shun inequitable racial, cultural, geographical, and religious distinctions in favor of unity that can only be found in Lord Krishna who is the ultimate owner of all things.

This belief underlies the devotee's goal to establish unity over distinction. Although the world is full of distinctions "Krsna says, aham bija-pradah pita: "I am the father of all of them" (ISCONZA. n.d.[f]). The *Bhagavad Gita* is "not simply Indian or Hindu." Although it is "generally regarded as an Indian religious book", the *Bhagavad Gita* "is meant for all people of the world, and not even just for human beings but for all other living creatures as well." There is a resistance to religious and racial distinctions of being "white or black, Christian or Hindu" (Karnamrita Das. n.d.[b]).

South African devotees refer approvingly to psychotherapist and yoga instructor Mariana Caplan's view that distinctions are based on the notion that "our group is more spiritually evolved, powerful, enlightened and, simply put, better than any other group." Here distinction is perceived negatively because it is accompanied by a value judgment, which renders some groups or persons inferior and others superior, hence why it is considered a spiritually transmitted disease (ISKCONZA 2011). Distinction is one of several spiritually transmitted diseases that threaten to hamper one's spiritual development and fool persons with the illusion (*maya*) of the material world that makes them think they "are a particular body and mind, separate from God, others, and Nature." Distinctions have a pervasive grip on people and will frequently frustrate them, despite them being temporary constructs that can be overcome when one cultivates authentic spiritual knowledge of who he is.

ISKCON's aversion to distinction demands to be viewed in light of the rigid divisions in South Africa across racial and socioeconomic lines. The country has a recent history of legislation dividing persons across these lines. Under apartheid just a quarter-century ago, divisions were deeply entrenched in historic laws such as those prohibiting interracial marriages (Mixed Marriages Act of 1949), allocating each racial group its own living area (Group Areas Act of 1950), socio-politically and economically dividing people according to racial categories (Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950), racially segregating public services and amenities (Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953), and manufacturing a separate system of education for Blacks (Bantu Education Act of 1953).

These divisions were sowed through apartheid legislation whose legacy continues to be experienced by millions in the contemporary democratic era. This legacy reflects in the country having the highest inequality in income distribution with a high Gini coefficient of 0.63. It is particularly Blacks and Coloreds who bear the brunt of apartheid policies in the post-apartheid era (Treiman 2005). For example, the Gini coefficient for Blacks increased between 2006 and 2015 and remained constant for Coloreds, but decreased for Indians, Asians, and Whites (Statistics South Africa and Maluleke 2019, 34). Blacks also have the highest unemployment rates among the local population. It is unsurprising then that "inequality in South Africa has not come down or has even increased since the end of Apartheid" (Wittenberg 2017, 298) and that inequality in income distribution "reflect(s) the strongly persistent legacies of apartheid policies" (Statistics South Africa and Maluleke 2019, 59). These legacies have manifested unequal development and inequalities in access to healthcare, education, basic services, and more. By contrast to Blacks and Coloreds, disadvantages experienced by Whites, of both English and

Afrikaner origin, have been modest in comparison (Treiman 2005, 7). Millions of South Africans continue to find themselves facing unemployment, economic inequality, and social exclusion.

Clearly, the legacy of fifty years of apartheid legislation and policy has been brutal in its sowing of division in the country today. Division exacerbates distinction and in a country with a history like South Africa's, this is clearest across racial, social, and economic lines. Devotees in the ISKCON movement are sensitive to these divisions. Champakalata Dasi writes that "The apartheid ideology was a total contradiction to the philosophy of Bhagavad-Gita As It Is…" (Champakalata Dasi 2013). The *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* (1968) teaches that we are not "these bodies but spirit souls, equal to one another and that these bodies (male or female; White, Black, Colored or Indian) are mere garments that are shed at the time of death and that the soul which is eternal, transmigrates at the time of death" (Champakalata Dasi 2013). According to this logic, if the human body is a temporary garment then any system that exists by fixating itself on it must necessarily be flawed. Because apartheid was so fixated with race, it was both an immoral system and a flawed philosophy.

In their support for unity over inequitable division, devotees fondly reminiscence the memory of Nelson Mandela visiting their temple in Durban. Mandela is a symbol devotees appropriate by embracing what they believe he stood for, namely the virtues of unity, reconciliation, forgiveness, and compassion. By in a sense owning Mandela as a symbol, devotees can represent their own interests, which is to cultivate a reputation for racial reconciliation in a country recently afflicted by division while also propagating their religion's teachings to as many South Africans as possible.

Devotees not only view unity as a moral imperative but also as a spiritual one, which underscores their commitment to "continue building on the ideals of Mandela…and respecting

each and every individual as children of God, the Supreme Father…" (Champakalata Dasi 2013). Unity is about people developing their spiritual life towards attaining "that ultimate goal, love of Godhead, which is reflected in the way we live with each other" (Champakalata Dasi 2013).

The devotee's aversion to distinction does not mean he fails to recognize differences between persons. Devotees acknowledge that people "are all born with different aptitudes, abilities and capabilities" (Krishna.org n.d.[f]). As one proponent articulates,

> "[In] every society you will find a class of thinkers and philosophers…, you will find a group of men who are martially spirited and who are very anxious to engage in politics and fighting, to become victorious in their battles and become leaders, and you will find a class of men who like to engage in agricultural cultivation and selling the produce or in business activities, and you will find a class of men who have no ability to work independently in the other three classes — so these are the a *brahmana*s, *ksatriyas*, *vaisyas* and *sudras*" (Krishna.org n.d.[f]).

Here distinctions are acknowledged along the lines of the caste system that divides society into the four classes of the *brahmanas* (intellectual, priestly class), *kshatriyas* (the kings, rulers, leaders, military men), *vaisyas* (productive workers, farmers, businessmen) and *sudras* (worker class) (Vishakha Devi Dasi 2011). Devotees claim that these four classes are found in all societies and they do not, in principle, object to this division. They view favorably people having different and unique natural capacities and abilities.

The ISKCON movement desires that people from each class engage in their "natural" capabilities to assist members of other classes in their spiritual advancement. The end goal is, once again, pursuing and attaining Krishna consciousness. But this is not how many devotees feel the system has been put into practice in India today. The system is too preoccupied with

preserving the tradition of being born into a class which, as one devotee remarks, feeds into the contempt and hatred between the classes (Hare Krishna Devi Dasi n.d.).

Tying these threads together, the ISKCON movement has an aversion to distinction that involves a fixation on the material world. This may include the material body, race, and real estate like nations and geographical boundaries that may cause a division along the lines of an "us" versus "them" mentality. Fixation on race explains the religion's opposition to apartheid and its support for reconciliatory symbols. It also feeds into the religion's preaching of and advocating for the unity of all people beneath the supreme Lord Krishna. Devotees do not, however, possess an aversion to people having "unique" skills and abilities. Although all people are equal because they have souls, this does not equate to them having the same skills and abilities, or necessarily having the same opportunities in society.

Earth, The

The ISKCON movement's worldview is sensitive to nature and advocates for a deep respect for the Earth. The symbolism is apparent in the obvious value the movement ascribes to the Earth believed to be under the proprietorship and superintendence of Lord Krishna (Smullen 2017[b]). The Earth is considered to be a divine creation (King 2012, 179), which is why anthropogenic threats to the ecosystem and nature's health are inherently a "spiritual problem" (Mukunda Goswami 2011).

Various habits of people continue to exert a disastrous impact on the Earth's ecosystem and resources (Lerche 2001, 73-88; Behera and Reddy 2002, 257-265). Air in the atmosphere is polluted. Industrial processes and activities produce harmful noxious gases and carbon dioxide resulting in climate change. Water is contaminated and made undrinkable because of human

waste, oil, residue from biological weapons, and waste dumping. Overpopulation has led to severe stresses on natural resources, as well as to pollution and the spreading of disease. The pollution of the atmosphere not only kills animals but also causes respiratory disease and lung cancer in humans.

The current state of the Earth and the degradation and exploitation of its environments continues to cause devotees significant distress (Mukunda Goswami 2011). But how do devotees make sense of this and what strategies do they employ to combat this pressing issue? Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami reflects concerning the human's harmful impact on Earth's natural environments,

> "For as long as there has been civilization on this planet, human beings have been abusing the earth. Thinking themselves lords over all they survey, they have taken without restriction whatever they desire for sense gratification, without considering that in the future there may be nothing left. Whole species have been killed, rivers and seas ruined, and the air polluted with poisonous waste. It seems only a matter of time before mankind destroys its habitat and that of all other creatures" (Mukunda Goswami 2011).

Strong terms are used here to refer to the destruction of nature by humans. The human perpetrators are "lords" who are "abusing" the Earth for their "sense gratification." These threats to nature Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami highlights are real and discourse places the blame on materialism and atheism. Noting those responsible for the problem in question is an important strategy of devotees. For them, to combat an issue one requires knowledge of who is behind the problem. This is the first step to overcoming a perceived challenge.

It is the "materialistic world-view" that fools persons into believing they live in a "godless, soul-less universe" that is part of the root problem of environmental exploitation and pollution

(Mukunda Goswami 2011). There is the danger of people becoming too "materialistic", which will cause them to lose their connection to and respect for nature. These attitudes are a result of the so-called "reductionism" underpinning modern scientific thought. It is the "atheist" who lacks God-consciousness and "scoff(s)" at the idea that there is any link between the Divine and nature (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]). Atheism is problematic because devotees maintain that God-consciousness is essential to looking after and preserving the Earth: "if the earth is plowed and there is no God consciousness, there will be scarcity" (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[c]).

A second strategy is to emphasize the spiritual component to harming the Earth, notably in negative karma believed to wreak havoc on nature. Much negative karma is produced through the utilization of slaughterhouses catering to human consumption. Perceived evil acts in the cattle industry such as murder and the killing of the sacred cow are deemed to be behind the production of negative karma and its destructive force on Earth and nature. Nature will continue to fade and suffer for as long as humanity thrives on the slaughter of animals for human consumption.

As Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami and fellow devotees maintain, the Earth must be cared for and people are to avoid abusing the ecosystem since it is under Lord Krishna's exclusive proprietorship. People are to take from nature only what they require for their subsistence. Discourse is further reflective of a call for humanity to exercise the appropriate relations with the Earth. Persons exist on a "spiritual planet" that they ought to nurture. Humanity is to have a "proper", "harmonious," and "healthy" relationship with the natural world (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[c]). The Earth is "God's energy" and this requires that humanity exercises its appropriate responsibility towards it in order to sustain "ecological balance."

To combat nature's destruction, devotees employ pragmatic strategies by engaging in public demonstrations (Smullen 2017). Through the Peoples Climate March in 2017, devotees fought to spread awareness of anthropogenic threats to the ecosystem. During such demonstrations, devotees typically chant the Hare Krishna mantra, promote environmentally-friendly initiatives, and emphasize their sustainable eco farms and communities. Also part of this strategy is the proselytization of the religion, as devotees attempt to teach others that it is Lord Krishna who owns the Earth and that, because of this, human beings should avoid exploiting it and take from it only that which they require to survive. This religious dimension is evident in Radhanath Swami's view that the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches "the art of living in harmony with the body, the mind, the soul, all living beings, God and nature. All of nature is God's gift and to see the presence of God's grace in nature is an inherent teaching of *Bhagavad Gita* and it is very much foundational to the principles of ISKCON" (Free Press Journal 2020).

It was during the 1990s when environmentalism became an international political movement that South Africa began discussing issues of environmental justice (Carruthers 2006, 805). Debates focused on various challenges such as worker safety, industrial pollution, clean water, land for housing, and subsistence farming. There was an expectation that South Africans regardless of race and class would, after a recently divisive past, unite in their care for the environment. Many came to celebrate the richness of the country's biodiversity as evidenced in its various ecoregions including tropical forests, an alpine heathland, an arid desert, a floral kingdom, and more. The country is the third most biodiverse country on Earth, which is a major pull for tourists and a feature of the country often celebrated.

But South Africa too has its fair share of environmental issues (Mmatlou 2020, 1-20). Since 2000, its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have increased by 23%. This has led the

government to make a commitment to become a low-carbon and climate-resilient nation with the goal of reducing its GHG emissions by 34% and 42% by 2020 and 2025 respectively. The chief culprit for environmental pollution is the heavy use of coal in coal-powered stations, which is the main source of the country's electricity. More than 70% of electricity is produced using coal, which threatens to contribute to extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, heatwaves, water management problems, and more. South Africa reducing its overall GHG emission will not be easy and will require huge shifts in technology and production methods in most parts of its economy.

Aware of these environmental challenges, local devotees in the ISKCON movement have attempted to make their voices heard. In Cape Town, several members joined protesters outside of parliament demanding the government acts against climate change (Hendricks, Postman, and Binda 2019). They chanted the Hare Krishna mantra, banged drums, and encouraged other protesters to dance with them. Elsewhere in the country closer to Johannesburg in Gauteng is the Lenasia temple home to a lush garden with a greenhouse. This is an environmentally friendly space where devotees are welcome to relax and enjoy *prasādam* picnics. Also in the works is Nandagram, a Krishna Conscious eco-village and self-sustainable farm community (with the slogan "Simple living – High thinking") dedicated to cultivating a deep connection to God while living in harmony with the Earth (International Society for Krishna Consciousness 2019, 3). Part of this project is to also teach other rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal the skills required for self-sustainability and local production.

This strategy is practical. Not only is part of the movement's strategy to be activist through joining public demonstrations and protests on environmental issues, but devotees also carve out spaces where they can contribute to environmental sustainability and preservation. The ISKCON

movement's efforts to preserve the health and vitality of the ecosystem have not gone unnoticed. The religion received the IGBC Green Champion Awards because of its green practices and eco-friendly advocacy (Free Press Journal 2020).

Food

Food as a symbol has been a fascinating area of academic study (Douglas 1966; Douglas 1975; Barthes 1979; Davidson 2014, 152, 191, 426; Harper 2016). Much scholarly work has been done in this area as in, for example, sugary foods being a sign of indulgence (Barthes 1979), Hebraic dietary laws maintaining rigid boundaries between Jews and non-Jews (Douglas 1966), and how people generally seem content with consuming meat from certain animals but not others deemed taboo (Douglas 1966).

It is unsurprising in light of such research that devotees too perceive food as symbolizing more than merely the material substance consumed. Food "is considered to more than that which is consumed for nutritional purposes… It is regarded as *prasādam*, which is food infused with the energy of the divine" (dandapro 2013).

There is both practical and religious significance to food (*prasādam*). On the practical side, there are health reasons for distributing *prasādam* to impoverished communities, such as preventing susceptibility in people to nutrient deficiencies, infectious diseases, and the impairment of mental and physical development in children (ISKCONZA. n.d.[g]). Religious reasons for distributing *prasādam* entail avoiding bad karmic consequences from killing animals for their meat, celebrating Krishna consciousness (the food is *prasādam*, meaning that it is dedicated to God), and expressing love for humanity by sharing with those who are

impoverished. Such sentiments are expressed by Vesanti Devi Dasi who, referring to ISKCON's celebrated Sunday Love Feasts, explains that,

> "It's a love feast, it's an offering of love. So we are cooking for as many people as are coming, so maybe a hundred, two hundred people. And it's a free entry and there's no cover charge, and it's a nice nourishing meal, a nice program, and it's a form of outreach. Yeah, just like that, a pure, pure offering of love to reach out and invite everyone to come and experience some bliss" (dandapro 2013).

The Sunday Love Feast feeds the poor and it traces back to 1966 when Srila Prabhupada requested that hungry people be fed in celebration of Lord Krishna. The feast has evolved to comprise various religious practices such as chanting, dancing, and fellowship. The food shared is vegetarian (ISKCONZA 2013; ISKCONZA. n.d.[g]) and an offering to God (Kurma Dasa 2012). The movement's Food for Life (FFL) initiative, established by Srila Prabhupada in 1974 after he witnessed a group of village children fighting with dogs for scraps of food, distributes *prasādam* to the poor and impoverished communities in South Africa. Sharing *prasādam* is fundamentally about expressing love as it is a "pure offering of love" to people who struggle with unemployment and putting food on their tables. The sharing of *prasādam* symbolizes Lord Krishna's own love for humanity.

In light of South Africa's contemporary socioeconomic context, devotees realize the need for distributing *prasādam* to "address the needs of so many across our country" (Nanda Kishor Das 2015). The country has significant poverty levels with swathes of persons living below the poverty line. Although the country's average adult level of poverty stands at 49.2%, certain provinces are particularly grim such as Limpopo (67.5%), Eastern Cape (67.3%), KwaZulu-

Natal (60.7%), and North West (59.6%) (statssa.gov 2019). Six out of ten (62.1%) children below the age of eighteen are considered poor in one or more of several areas of life, which means that many lack adequate nourishment (statssa.gov 2020). In 2017, 6.8 million South Africans experienced hunger affecting homes "headed by black Africans and coloureds" (statssa.gov 2019). These households lack the finances to purchase food and they are unable to produce their own, which are social and economic challenges the ISKCON movement is sensitive to.

Poverty is pertinent to the ISKCON movement's outreach efforts. An important strategy is to use poverty as a means of introducing their religion to the public. Poverty presents a large market ripe for the religion's proselytization and because Black children and majority-Black communities are most vulnerable, it is understandable that devotees reach out to these areas in particular (Smullen 2017[a]). In Johannesburg, devotees deliver *prasādam* to several schools in majority-Black areas like Soweto during the day and in the evening. This is not only a practical strategy but also a spiritual one as devotees want to take "Krishna consciousness to the native black South Africans, who make up the vast majority (79%) of the population and often live in urban townships like Soweto" (Krishna-kripa Dasa 2011). These efforts have aided the movement's growth in Black areas where several residents have converted and gone on to occupy leadership roles in ISKCON centers.

Contestation becomes apparent as devotees need to contend with popular consumption habits that do not square with their vegetarian preference. Historically in Europe and the United States, there has been a substantial consumption of meat products. In that milieu, Srila Prabhupada tried to convince young people experimenting with alternative lifestyles that animal killing is evil because animals have souls (King 2012, 184). He advocated strongly against

animal commercialization and exploitation in a context in which most did not share his views. Similarly, most South Africans enjoy consuming meat products sourced from the killing of animals (Ronquest-Ross, Vink, and Sigge 2015, 9). For example, they consume significantly greater amounts of pig and poultry today than they did in 1994 and meat consumption has risen by a sizable 45.7%. It is estimated that the average meat-eater consumes thousands of animals in his or her lifetime (King 2012, 180).

Also contesting the devotee's vegetarian stance is that the South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines recommends consuming chicken, fish, and meat daily (westerncape.gov.za. n.d.), which are all items that are taboo to consume in the eyes of devotees. But perhaps more amenable to devotees is that South Africans today consume greater portions of pulses, potatoes, and fruits than they did in 1994. Several of these items, notably potatoes, are popular in *prasādam* dishes served in temples. Many ISKCON temples across South Africa have restaurants connected to them. In the Cape Town temple located in the well-off suburb of Rondebosch, one can find a Govinda's natural food café in which one can purchase affordable meals averaging around R50 ($3.46). The Govinda's restaurant (Govinda is one of the names given to Krishna by ISKCON devotees; it is also a name in the Vaishnavism tradition of Hinduism referring to Vishnu) offers several dishes that change daily. The food is prepared with much chanting and singing and is then blessed before being presented to customers. The cheap price of the meals is celebrated by visitors and is consistent with Srila Prabhupada's emphasis on making food available to those who are needy and strapped for cash.

We have noticed two strategies utilized by devotees to contest popular consumption habits. First, devotees reach out to poorer communities to distribute *prasādam* while also encouraging persons to embrace a vegetarian diet (ISKCONZA 2014). There are several means through

which the movement provides food to the needy, such as through the Sunday Love Feast hosted on temple property that is open to the public and through outreaches into poorer communities across South Africa. Part of this strategy is also to grow the religion through proselytization. If the religion can be marketed as one to satisfy a person's nutritional needs, then the devotee can also market his religion as one that will satisfy the person's spiritual needs. The second strategy is educational in that devotees seek to bring to mind the nutritional benefits of a vegetarian diet.

Gender

Gender transcends merely being biologically male or female in that it influences how men and women are to behave and function according to the norms and expectations of a group. To be a woman or a man is to have a script by which one must live and act, which is why the role of women in religious movements has been a topic of interest to scholars of religion (Puttick 1999; Furseth 2001; Atsuko 2003; Palmer 2003; Rochford 2007; Heidegger 2010, to briefly mention a few).

There is much relevance to the ISKCON movement as several internal and external contestations over gender present themselves for analysis. Historically, the position of women inside the movement has been unpleasant, especially as a patriarchal framework came to dominate in the 1970s and made women victims of scorn, public criticism, and neglect (Knott 2004, 324; Rochford 2007, 116). They were marginalized and victims of abusive treatment by men,

> "[D]evotee women were no longer viewed as partners in a spiritual renaissance, rather they were categorized as personifications of the illusory energy Mayadevi, who threatened to cause men to deviate from their noble spiritual quest" (Visakha and Sudharma 2000, 2).

The unpleasant experiences for many women in the movement are not unique and can be found in many religions where women, who are often responsible for maintaining congregations and for socializing children into the movement's values and practices, have been excluded from formal religious roles, viewed as spiritually weaker than men, and less capable of reaching spiritual enlightenment.

A precedent for these attitudes was set by Srila Prabhupada. In the *Bhagavad-gita As It Is*, Srila Prabhupada compares women to children in a degraded state: "As children are very prone to be misled, women are similarly very prone to degradation" (Rochford 2007, 148) and that "women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy" (Srila Prabhupada 1989, 60; Rochford 2007, 126). In what will be objected to by many feminist scholars of religion is Srila Prabhupada's view that young girls should be taught "how to sweep, how to stitch… clean, cook" (Lorenz 2004, 378-379). In a lecture he gave in 1971, Srila Prabhupada offered a view of gender roles many will consider causes the woman's dependence on the man,

> "Man is meant for hard working, and woman is meant for homely comfort, love. So both of them, if they are situated in their respective duties under proper training, then this combination of man and woman will help both of them to make progress in spiritual life" (Rochford 2007, 142).

He further taught that "Girls should be completely separated from the very beginning. They are very dangerous", and that "Women in general should not be trusted" (Lorenz 2004, 378-379).

Women have been perceived to pose a threat to the spirituality and purity of male devotees. According to one woman devotee, it is recorded that,

> "Srila Prabhupada first said in class that for a man, association with a woman is dangerous because she makes him lose control over his senses, the male devotees started acting very nastily with the women of that particular temple" (Rochford 2007, 131).

Another woman devotee lamented that "I've never so much regretted being born in a woman's body since I joined the ISKCON movement. I've never been so much criticized, abused, slandered, misunderstood, or chastised because I have this woman's body" (Rockford 2007, 118).

As much as 80% of the founder's scriptural commentaries on women were of a "negative" nature (Lorenz 2004, 122).[13] Srila Prabhupada later claimed, in response to an inquiry from several women, that he was "talking of materialistic women, not of the women of the movement." Be that as it may, it is important not to underestimate the influence Srila Prabhupada's teachings have on devotees; as sociologist and anthropologist E. Burke Rochford comments, "followers view him as a pure representative of God, most accept his words as literal truth" (Rochford 2007, 126). Rochford cites a study in which 97% of 363 men and women agreed that "I accept as truth Prabhupada's translations of and commentaries on the *Srimad Bhagavatam* and other Vedic scriptures." The teachings of Srila Prabhupada are influential to the

[13] Scholar Kim Knott brings to the surface a lighter view of Srila Prabhupada's teachings regarding women. This includes Prabhupada considering a female disciple having a "talent" as a writer usable for propagating Krishna consciousness (Knott 2004, 321). Prabhupada similarly encouraged his earliest female follower, Janaki, to use her skills to promote Krishna consciousness. According to this teaching, it does not matter if one is a man or a woman; rather it matters if one is contributing to spreading Krishna consciousness.

majority of devotees, which leads some scholars to conclude that his teachings played a role in the abuse experienced by the movement's women (Lorenz 2004; Rochford 2007, 122).

One discovers similarly negative depictions of women across the religion's discourse. Public lectures given by men questioned, criticized, and dismissed the "intelligence, motives and capabilities" of women (Visakha and Sudharma 2000, 2). Women were seen as a threat to the spiritual quest of men because of their seductive appearances, which resulted in them being relegated to the back of temples during worship services so as not to distract men (Visakha and Sudharma 2000, 2). Women were seen as unintelligent and many men considered them "stupid and incapable" (Jyotirmayi 2002, 2). They were capable only of performing household chores and seeing to the needs of children (Whitworth and Shiels 1982, 161). Their participation in temple activities and programs was kept to a minimum (Rochford 2017, 117-118). Many women came to feel embarrassed about themselves and unwelcome in the ISKCON movement, although the majority stuck it out (Rochford 2017, 137).

Pro-change women within the movement did manage to achieve some gender reform. In 1998, the Governing Body Commission (GBC) came to openly acknowledge the mistreatment of devotee women within its movement. The GBC noted how its movement had not provided the appropriate protection for women. What followed were several gender reforms to recognize the value of women and provide them the opportunity "to fully participate in the Society according to their abilities and wishes" (Visakha and Sudharma 2000, 20). The GBC also for the first time heard presentations by representatives of the Women's Ministry focusing on the history of the abuse suffered by women devotees. The GBC concluded that the oppression and abuse of women was a misrepresentation of its philosophy. They then provided women opportunities to speak on the Vedic scriptures during temple classes open to all devotees regardless of gender.

In some temples across North America, it became permissible for women to worship alongside men (although on different sides of the temple) and chant collectively with men in the temple room (Rochford 2007, 136). They could also serve on the altar and hold administrative positions in temples. Some pro-change women appealed to Srila Prabhupada's respectful dealings with his earliest women disciples allowing them to lead *kirtans*, write articles for their religion's magazines, and give classes and public lectures to reshape an understanding of their role in ISKCON movement. But despite such reforms, a majority (67%) of women devotees still felt that sexism has been a barrier to their spiritual advancement (Rochford 2007, 120, 123).

Generally speaking, many people frown on negative perceptions of persons and their capabilities based on their gender. The ISKCON movement's treatment of women will to many be perceived as sexist and discriminatory because gender equality has become increasingly normative and accepted in society and culture (Liebig, Gottschall, and Sauer 2016, 21). This owes much to women's rights movements that emphasize the rights of women (Messer-Davidow 2002). But many devotees distance themselves from these developments and attitudes because they are taken to undermine the views and teachings of Srila Prabhupada. Consider the words of male devotee Catainya Das who moans that,

> "We see feministically-inclined devotees wanting to change, edit, or add their own footnotes to Srila Prabhupada's books, especially the parts that speak against the theory of gender equality, or feminism. Is this not a rejection of Srila Prabhupada's authority?" (Catainya Das n.d.).

But where do these "feministically-inclined" ideas stem from? Catainya Das believes their genesis lies in universities where secular humanism has become a dominant ideology. Modern feminism, he explains, is "an offshoot from the humanistic philosophies" and is symptomatic of

a diseased secular culture that causes higher rates of abortion, divorce, and deterioration of the family unit (Catainya Das n.d.; Rochford 2007, 124). This is a product of cultural conditioning of "which gender equality or feminism is a big part" (Catainya Das n.d.). Moreover, devotees frown on feminist interpretations of Srila Prabhupada's teachings because they relativize them. Feminist interpretations merely force the founder's teachings to arbitrarily fit with the times rather than being the unchanging, universal standard it is.

These negative perceptions of feminism and "feministically-inclined" ideas by many in the movement filtered down into the minds of pro-change women within the religion itself. Women who sought to change negative attitudes towards them from the inside distanced themselves from feminism because of their religion's perception of that ideology possessing a destructive agenda. A woman devotee who penned a letter to protest the prohibition of women giving classes in temples was told that she is "a demon destroying Prabhupada's movement" (Pranada 2002). This perception is also reflected in the Women's Ministry that claimed its goal is "not feminism, but rather a sincere attempt to create an environment conducive to devotional service for *Vaisnavis* [women devotees]" (Sudharma 2000, 14).

Many devotees, especially Western devotees, continue to pursue reform in the twenty-first century. There is, for example, debate over whether or not a woman should be allowed to become a guru. One male devotee notes that,

> "Many of our sisters grew up feeling like they have to be in the back, like they couldn't be public speakers. My honest opinion is [that] it's latent misogyny. It reflects some sort of hostility to women in general" (Blumetti 2019).

This devotee, who attended a conference in India to discuss the issue of women gurus, found that many temple leaders threatened to separate from the organization if women were ever allowed to become gurus. This, he believes, is suggestive of prejudice against women devotees and women in general. In his view, this rampant sexism in the movement of the twentieth century must be resisted.

It is also important to note that gender reform and equality in the ISKCON movement have been resisted internally too. A group consisting of men and a single woman emerged and launched the General Headquarters (GHQ). The GHQ was a secret internet conference on the ISKCON movement's communication system that branded feminism "a big cancer that needs to be taken seriously" (Rochford 2007, 140). The GHQ tried to get the leaders who supported gender reform in the movement to reverse their decisions. Among several of GHQ's counter-proposals was that no women were to occupy leadership positions, that the Women's Ministry was to be terminated, and that feminism is considered a materialistic and atheistic philosophy deviating from Srila Prabhupada's teachings. The GHQ deemed it "natural" that men possessed authority and that women were to submit to them.

The disputes did not end there as further responses emerged from pro-reformist members of the movement, both men and women. They argued that the GHQ members were attempting to use Srila Prabhupada's teachings to exert control over women's lives. They also objected to claims that women required "protection" from men and that this was proof of their need to submit to them. Such "protection" was misogyny outfitted in new clothes.

But over time attitudes toward gender equality in the movement changed. In 1996, two-thirds of men and three-quarters of women in the movement agreed that qualified women should be able to serve in important positions, such as temple president (Rochford 2007, 133). Both men

and women generally accept equality for women, such as women being spiritual equals to men, being allowed to chant in the temple, and having equal access to deities in worship. The result today is that the patriarchal gender ideology and framework that dominated the movement in the 1970s and 1980s has lost its appeal to most devotees, both men and women. This is a sign that the movement has edged ever closer to mainstream culture (Rochford 2007, 159).

But the South African ISKCON community still has much work to do here and is currently active in the area of inclusivity. There has been internal discussion and planning to make the religion more inclusive not only for women but also for other marginalized and minority groups in the movement, which includes having more women and Black people taking up leadership positions (Aarushi Dasi, personal email communication, 17 July, 2021).

When it comes to feminism, the local ISKCON community has not adopted an official position and members generally hold to their own personal views on the matter. A practical strategy is visible in the local community's implementation of various Women's Forums in temples across the country. These forums, which advertise themselves as "a place of love, sisterhood and spirituality where we gain strength & inspiration from the *Vedas*" are aligned to the GBC's purposes and objectives to making the ISKCON movement more inclusive across gender grounds, especially for South African women. Yet devotees realize there is much work that still needs to be done to achieve greater gender equality, especially in the area of decision-making, as Aryan Dasa, a male devotee, describes,

> "I wouldn't say it is fully equal in terms of men and women, especially in terms of decision-making. It is mostly men who are sort of running the show. Srila Prabhupada established the GBC to keep the movement from breaking up. It is the governing body. It is mostly Americans. That's where he started, he started in New York, and after some time they [men disciples] started

> traveling the world. When they joined they were in their 20s [and] now most of them are in their late 60s and some in the 70s" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

According to Aryan Dasa, it is mostly men, especially American men of a mature age, who are the major decision-makers in the ISKCON movement. He believes there is an underrepresentation of women in this aspect although there are attempts to change this.

Situationally, South African feminists or devotees with feminist proclivities in the movement currently exist in a more favorable time to bring women's issues to the fore. It was after 1994 that women started to articulate and speak about their oppression in the new democratic era. Before 1994, interests, especially in many universities across the country, were invested in the struggle against the oppressive apartheid regime, which led to the lesser emphasis being placed on gender inequality. This changed after 1994 when feminists found themselves presented with numerous challenges ranging from high rape and corrective rape statistics, patriarchal attitudes and customs in cultures to the misogynistic behavior of male politicians, significant levels of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, a lack of diversity in local feminism (lacking Black women's input as it emerged as a mostly White phenomenon, which led to a misrepresentation of Black women's positions), lack of child care for working women, the challenge of putting women's issues on the national radar, and much else.

These factors prompted local feminism to become active and produce literature and a strong academic presence, especially at universities offering Women's Studies and creating Women's and Gender Studies Programs. Although most South African women still do not want to self-identify as feminists, they still embrace gender equality. It is also no longer considered taboo to raise issues of women's struggles and to do so in spaces dedicated to this purpose.

Yet despite these aforementioned opportunities in South Africa and pro-change reforms in the ISKCON movement generally, we expect contestation over the role and place of women devotees to continue, although to a lesser degree than historically from the 1970s to the 1990s. There still exist devotees who view their religion as a conservative movement rejecting social norms like feminism and gender equality (Zeller n.d.[a]). For some, social equality and the rights of women are symptoms of the sinfulness permeating culture. As Rochford noted, the disputes and contestations over the rights of women within the movement opened a "Pandora's box that may forever remain open" (Rochford 2007, 159).

God's Existence

Great effort has been put into defining the term "God" and whole books have been written on this (Ward 2002, Armstrong 2011, Bowker 2014). What complicates matters is that what we mean by "God" will depend on various factors such as religious affiliation, type of theism embraced, idiosyncrasies of members of traditions, cultural and social contexts, and even the biological sex of devotees, and more.

God is a symbol of greater transcendence perceived to be lying behind religious texts, such as in the devotee's belief that the *Bhagavad Gita* contains divine and transcend truths revealed by Lord Krishna. To devotees, God is a symbol of love, compassion, and hope. It is God who, full of compassion, has lovingly revealed in divine texts the path to releasing oneself from degraded material existence and the endless cycle of rebirth.

God's existence is essential to the devotee's doctrinal dimension as indicated in the efforts to make exclusive claims to its ownership. Not only does God exist, but God is also very close to his human creatures. The vast majority of South African devotees, according to Sooklal's aging

study, believe God is "within them" or "near" to them (Sooklal 1987, 29). Lord Krishna is believed to be present in all living entities. Devotees affirm belief in an objectively existing supreme deity identified as Lord Krishna who is personal in that he loves human beings and possesses a form. God is transcendent in that he exists beyond the material world.

But the sacred God symbol is hotly contested. God has come under significant intellectual suspicion and opposition in the West, which has led to the emergence of various contestations. It is increasingly the case that we cannot assume that persons necessarily believe in a God. This is not lost on Dan Coggins. Coggins, a former skeptic of religion and agnostic "leaning toward[s] atheism" (Thompson 1987) who is now a devotee going by the name Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa, heeds the skepticism of influential thinkers in the Western intellectual tradition,

> "Many intellectuals seem to agree with Karl Marx's statement that religion is the opium of the people. A common misconception in these times is that God is an anthropomorphic projection, a psychological crutch for those who are helplessly bewildered by the problems of life and who haven't the guts to face reality" (Pandita Dasa, n.d).

These sentiments indicate a major contestation between the ISKCON movement and critics of religion. Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa objects to interpretations of God that undermine his existence as an objective fact. By objective fact, the author means to affirm the existence of a Supreme Lord that is independent of the human mind and that has a life of his own. This is a God who is affectionate, compassionate, and willing to have a relationship with human beings. God is not the product of the human being's capacity to think or the manifestation of some other aberration like wishful thinking or delusion: "To say that something objectively exists means that it has its own independent existence and is not the product of someone's imagination" (Pandita Dasa, n.d).

Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa is aware of historical skepticism of religion in important thinkers in the Western tradition. He appeals to the theorist Karl Marx (1818-1883) who viewed religion as the "opium of the people." The author also makes indirect references to ideas tracing back to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) (who saw religion as wish fulfillment) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) (who saw religion as projection).

One cannot underestimate the importance these thinkers have had in shaping skeptical views of religion. According to Walter Capps, they provided for the West a theoretical foundation for atheism in competition with religious belief (Capps 1995, 51). They were instrumental in putting atheism on the agenda in the nineteenth century (Armstrong 2011, 407). They openly declared their independence from God and viewed belief in God owing itself to some discontent within human existence. Whatever God is, he does not exist "objectively" out there beyond the human imagination.

Marx, remembered primarily for his theory that societies develop through class struggle, viewed belief in God as a result of the suffering brought on by exploitative economic conditions (Capps 1995, 41). Religion is a manifestation of productive and economic forces representing a process against whatever dehumanizing conditions keep human beings in social and political bondage. Religion is the feel-good drug (the so-called "opiate") that takes the pain of an oppressive human existence away, although only temporarily. Marx thought that if such exploitative, dehumanizing conditions were absent then religion would not be necessary.

In addition to Marx, one finds allusions to Freud and Feuerbach. Both theorists viewed the essence of religion as being unreal and false. Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa recognizes that some see religious belief as a "psychological crutch" for people who cannot face reality. Freud viewed religion as constituting an illusion and the human desire to fulfill a wish (Capps 1995, 42).

Because religion is “make-believe” it is the product of human weakness and helplessness, which means God does not exist in any objective sense.

Feuerbach, whose work was widely read by Freud and whose ideas would also influence Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), conceived of belief in God as constituting projection (Capps 1995, 39-40). God does not exist objectively “out there” independently of the human mind but is the result of the abstraction of essential human attributes into the cosmos. God is a fiction and the product of the human imagination. Feuerbach was critical of religion causing human beings to place their focus on areas that detracted from their need to improve their own social and economic conditions.

Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa acknowledges the necessity for religious believers to oppose the skepticism presented by thinkers like Marx, Freud, and Feuerbach. This is because “many intellectuals” find such views compelling (Pandita Dasa, n.d). It is also because the ISKCON movement has its roots in the West’s intellectual milieu, constitutive of which is religious skepticism shaped by Marx, Freud, and others. Charitably, Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa acknowledges that one does not need to agree with these religious skeptics to recognize their status as intellectual giants deserving attention. Such recognition is required if one wishes to “own” the God symbol and claim intellectual legitimacy for his religion.

Devotees are bound to encounter skeptical arguments opposing religious truths. There is a realization in the movement of the need to be both ready and able to provide answers and justifications for faith. ISKCON’s founder, Srila Prabhupada, noted this when he observed how “atheistic ideas” are widespread in society leading to a “great need to establish that God exists and that belief in God is actually very rational logical, and scientific” (Srila Prabhupada 2018,

40). Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa's apologetic strategy is one such effort to apply this logic to offset a common challenge to religious belief,

> "Show me God," many people say. I hear this all the time. "OK, if God exists, prove it. Show me God right now"—as if seeing something were the only test of its existence… Besides, why do we have to see something to believe it? "Seeing is believing," we say, but actually we believe in many things we don't see. It's only when we don't want to believe something that we make the rules more difficult and say we have to see it to believe it." (Pandita Dasa, n.d.)

The concern here is with what some religious apologists and philosophers have termed "scientism", the view that the empirical sciences are the only way to know the truth about the world (Stenmark 1997; Craig and Moreland 2009, 346-348). Such disciplines as metaphysics, theology, and aesthetics are rendered meaningless because these contain content immune to empirical verification. All types of God-talk and talk about morality and aesthetics do not correspond to reality in any meaningful way.

The philosopher W. V. O. Quine (1908-2000) expressed such sentiments when he remarked that "If I saw indirect explanatory benefit in positing sensibilia, possibilia, spirits, a Creator, I would joyfully accord them scientific status too, on a par with such avowedly scientific posits as quarks and black holes" (Quine 1995, 252). To Quine, and other advocates of scientism, the physical and empirical sciences are the only sources of knowledge. This is a view that has for many influenced perceptions of what constitutes reliable knowledge about reality. According to Mikael Stenmark who has written widely on the philosophy of religion and science, it is because of science's successes that many have come to "think that there are no real limits to the competence of science, no limits to what can be achieved in the name of science"

(Stenmark 1997, 15). These views have snowballed in the wake of publications from several popular public scientists such as Francis Crick, Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, and others. Scientism has, in Stenmark's words, been brought "into the living room of ordinary people" (Stenmark 1997, 15).

Although only a small fraction of South Africa's population, atheists and religious skeptics are active locally across various areas of society in their individual and collective efforts to promote atheism and secular materialism.[14]

These atheist voices, along with others, have motivated interested theists and apologists to provide counterarguments in formal debates and discussions. The notable Irish philosopher of science and mathematician John Lennox, a religious apologist, visited South Africa on a tour to discuss the challenge of religious skepticism. In one of his lectures at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, Lennox engaged with the thought of the New Atheist proponent Richard Dawkins and Stephen Hawking ("Dawkins and Hawking: Is God a Delusion?"). Lennox has engaged in similar discussions in Pretoria, Stellenbosch, and Cape Town.

In various ways, despite its marginal status, atheism and religious skepticism have forced themselves onto the radar on several levels including online, on social media, in the public space via secular groups and organizations, and in the university space among students and professors where many ideas are shared. Religious skepticism and atheism have also pierced the minds of various religious persons, including the devotee at the Cape Town temple who, upon learning I am a researcher of religion, asked me that "with this atheism thing, does religion still have a

[14] There are several notable cases of atheistic philosophers at universities who have debated religious opponents (e.g. Jacques Rousseau versus Mahlatse Winston Mashua and David Benetar versus Bruce Blackshaw) and atheistic societies and organizations (e.g. Secular Society South Africa, OGOD-South Africa).

chance?" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021). Upon inquiring further, I discovered he had come across content in the local media where religious skeptics propagated claims of God not existing, which evidently caused him distress.

Devotee Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa's apologetic strategy confronts this challenge by religious skeptics, although indirectly through the official ISKCON South Africa website. It is the scientism underpinning the secular-materialist's worldview that he wants to invalidate. He intends to have skeptical readers appreciate truths that they accept but do not themselves have empirical verification for.

He further alleges that skeptics maintain double standards. If skeptics dislike religion for whatever reason, they will make the burden of proof much greater for religious claims than for some other religiously neutral proposition. But Dhananjaya Pandita Dasa maintains that we all believe in phenomena that we do not see with our own eyes; he refers to our knowledge of the atom and a fictional scenario of a fire on the other side of town that one learns only through reading the newspaper. Why cannot God be like that? A personal being that exists objectively despite us not being able to see him with our own eyes.

Also relevant to apologetic discourses offered by devotees is the situational context urging us to consider the time and place a discourse occurs. Here devotees have, much unlike earlier generations, benefitted from advances in communication technologies and media. Communication technologies like the internet, network, social media, and mobile devices have been utilized liberally by devotees to disseminate discourses to the public. Through these opportunities, they can reach a host of people including religious seekers, skeptics, devotees inside the movement itself, members of the general public, activists, and more. Aryan Dasa reflects on how technology can be of great use to his religion,

> "This is all based on science [pointing to my laptop], we all use science by using technology. Technology is important to spread the movement. Back in the days, they had to still travel around, whereas now you can be here at home and be able to spread whatever you want to spread and share with the world without leaving your own home. Today they [spiritual leaders] are using online platforms to reach disciples, so that's very effective" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

The ISKCON movement is enhancing its online reach. The movement is "utilizing digital media" to reach the public and attract the greatest number of potential converts. This strategy is essential for if religious groups want to compete in the religious marketplace for the attention of potential followers, then they "must present [themselves] as a valuable commodity" (Karapanagiotis 2018, 76). The ISKCON movement needs to compete with other forces in peoples' daily lives such as work, school, friends, family, chores, hobbies, and other religious groups, which is why it requires "sales representatives" and "marketing techniques" to present its messages successfully and as an attractive package to which people will respond (Finke and Stark 2005, 9). As Mara Einstein in her *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (2007) reflects, "as people are increasingly prone to shop, religions will… have to increase the level of marketing and promotion in order to be heard among so many competing forces…" (Einstein 2007, xi).

Although technology has made presenting and disseminating discourse significantly easier for devotees, it also comes with its challenges. Technology and media have also allowed discourse produced by those of competing ideologies to penetrate the public domain. This became evident in the 2000s in the New Atheism movement that emerged in the United States

and the United Kingdom. In response to the rise of religious fundamentalism in the twentieth century and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, several high-profile authors and atheist proponents produced books and online resources collectively condemning religion as a source of evil and immorality in the world (Gallagher 2012, 59).

The movement had a significant influence on Western culture. The crudest possible representation of religion was produced and the authors condemned religion as ancient superstition that enlightened people living in a modern scientific age could and should no longer believe in. In his documentary *The Root of Evil Faith* (2006), Richard Dawkins presents religious faith as evil, compares it to a virus, and condemns it for infecting the minds of children. Similar ideas were forwarded in his book *The God Delusion* (2006), as well as in Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (2006) and Christopher Hitchens' *God is Not Great* (initially with the subtitle: *How Religion Poisons Everything*) (2007).

Technology has assisted the efforts of these atheist proponents and religious skeptics. There are many blogs dedicated to sharing these ideas that are easily accessible to an interested audience and various organizations like the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science promote religious skepticism and atheistic discourse online. The internet has provided religious skeptics with the opportunity to share and promote their ideas and critiques of religion to a broad audience across geographical locations. Not only is this online material easily accessible to South African audiences, but many major bookstore franchises in the country such as Exclusive Books, Van Schaik, and Wordsworth stock these authors, thus putting them within easy reach.

In devotees and religious skeptics both using the internet space as a shared medium to disseminate their antithetical ideas, the internet becomes a competitive space of contestation

where devotees and their ideological counterparts present contesting discourses on various topics pertaining to religion. The strategy is for devotees to contest the discourses of their ideological counterparts by presenting defenses of key doctrines. This strategy has been largely limited to the online space through its presentation on official ISKCON websites and is yet to take the shape of academic or formal debate.

God's Form

God's form is a point of contestation between proponents within the ISKCON movement and advocates of the classical conception of deity. God's form is deeply symbolic to devotees who have made considerable effort to maintain ownership of the concept. God's form, notably his blueness, represents the infinite and the immeasurable (Shri Radha Krishna 2017). The color blue represents Lord Krishna's qualities, vision, bravery, determination, and stability.

Chandidas Dasa articulates God's form using rich imagery: Lord Krishna is of a "bluish hue" and has "lotus eyes, blooming youthfulness, and pearl-white smile." He has a "lustrous body" whose "bodily features also glisten" with the rainfall. His "legs [are] crossed", his "head tilted to the side", he has a "neck [on which] hangs a lovely necklace of brilliant pearls", eyebrows, eyes, lips, fingers, and a "face [that] looks as beautiful as the full autumn moon" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.). God's form is distinctly defined and important, which leads Chandidas Dasa to contest any philosophy that he alleges has convinced many people that God is formless,

> "Usually they [members of the public and Christians] have been exposed only to Western religious philosophy, which hints that God is a person—the eternal father of every living entity—but gives

> scanty information about His form. For this reason many people think God is formless or void" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.).

By using logic, argues Chandidas Dasa, we can understand that God must have form just like our own "fathers are persons with form." Devotee Bhakta Rudra states his case similarly arguing that God has "his four-armed form and another being his two-armed form." He then asks, "How can I claim to have something that God does not?" (Bhakta Rudra, personal email communication, 21 July, 2021). The conclusion Bhakta Rudra draws is that God must have a form because human beings have form.

In contestation with this conception of deity is the popular view that God is formless and immaterial, a perspective held by many reputable philosophers embracing classical theism. It is with classical theism where contestation between devotees and their ideological opponents is most apparent. Classical theism has been important in historical and contemporary philosophy, and it will help to offer a brief outline so as to recognize what is being contested between Chandidas Dasa and his ideological counterparts.

Promoted by prestigious historical thinkers such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the God of classical theism is ascribed several metaphysical attributes, two of which are divine simplicity and incorporeality (Morely n.d.). Divine simplicity claims that God is ontologically simple in that he possesses no parts, real distinctions, or distinct attributes (Vallicella 2006). God is identical to each of his attributes that themselves are identical to every other one. Simplicity is not considered by classical theists to be a deficiency on God's part but a positive quality demonstrating God's superiority to partite entities. Aquinas, for example, maintained that to be absolutely simple God must also be incorporeal and thus without any physicality or form. Such a being would exist

outside of time and therefore possess no temporal location or extension, which would make him similar to abstract objects like numbers or sets. But for classical theists, God is much more than abstract objects because he also possesses perfect life and activity. A popular theistic view is that God is an immaterial and unembodied mind transcending space and time (Craig 2010, 63).

This classical conception of God is dominant in contemporary South African theological discourse that perceives God as Spirit who is omnipresent (Oliver and Oliver 2019) with the divine characteristics of love and joy (Verhoef 2019) and who "is a missionary God" aiming to reconcile the world to himself (Reimer 2019). Willem Oliver and Erna Oliver, both specialists in Church History and Missiology at The University of South Africa (UNISA), identify unity, which they understand in terms of omnipresence, as a fundamental characteristic of God. Here God is present everywhere in the universe, in all possible worlds, is not bound by space and time, and is not partite but rather an indivisible unity. The Olivers draw on various biblical texts, patristic texts, and ecumenical creeds to support this classical conception of God. Johannes Reimer of UNISA engages with the theology of the famous Russian icon painter Andrey Rublev (1360-1430). Rublev produced a composition in 1425 conceiving the Christian Triune God as a simple unity and eternally existing being. For Reimer and others (philosophers, theologians, poets, and musicians), the influence of Rublev's theology as presented in his work is of obvious influence.

These theologians do not only wish to theorize in the abstract but use classical theistic theology to inform an engagement with real-life challenges. They apply theological language to issues of identity, unity, diversity, and religious plurality, and even to the problems of ecological destruction and climate change. The classical God becomes a heuristic lens through which the theologian can explore themes found inside or outside his religious tradition. This classical

conception also reflects on the nonacademic level among largely theologically untrained church-going believers. For example, to cite one case that is representative of many, there is a large, popular non-denominational church in Cape Town located but a kilometer from the ISKCON temple in Rondebosch whose congregation embraces a conception of God that is Spirit, omnipotent, and omnipresent, all typical characteristics of the classical conception (commongroundchurch 2021).

It is because of this common conception of God in the South African theological academic and Christian context that the devotee has his hands full if he intends to penetrate the minds of those who do not share his religion's concept of God. Yet despite this strong current in contemporary philosophy and theology affirming the classical conception, Chandidas Dasa is not deterred. His counter-strategy is to offer logical criticisms of the classical conception as a means to contest its viability and have readers consider his conception.

This apologetic counter-strategy is evident in Chandidas Dasa's charge that the classical conception is "hazy" and "incomplete" at best: "Everything in His creation has form, so how can God have no form? This would mean that God is less than His creation—or in other words, that the complete is incomplete, which is simply illogical" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.). According to Chandidas Dasa's reasoning, a God without form is lesser than human beings with form. As a perfect being, God cannot be lesser than imperfect human beings. The classical conception also for Chandidas Dasa problematizes one's relationship with God: "How can we love something formless or void?"

Homosexuality

For the ISKCON movement, homosexuality symbolizes sinfulness in its endorsing of illicit sexual relations. Homosexual intercourse, like heterosexual intercourse without the purpose of procreation, is considered taboo because it seeks to only gratify the physical, material body (Madhudvisa Dasa. n.d.[b]). Illicit sexual intercourse is never in the service of Lord Krishna but is symptomatic of an illusory attachment to the temporary, material body seeking to gratify the senses. Srila Prabhupada was not shy to condemn homosexual proclivities,

> "[T]he homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demonic and is not for any sane male in the ordinary course of life. It is clearly different from heterosexual relationships. If we try to understand through our philosophy and common sense, we will find that heterosexuality is normal and homosexuality is abnormal" (Srila Prabhupada 1974, 778; Krishna.org n.d.[c]).

These strong words are not unlike those of another devotee who states that homosexual desire is the creation of demons and therefore "demoniac" (krishna.org n.d.[e]). Clearly Srila Prabhupada's discourse denounces homosexuality in no uncertain terms: it is "demonic" and not for any "sane" man to embrace. Since it is not for the "ordinary course of life", it must be unusual and an aberration. Homosexuality runs counter to "common sense" which means that to accept it cannot be done on logical or rational grounds.

Heterosexuality, in Srila Prabhupada's view, is normal because of what we know about basic biology: the male produces sperm and the female produces the egg, and these combine to produce a child. Producing a child is the only permissible reason for sexual intercourse and all other intercourse is illicit. Since a child can never emerge from a homosexual relationship, all

homosexual intercourse is illicit. Homosexual devotees wanting to follow Krishna consciousness in the ashram (monastic temple) are viewed as problematic. Chaitanya Charan Das observes the difficulty of one being a homosexual while attempting to pursue Krishna consciousness in the ashram,

> "Now, for a homosexually declined devotee, brahmachari ashram is much more problematic than for other devotees aspiring to be brahmacharis.[15] Because in the ashram when normally people have [an] attraction to members of the opposite sex, so the brahmachari ashram where one gets associated with other brahmacharis, provides protection by providing like-minded association, providing a safe physical and emotional distance from members of the opposite sex. But for a homosexually inclined devotee, it's extremely dangerous because one is constantly surrounded by the objects that may provoke one" (Hare Krsna TV 2013).

Chaitanya Charan Das believes that one must be cautious when it comes to sexual attraction because it can be a source of temptation. One may be unable to control his impulses and feel tempted to act them out in the ashram. This can lead to "trauma" and "turmoil" for the individual involved. But Chaitanya Charan Das does say that one should never be shamed for his homosexual orientation or inclination (Hare Krsna TV 2013). The homosexual devotee must not be discriminated against because all devotees have conditions through which they must work to progress in Krishna consciousness. Chaitanya Charan Das does urge the homosexual devotee to find a senior counselor in the movement to inform him of his (homo)sexual orientation. Through

[15] A *Brahmachari* is a student of the Vedic literature and an individual who has taken a vow of celibacy. The *brahmachari ashram* is similar to a boarding school but typically involves simple living (often devotees sleep on mats rather than on beds, for instance) and the fostering of spiritual values.

the guidance of a counselor, the homosexual devotee can discuss how he can progress and overcome his “condition”.

The ISKCON movement is concerned with the growing acceptance of homosexuality in society and culture today. Devotees realize that many are now in favor of accepting homosexuality (krishna.org n.d.[d]). Statistics demonstrate an increase in the acceptance of homosexuality. In the United States, for example, 72% say that homosexuality should be accepted in society (Pew Research Center 2020). The vast majority of people in Western European countries believe homosexuality is socially acceptable: Sweden (94%), Spain (89%), France (86%), Germany (86%), the United Kingdom (86%), and Italy (75%) represent some of the higher figures.

But what are devotees up against in South Africa regarding the acceptance of homosexuality as being socially acceptable? Homosexuality has a complex and chequered history in the country. Because of early Christian influences, homosexuality came to be frowned upon. Christianity shaped society via British missionary schools through which its understanding of sexual purity spread. The apartheid nationalist government’s foundational religious ideology was Dutch Reformed Calvinism according to which homosexuality is considered unnatural and immoral. But negative perceptions of homosexuality were resisted. The Gay and Lesbians of the Witwatersrand (GLOW) group formed in 1988 and consisted of mostly Blacks from townships like Soweto. Soon to follow was the first gay pride parade in 1990 and the formation of the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project (LGEP) in 1994. Many within these groups committed themselves to the anti-apartheid struggle and joined groups like the African National Congress (ANC) and United Democratic Front (UDF).

Homosexuals have experienced greater tolerance of their sexuality since the 1990s and today have the support of a Constitution that makes discrimination based on sexual orientation illegal (sahistory.org 2014). It was ruled in the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 that employers could not discriminate against employees on the basis of sexual orientation and preference. In 2006, the state passed the Union Bill which legalized same-sex marriage for the first time.

Despite this increase in tolerance, it has not solved all social problems experienced by homosexuals. Homosexual students are sometimes victims of bullying and there is the nefarious practice of corrective rape of lesbians (Lake 2017). Today, however, more than half (54%) of South Africans say that homosexuality should be accepted in society versus a smaller 38% who believe it should not (Pew Research Center 2020).

These changes in attitude towards greater tolerance have been spurred on by important religious leaders. The influential religious leader Bishop Desmond Tutu (b. 1931) has supported a more welcoming view of homosexuality in religion (Davis 2013). In Tutu's view, to hate homosexuals is "every bit unjust" as apartheid and one must remember that they too are children of God. Tutu declares that he would not worship a homophobic God: "If God, as they say, is homophobic, I wouldn't worship that God" and that we should not concern ourselves with what others do in their bed.

Tutu's tolerant and welcoming stance toward homosexuality is far from an isolated case. There has been an increase in the acceptance of homosexuality in the wider Church. In 2014, 54% of American Christians said that homosexuality should be accepted versus 38% who said it should not (Pew Research Center n.d.[b]). In Italy, despite 97% of Italians being baptized as

Catholic (Garelli 2007, 10), the country has one of the higher figures (75%) for the acceptance of homosexuality among countries in Western Europe (Pew Research Center 2020).

Devotees generally find views accepting homosexuality in society as "normal" or even welcome alarming (krishna.org n.d.[d]). Several reasons are stated: homosexuality runs against basic human biology for procreation, encourages illicit sexual intercourse, and cultivates an attachment to the physical, material body. According to Aryan Dasa,

> "It's going back to illicit sex, that's the biggest problem with that [homosexual intercourse]. And [we] also believe that marriage is meant for a man and woman. ISKCON is trying to broaden its view and be more accommodating. In the movement, you find there is the conservative and more moderate devotees. Whereas the conservatives are very strict about it, with the youth they are more broadminded and tolerant to a lot of different things. There's that influence in the Hare Krishna movement" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

Aryan Dasa says he has no issue if people personally decide to engage in homosexual intercourse because "people are free to make their own choices. And if they feel that, it is for them, it is not for me to judge." But he does notice how homosexuality and the acceptance of it by members of the ISKCON movement raises pressing questions regarding Srila Prabhupada's foundational teachings,

> "How can you go against what Srila Prabhupada said back in those days? But today we live in a very different world, to put it into a modern setting. That's very difficult as well. You get devotees who are very strict, almost fanatical about it [Srila Prabhupada's teaching on homosexuality].

> Which is not a bad thing but it can also be very limiting. You enclose yourself to that and do not allow any different viewpoints" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

Aryan Dasa's explanation is indicative of confusion regarding how one is to view homosexuality in a more tolerant social and cultural setting while also being a committed member of a religion with a founder who held strong views on the subject.

But other devotees are unabashed in their opposition. This devotee's strategy is to point out where other religions have caved into the modern age and the social pressures of society. These types of religions are examples to learn from and avoid imitating. For instance, whereas devotees claim that Christianity increasingly views homosexuality approvingly, they pride themselves in remaining strong and firm in their opposition (krishna.org n.d.[e]). They are not willing to buckle under the pressures of the modern age demanding they accept homosexuality as being "normal" or view it approvingly. Devotees are scathing in pinpointing trends in other religions that cave into social pressure and change their stance on the matter. For example, devotees have alleged that Christian priests who now support homosexual marriage are "degraded" and that their religion "has fallen down" (krishna.org n.d.[e]).

These tensions and contestations evidence a struggle for many religious people. Pro-gay messages increasingly permeate the public space through the many gay rights advocates, agencies, organizations, public parades, demonstrations, bright iconography and symbols, and special events like Pride Month, and more. In secular societies, religion is privatized, which may give the impression to believers that they are being dominated by other ideologies permeating the public domain, one of which is a pro-gay ideology.

Devotees are finding themselves increasingly rooted in societies where there is a greater number of people viewing homosexuality as socially acceptable. Tolerance for homosexuality is

also on the increase in religions like Christianity and among its leaders and lay believers. But many devotees resist these trends and are adamant about being counter-cultural in support of rightful (hetero)sexual relations. For them, it is significantly more important that they stand firm in their faith than to capitulate under the pressures of the contemporary age.

Marriage

The marital union represents to devotees significantly more than a commitment between two persons. The religion has, for one, its convictions concerning the appropriate roles spouses (and children) ought to have in family life. There is also a distinct transcendent component to the marriage union because it is integrated within a spiritual and transcendent dimension, such as in whether or not it assists one's pursuit of Krishna consciousness. We also discover tension and contestation between devotees and various contemporary attitudes and perspectives on marriage that underscore the discourses devotees have offered on this contentious topic (Krishna.org n.d.[b]; Krishnanandini Dasi 2011; Cintamani Devi Dasi 2012).

Devotees acknowledge that married life can be difficult (Cintamani Devi Dasi 2012). Life is busy, family members can take each other for granted, and there can be a lack of appreciation for one another. Devotees maintain that in the bustling of daily life, spouses must learn and make time to appreciate each other and express their gratitude. This can elevate the quality of the marriage bond and prove a valuable example to the children for when they grow up and get married. A marriage is a sacrifice and life-long commitment that should be accompanied by spiritual growth, mutual respect, open and honest communication, social and personal responsibility, family love and affection, and a commitment to the children's welfare

(Krishnanandini Dasi 2011). But how should married life look in practice? Srila Prabhupada put it this way,

> "When a man comes at home, he sees that everything is nicely decorated, my wife is well-dressed and foodstuff is nicely prepared, he becomes encouraged. He can work more nicely. Therefore woman is the energy. The woman gives the energy and he can work" (Krishna.org n.d.[b]).

Such discourse constructs perceived ideal marital and familial relations and roles across gender (see also above). All family members are to take care of each other's needs, the man is to work and labor for the benefit of the family unit, the woman must tend to the home, and the parents are to set an example for their children to follow. The husband should always protect his wife, the wife must be chaste and be faithful to her husband, and the children are to respect their parents and be grateful for what their parents do for them (Cintamani Devi Dasi 2012).

In the contemporary situational context, devotees find little to celebrate concerning current trends in marriage. Particularly troubling to them is that there has been an extensive breakdown of marriage in Western societies. This breakdown has steadily climbed since the 1960s (Murphy 1995, 239) at an unprecedented and widespread rate (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010, 308). The rate of unmarried parenthood and cohabitation has also risen. For many, divorce is deemed acceptable in the modern age, especially with the relaxation of divorce laws, mutual consent, and the view that marriages can have a legitimate end (Perelli-Harris et al. 2010, 308). But for devotees, divorce is almost always taboo and unacceptable,

> "If you left your wife, this would not be Krsna conscious. Think about how much pain and suffering your wife and children would go through if you were to divorce. This is not right -

> remember, a devotee never causes distress to others, he never brings them grief" (Bhaktin Roma 2012).

The ideal marriage must evidence a secure bond between spouses, a commitment to the children, and the pursuit of Krishna consciousness. The family unit is to be strong and its members are to take care of each other's needs. This perspective on marriage held by devotees is,

> "a far cry from what has developed in the materialistic culture in present society. In Krsna-consciousness, as previously in Christianity- it was 'til death do we part.' People didn't marry simply for sex but to contribute children to society. If the marriage was unsatisfactory, the partners could separate but not re-marry" (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

Local devotees are aware that South African legislation makes it easy to obtain a divorce. One needs to only prove he or she cannot live with his or her spouse and that there is no chance of resolving differences (South African Government 2021). An uncontested divorce can take as little as four weeks to complete and can even be done without an attorney. Yet this is anathema to the devotee's ideals. Divorce is considered an unwillingness of the husband to take care of his wife and children. And how can the wife and children survive if there is to be a divorce that leaves them without a provider for their needs? Divorce thus brings grief and suffering to those who are most vulnerable and impedes the devotional pursuit of Krishna consciousness that ought to be central to the spiritual life. All divorce should be discouraged unless there is serious physical or emotional abuse involved (Krishnanandini Dasi 2011).

Importantly, within the ISKCON movement, marriage has also been a source of tension. Historically, the movement initially drew much of its membership from disaffected youth

suitable to the group's unconventional lifestyle (Bozeman 2000, 385-385). But devotees grew older and came to marry and have children, which led to the experience of conflicting responsibilities. On the one hand, they wanted to provide a stable home and look after their children, yet, on the other, knew their religion required a highly mobile life and public lifestyle in, for instance, traveling to preach, distributing literature, and canvassing for funds. The solution was for the religion to establish gurukuls (religious boarding schools) for the children of devotees, although this raised additional challenges and concerns such as untrained staff, parental discontent with inferior quality education for their children, and allegations of physical and sexual child abuse (Rochford 2007, 84-87, 92).

Marriage also came to represent two different social realities for men and women (Rochford 2007, 57). For men, marriage has been considered a sign of weakness due to an inability to control their sexual impulses, whereas for women, marriage has been considered to help them in their spiritual progress in Krishna Consciousness. It has also been the duty of the husband to offer the wife "protection," as Srila Prabhupada taught, "the women must have a husband to give protection" (Prabhupada 1992, 869).

There appear to be at least two major reasons why devotees present discourses and allocate resources in support of marriage as part of their strategy to claim exclusive ownership of the marriage symbol. The first, as indicated, are the changes in attitudes toward marriage that devotees perceive negatively and resort to protesting in their discourse. Another reason is that divorce is not uncommon in the ISKCON movement itself (Rochford 2007, 149). For the married, especially those devotees struggling in their commitment, the movement offers online resources, courses, workshops, classes, and programs (Krishnanandini Dasi 2011). The movement encourages premarital counseling and strong premarital education as fundamental

prerequisites to a marriage commitment (Krishnanandini Dasi 2011). Assistance is offered to married couples through telephonic communication and the movement has released a publication, *Heart and Soul Connections: A Vaishnava Guide to Marriage, Service and Love* (2011), to specifically engage the many challenges that household and married life have.

Miracle

It is possible to debate the concept of miracle to no end (Corner n.d.), but we will accept a miracle as being an event that is inexplicable by natural causes alone and at its cause appears to require agency beyond the reach of human action (McGrew 2010). Symbolically, a miracle functions to represent a transcendent or supernatural reality breaking into the natural order of things.

Miracles can be found in many religions, including in the ISKCON movement. It is important, however, to acknowledge the various concepts of miracle embraced by devotees. For instance, although the common understanding is that a miracle is supernatural in its cause through the work of an agent existing beyond the natural world, many devotees view it as miraculous perceived extraordinary achievements, emotional sentiments such as compassion, and the majestic nature of the immense universe.

It is considered "miraculous," for example, how in just the span of a few years Srila Prabhupada established Krishna Consciousness in the United States and began attracting a following that would eventually cascade into a fully-fledged movement (Nanda Kumar Das 2011). In such achievements and others like it, devotees see the superintendence and favor of Lord Krishna in the lives of their revered figures. Another devotee reflects that it is compassion nestled within the human heart that is a "miraculous" instrument that can be mobilized to free

one from all anxieties (Sacinandana Swami 2012). It is further deemed miraculous that people undergo a radical transformation in their personal lives,

> "Miracles are happening all the time. Otherwise, how can Western youth give up all family and cultural connections, as well as many bad habits and dedicate themselves to the service of Krsna?" (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

Devotees also embrace the common notion of a miracle as being supernatural in origin. Many look back to the sixteenth-century guru Sri Chaitanya, believed to have been a divine incarnation of Lord Krishna, whose life was full of miraculous events (Sadaputa Dasa n.d.). Sri Chaitanya's teachings form the philosophical basis of the movement, which is why stories of miracles associated with him are remembered fondly. He performed many miracles (Rosen 2017, 59) such as, for instance, exhibiting himself as Krishna to a Brahmin, possessing an unusual ability to trick thieves, displaying his heavenly powers in the house of his associate Srivasa Pandit, performing miracles in the homes of his followers, curing a leper during a visit to southern India, and making tigers and elephants dance upon hearing the name Krishna (Saccidananda Bhaktivinoda Thakura 1897; Pure Bhakti n.d.).

For devotees, it is through these unusual abilities and supernatural acts that Sri Chaitanya's divinity and identity as the Supreme Lord Krishna are established. Most believers do not find any difficulty in accepting the genuineness and authenticity of the miracles attributed to Sri Chaitanya.

Many also draw inspiration from Christian history. Jesus Christ is a source of inspiration who "performed many amazing miracles, walked on water and spoke a wonderful sermon on a

mountain" (Shaunaka Rishi Dasa n.d.). Rehan Medhavi distinguishes between *siddhis*, of which Jesus was one,

> "In yogic experience, there are different perfections known as siddhis. Siddhis are supernatural powers gained by the performance of difficult austerities. There are eight primary siddhis: anima, mahima, laghima, prapti, prakamya, isitva, vasitva and kama-avasayitva.[16] Jesus showed 'laghima siddhi'- lighter than the lightest - when he walked on water" (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

Importantly, Jesus is not considered a Christian but rather a divine incarnation empowered by Lord Krishna (krishna.org 2011). Similar to Sri Chaitanya, the supernatural miracles of Jesus provide legitimacy to the ISKCON movement's supernaturalist worldview. There are also stories of Krishna who performed miracles and slew demons. Some of Krishna's miracles were seen in his ability to transform himself, expand his body into many different forms, raise people from the dead, and cure the diseased (ISKCON Birmingham n.d.).

There are also contemporary miracles celebrated by devotees. As one reflects, "it's not just Christians who see the modern day miracles… We have seen the miracles ourselves so many times" (Madhudvisa Dasa n.d.[c]). There are yogis living today in India who are believed to possess supernatural powers for miracles to attract people to Lord Krishna (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021). There are stories about perceived supernatural

[16] The eight *Siddhis* denote distinct miraculous abilities. For example, *Aṇimā* is when one can reduce his body to the size of an atom; *Mahima* is the ability to enlarge oneself infinitely; *Laghima* is becoming weightless; *Prāpti* is the ability to access all places; *Prākāmya* is realizing anything that one desires; *Iṣṭva* is possessing absolute worship; and *Vaśtva* being the power of subjugation (Tibetan Buddhist Encyclopedia 2014).

healing from cancer in response to prayer (ISKCON Seshadripuram 2016) and of spoon fills of milk disappearing after being offered to idols of gods as if being accepted and consumed by them (Sadaputa Dasa n.d.).

What interests do these miracles and their authenticity serve? (Chidester 1989, 24). Devotees claim ownership of the miracles of Krishna, Jesus Christ, and Sri Chaitanya because they point to a transcendent, supernatural reality beyond the material world. These miracles serve interests because through them the devotee can make a personal claim to an exclusive ownership of important religious figures to demonstrate the truth of his worldview. For example, through an act of appropriation, the Jesus symbol is taken out of the hands of the Christian and placed into the ownership of the devotee. Jesus is appropriated by transitioning him away from being the "Son of Man" as the gospels state it (Mark 2:27-28; Matt. 8:20, 12:8; Luke 6:5, 9:58, etc.) and Christians believe him to have been, to one in service of Krishna consciousness. Srila Prabhupada cited Jesus as his "favorite example" of a figure to spread God-consciousness and was "crucified by nondevotees" as a result (Srila Prabhupada 1974, 539). Of course, this is a site of contestation as Christians will disagree strongly and retort by themselves claiming ownership of the Jesus symbol.

That miracles point to a transcendent reality is welcomed by devotees because of their aversion to the material world and desire to transcend it. An authentic miracle is indisputable proof of divine reality. Sadaputa Dasa recognizes this writing that miracles "surpass the laws of nature and are therefore ascribed to a divine or supernatural cause… [they are] seen as evidence for the reality of divine power" (Sadaputa Dasa n.d.). An authentic miracle has apologetic value because it is a proof of the transcendent and would suggest that materialistic philosophies are

intellectually bankrupt. Another devotee presents a case for why Krishna is God by appealing to his miracles and then asks readers to "accept him" (ISKCON Birmingham n.d.).

The authenticity of a miracle serves to mitigate the doubt some devotees have regarding belief in God and the supernatural. Much discourse is generated for these doubtful believers (Pandita Dasa, n.d). Discourse proving a genuine miracle terminates the threat of philosophies held by naturalists, secular-materialists, and religious skeptics (ISKCON Birmingham n.d., Madhudvisa Dasa n.d.[c], Chaitanya Charan Das 2017). In the words of Sadaputa Dasa, "the [miraculous] event confirms the doctrines" (Sadaputa Dasa n.d.). In other words, a miracle confirms the devotee's religious beliefs and legitimizes his religion. Strategically, this justification for faith opens up space for devotees to proselytize their religion to others with great confidence.

The miracle symbol is contested. As Sadaputa Dasa notices, "miracles have also served as a focus for skepticism and doubt" (Sadaputa Dasa n.d.). Doubt over miracles certainly exists and devotees are aware of it, especially in the contemporary context where miracles tend to be frequently pitted against science. Chaitanya Charan Das observes,

> "The notion of miracles is often seen as antithetical to science. Miracles connote sudden, arbitrary and even disorderly events that go against the natural order of things – such as the parting of seas or the lifting of mountains or walking on water. Science involves a meticulous study of the natural order, a study that leads to adoration and even adulation of nature and its laws, which are sometimes enshrined as if supreme" (Chaitanya Charan Das 2017).

Scientism, as reflected upon earlier, is relevant to this insight Chaitanya Charan Das offers. If, as scientism maintains, the empirical sciences are the only means for attaining authentic knowledge

about reality, then it follows necessarily that miracles are meaningless because they are by definition supernatural. As such, one can never legitimately claim a miracle to have occurred as scientism renders such talk nonsensical and meaningless.

Chaitanya Charan Das notices that science operates according to methodological naturalism and leaves out God or the divine in its explanatory scope. This gives the impression that belief in God and miracles is unscientific because they lie external to the purview of science. After all, science seeks natural explanations for phenomena, not supernatural ones. A miracle is also viewed as impossible because it is said to violate the laws of physics. The assumption is that if it is impossible to violate the laws of physics, which are established beyond a reasonable doubt, then miracles cannot occur because such violations are not possible. These interpretations have led skeptics to argue that belief in miracles today is no more than "the gullibility of the masses" (Chaitanya Charan Das 2017).

Chaitanya Charan Das is aware of the historical Western philosophical tradition in which doubt concerning miracles emerged. He refers to the influence of the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) who argued against the reasonability of accepting miracles. It is more reasonable, if we apply Hume's logic, to conclude that a group of witnesses is lying than to accept a violation of the laws of physics occurred. While not saying miracles are impossible, Hume is arguing that it is always unreasonable to accept a miracle because the supposed evidence for it can never be superior to the evidence for the laws of nature (Tim McGrew, Facebook conversation, April 27, 2021). Many philosophers and theologians acknowledge that Hume's argument against miracles remains influential and deserving of critical response (Craig n.d.[a]; Tweyman 1996; Earman 2000; McGrew 2010).

Who are the critics carrying on this tradition of skepticism? Devotees identify atheists as those responsible for objecting to miracles (Priyanka 2014). More generally, these atheists embrace the worldview of philosophical naturalism. For philosophical naturalists, there is no transcendent, supernatural reality beyond the physical world, which makes miracles impossible (Papineau 2007). The universe is a closed system immune to influence or intervention by an external agent beyond it, such as by a God, gods, or supernatural entities.

Contestation for the ownership of the miracle symbol is animated. On the one hand, the skeptical voices argue that belief in miracles is not done on rational or logical grounds. Rather, belief in miracles is considered superstitious and is taken on faith. Faith is considered to be holding to a belief without evidence, or in spite of evidence. On the other hand, devotees argue that it is reasonable to accept a miracle.

Chaitanya Charan Das argues that science, rather than undermining belief in miracles, actually "begins with a sense of the miraculous, an appreciation of the wonder of the world around us…" (Chaitanya Charan Das n.d.). He views the inherent order of the universe as evidence of the miraculous. He is impressed with the mathematical precision of the laws of nature, which leads him to argue that science enhances an appreciation of the miraculous, rather than undermines it. Natural laws and their mathematical precision offer evidence for a guiding intelligence. It is because of natural law that one can see God in natural phenomena: it is a "gift" that "points to a sublime, supreme intelligence who permeates, animates, oversees and transcends nature."

Money

Money is much more than the material paper on which digits are printed. It constitutes a shared myth of the collective human consciousness that persons invest with imaginary value (Harari 2011). Money has a dimension that transcends its material properties. It can, for example, be a symbol of social status, desire, and, for some, even spiritual significance.

The attitudes of devotees toward money are mixed. On the one hand, the religion embraces an anti-materialistic view of human relations to material wealth prioritizing "the passions of consumerism" (Devamrita Swami n.d.), wanton greed, and exaggerated attachment (Vishakha Devi Dasi 2011). This is a view contested in, although not limited to, contemporary Western culture and societies where consumer culture and material gain are prioritized (DeAngelis 2004; Roberts and Clement 2007, 79).

On the other hand, devotees are not entirely committed to an anti-materialistic stance in having an aversion to all material ownership. For example, their movement utilizes economic strategies to serve its interests. The movement draws its finances chiefly from solicitation by begging, sale of goods (food, books, magazines, clothing, etc.), services, renting out properties it owns, and donations (Bird and Westley 1985, 159). To its benefit, the ISKCON movement does not have excessive expenses. Rather than ordinarily constructing elaborate meeting and worship places, devotees are content to congregate in simple flats, houses, and rented halls. These economic strategies continue to serve the movement well. Devotees further recognize people exist in a material world and therefore need to own material wealth and goods to survive. However, they establish conditions under which it is appropriate to possess this wealth and use it.

An important condition depends on the caste (*varna*) in traditional Vedic society. The ISKCON movement accepts this system placing people into four classes: *brahmanas, kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*, and *shudras* (Vishakha Devi Dasi 2011). The *brahmanas*, the top class of teachers, accept financial and material contributions from their students and give to charity; the *kshatriyas* (rulers) require money but have a duty to donate liberally to charity; the merchant class, the *vaishyas*, receive money through agriculture and trade, and support themselves and their families; the *shudras*, the lowest of the four castes, do not receive money but acquire food, shelter, and clothing from the other three castes in exchange for their services.

How one spends his money depends on his place in the caste system. Using money in the mold of one's caste avoids one using it sinfully and in contradiction to the wishes of Lord Krishna. Money is subservient to Lord Krishna because he owns it: "Money is God's energy. He created it, He owns it, and He controls it" (Vishakha Devi Dasi 2011). Lord Krishna and the law of karma determine how much money a person will have in his life. What money one does have must be used in the service of Lord Krishna.

Contesting the anti-materialistic stance of devotees is consumer culture, which has been studied extensively by consumer theorists (see Arnould and Thompson 2005 for an extensive summary of consumer studies and developments). Consumer culture is constructed upon the foundations of marketplace ideologies, capitalist cultural production systems, and the consumer's coveting of lifestyle ideals. Consumer theorists study a multitude of factors (e.g. socio-historic influences, cultural meanings, and social dynamics) that shape consumer buying behaviors in everyday life.

Consumer culture is pervasive in the South African context, especially among the wealthier segments of the population. Consumer culture theory is a relatively recent area of specialization

in the country. The Critical Research in Consumer Culture (CRiCC) network was only established in 2012 when it hosted a two-day symposium at the University of the Witwatersrand. This symposium, entitled "Consumer Practices, Media and Landscapes in South Africa: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," was the first forum to focus on the topic and critically evaluate the rise of consumerism after the end of apartheid. It is the history of apartheid and the subsequent changes in consumer habits that have interested consumer theorists (Posel 2010; Iqani and Kenny 2015, 95-101).

During apartheid, only the small White minority had access to the industrial economy. This economy was inaccessible to the majority who were excluded through the Group Areas Act confining them to townships. Whites had privileged access to upmarket shopping malls and most consumer brands targeted the White middle-class population. This changed after 1994 when millions of Blacks gained middle-class status, accumulated more disposable income, and were able to join the consumer class. Although there is a growing middle-class today, a significant amount of the population is poor. The median wage is R3 300, which means that most of the population cannot afford non-essential items and might barely have enough finances to cover transport, food, burial insurance, and so on (Lappeman et al. 2021, 51). Most of these households are dependent on state support.

But there is a strong consumer base in the country. Most wealth is found in the working, middle, and upper classes. 25% of national expenditure comes from the working class, 14% from the middle class, and 34% from the upper-middle and top-end classes (Lappeman et al. 2021, 79). Rapid urbanization is enabling more people to have greater access to consumer brands, products, and media. By 2015, the urban population was expected to increase from 63% to 70%

(Lappeman et al. 2021, 74). In 2020, a majority live in cities (67.35%) (statista 2021) and this is why retailers use urban space and social media to promote their brands and products.

Devotees take issue with consumer culture. Referring to South African consumer habits and use of wealth, Aryan Dasa offers the following insight,

> "God isn't against accumulating wealth, but it depends how you use that wealth. The only problem I can see is that if you don't have a strong foundation in the spiritual life, then you don't have a solid base and that can affect how you use it… Being too attached to it can be a problem. Ultimately, we devotees are accumulating wealth but the ultimate goal is to detach from all of these things. That attachment [to wealth] can sort of lead to a detachment to Krishna and the movement" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

A fixation on wealth causes people to place their focus on the wrong area rather than on what is of ultimate importance. In the *Basics of Bhagavad-gita: A Thematic Study of Bhagavad Gita* (2018), Srila Prabhupada referred to this society as "the cage polishing civilization" (Prabhupada 2018, 112-113). Most of our lives are concerned with materialistic and bodily pursuits which cause us to forget about the "spirit soul." The cage is the body and the "parrot" within it is the soul. Most of us are too concerned with the cage, so we polish it extensively day after day, yet we forget to feed the parrot, which eventually dies from neglect. The teaching of this parable is that "our modern society is simply a cage polishing civilization which caters to the unlimited demands of the body but completely ignores the needs of the soul" (Prabhupada 2018, 113). Thus, according to Srila Prabhupada's teachings, consumerism thrives on people placing their focus on the outer cage. After a while, individuals starve the soul and it begins to fade. For the devotee, limiting oneself to polishing the outer cage is a recipe for unhappiness. Devotees are

aware that material wealth and ownership do not equate to greater life satisfaction and happiness: "almost all of us", writes Vishakha Devi Dasi, "are restless and dissatisfied, despite earning and spending vast amounts of money and despite using and owning any number of things. Money does not necessarily produce happiness" (Vishakha Devi Dasi 2011).[17]

The devotee claims that the only solution to the unhappiness engendered by consumerism and materialism is to place one's focus on Lord Krishna. It is wrong to place focus principally on the material world and goods. Although one can own a house and work a job to earn an income, she must always place her focus on Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna is of greater importance than material goods and wealth, and he is the locus of true meaning and contentment in life (Vande Berg and Kniss 2008, 83).

It can be argued that consumer culture manufactures inequitable division and therefore runs counter to the devotee's ideals. Theorists have studied how what people consume is shaped by divisions such as social class hierarchies (Wallendorf 2001; Allen 2002), gender (Thompson 1996; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Dobscha and Ozanne 2001), and families, households, and other formal groups (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Moore, Wilkie, and Lutz 2002). Consumer materialism emphasizes attaining status in society, with status being "the relative rankings of members of each social class in terms of specific status factors" (Schiffman and Kanuk 2006, 358). It is about attaining a higher position in society (Fitzmaurice and Comegys 2006, 287), which suggests that consumer culture and material wealth can reinforce divisions among people. Rather than breaking division down, consumer culture tends to exaggerate inequitable division

[17] There is research to suggest that the more materialistic people are, the less happy they tend to be (Ryan and Dziurawiec 2001; DeAngelis 2004; Roberts and Clement 2007; Joseph Sirgy et al. 2012).

across educational, socio-economic, gender, and age divides, which can undermine unity and diminish one's ability to focus on her true spiritual identity (Kripamoya Das 2011).

Morality

The morality symbol denotes how persons ascribe to an action significance beyond the act itself. An action is not merely an act, but one ascribed with meaning often expressed as "good" or "evil." The morality symbol is contested between devotees and secular-materialists on primarily ontological grounds concerning the nature of morality: is morality an objective reality independent of subjective human culture and thought, as devotees maintain? Or is there no such reality as objective morality (Provine 1988; Steinrucken 2010) and that what we consider "morality" is merely reducible to subjective human culture and thought, as some secular-materialists affirm? (Baggini 2003, 51).

Devamrita Swami argues that on a materialist philosophy there is no objective foundation to morality (Devamrita Swami n.d.). Human beings are merely the insignificant products of chance existing in an indifferent universe. Devamrita Swami alleges that this is a "predominant scientific explanation" today. Whether or not this view is a predominant scientific explanation is debatable, but what is certain is that it is a view held by some prominent thinkers, scientists and philosophers included.

Historian of science William Provine (1942-2015) is an apt example; he writes that "No inherent moral or ethical laws exist, nor are there any absolute guiding principles for human society. The universe cares nothing for us and we have no ultimate meaning in life" (Provine 1988). In the words of philosopher Julian Baggini: "moral claims are not true or false in the same way as factual claims are… moral claims are judgments [that] it is always possible for someone

to disagree with" (Baggini 2003, 51). Any value or transcendence ascribed to morality is merely a part of the imagination. People live and act as if moral or ethical laws exist, but they are subjective fictions.

Secular-materialists often claim that what people consider to be morality or that small inner voice informing them what is morally good or evil is no more than sociobiological evolutionary conditioning. In the view of two philosophers, ethics is an illusion fobbed off on human beings by their genes to get them to co-operate in order to ensure their survival (Ruse and Wilson 1989, 316). Morality is the shared illusion of the human race.

The debate over the ontology of morality is lively and contested between theists and secular-materialists (Craig 2011; Morriston 2012; Craig, Wielenberg, and Johnson 2020). Devotees in the ISKCON movement have also participated in this debate, although they do so through online discourse on official websites and blogs rather than through formal debate.[18]

There is a small but vibrant secular-materialist and humanist movement in South Africa that is interested in the question of God and morality. For example, Jacques Rousseau of the University of Cape Town took much interest in the 2014 debate between philosopher John Lennox and political commentator Eusebius McKaiser ("Morality and God: is there a connection?") and provided his own reflections (Rousseau 2014).

Secularists like Rousseau are the sort of ideological counterparts and religious skeptics we find our devotees in contestation with, especially on the question of morality. Rousseau rejects

[18] Keen public interest in the question of morality was apparent in the visiting apologist John Lennox's debate with agnostic and local political commentator Eusebius McKaiser in 2014 ("Morality and God: is there a connection?") at the University of the Witwatersrand delivered to a packed auditorium. The debate produced many subsequent commentaries in the popular media by supporters of both Lennox and McKaiser alike. It is not immediately clear why ISKCON does not engage in similar formal discussions when the opportunities to do so exist.

moral realism/objectivism, which is the view held by devotees, to embrace moral subjectivism based on a naturalistic and humanist worldview. Philosophical naturalism rejects any supernatural reality and, by consequence, requires meaning and purpose in life to be created by human beings. Secular humanism recognizes that people are capable of praiseworthy virtues (honesty, trust, care, etc.) regardless of religious belief (Free Society Institute 2021). Here the secular humanist does not believe God and religion are essential to living a moral life.

Many devotees, however, notably the ones interviewed, are moral realists who believe in an objective standard of morality in the universe. Persons do not subjectively create their own morality but are bound to an existing, transcendent moral standard,

> "[M]orals can be said to be universally applicable principles… Of course, what those pleasures are and how to attain them may vary from community to community, so too will their codes of conduct also vary in accordance. But the principle is if you hold true that each individual has a purpose and that for the attainment of their purpose they need a guide, then morality is certainly an objective reality" (Vivaan Rudra, personal email communication, 8 July, 2021).

According to Deepika Dasi, with the exception of the *Ksatriya* (warrior) class under certain circumstances, "it is [always] wrong to kill or bring harm to others… There are sets of rules and regulations to be followed by each for their wellbeing and that of their society" (Deepika Dasi, personal email communication, 9 July, 2021).

Here one discerns the objectivist, realist stance in an imposition of moral rules given by God through sacred scripture. Believers are obligated to obey these rules. The law of karma is relevant to the devotee's moral ontology because according to it there are objectively good and evil actions that contribute to one's karmic debt. No one creates morality, rather actions (like

murder and illicit sexual intercourse, for example) are always immoral regardless of what individual persons think.

The contestation over the morality symbol is clear between devotees and their secular-materialist counterparts. Devamrita Swami contests the secular-materialist's subjective view in recognizing its implications,

> "If everything is matter, then why should anything matter to you? Is it okay to push someone out of the window of a tall building? After all, that person is just a conglomeration of matter, nothing more—right? The person's matter would merge with the pavement matter down below—what's the problem?" (Devamrita Swami n.d.).

He argues that should we suppose people are merely composites of matter, then on what grounds can one invest them with any value or transcendent significance? After all, rocks are composites of matter, but no one would ascribe any moral significance to two rocks smashing into each other. It follows, argues Devamrita Swami, that on this view there is no moral and ontological significance to human actions, including those that we would consider constituting a moral evil, such as committing a murder.

What in the secular-materialist's view does Devamrita Swami find objectionable? The error lies in that secular-materialists "focus exclusively on matter [and] acknowledge only material objects, material bodies." This is a diminished vision that neglects the transcendent spiritual reality of human existence and leads secularist-materialists to adopt the radical position of morality being subjective. But Devamrita Swami believes that one can become "detached from matter" and expand her spiritual awareness beyond the material world. He emphasizes the function of "spiritual scientists" in the form of practitioners of Krishna consciousness who

engage in spiritual-scientific inquiry known as bhakti-yoga. Through bhakti-yoga, one is liberated from lust, anger, and greed. Ultimately, "The philosophy of God consciousness is the basis of all genuine morality" (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]).

Sacred Consciousness

Sacred consciousness is fundamental to the existence of religion and exists in tension with the profane. Famous work on the "sacred" and "profane" dimensions of human consciousness was produced by the scholar and phenomenologist Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) (Strenski 2015). Eliade viewed the sacred as central to religion, an insight that motivated him to describe and characterize the sacred in its multiple dimensions (Capps 1995, 141).[19]

Eliade viewed the sacred as both lying in opposition and contestation with the profane. He claimed that in the West technological progress and industrialization tended to display profane (non-religious) modes of apprehension. These developments capture "the man without religious feeling… the man who lives, or wishes to live, in a desacralized world" (Capps 1995, 142-143). Eliade referred to this as "desacralization", a term synonymous with the profane and symptomatic of societies cultivating a profane orientation.

There is evidence of a profane orientation in South Africa. A small yet significant portion of the population is unaffiliated to any religious organization or institution (Schoeman 2017, 2). Although the majority in South Africa is Christian, in 2001 16.41% claimed to have no religion or refused to answer. In the 2013 General Household Survey, 4,015,687 South Africans (7.4%)

19 I am aware that Eliade has been criticized because of his uncritical methodology based upon subjective generalizations not supported by empirical and historical data (Hinnells 2005, 194-196). This thesis keeps itself at a distance from aspects of Eliade's phenomenology, as well as his inclination to favor specific religions, especially Asian religions like Hinduism, and inject metaphysical and theological assumptions into his work.

made up the “Atheist and agnostic”, “Nothing in particular”, “Refused and Do not know”, and “Unspecified” categories (Schoeman 2017, 3).

Devotees who embrace “sacred consciousness” find themselves needing to contest and resist various people, institutions, and movements maintaining a “profane” orientation. We have seen that there are several areas of contestation, such as pertaining to God’s existence and the soul where ISKCON members find themselves opposing the views of skeptics embracing a “profane consciousness”. Devotees realize that many of their “opponents” play prominent roles and are influential thinkers in the Western intellectual tradition (Pandita Dasa, n.d) and in philosophy (Chandidas Dasa n.d.). In this regard, Deepika Dasi reflects as follows,

> “Someone who has concluded that life is purposeless must have started by questioning its purpose. The *Bhagavad-Gita* states that such a person, at the questioning stage, is the perfect candidate for receiving spiritual knowledge, which it goes on to impart at length. I would therefore implore such a person to give the *Bhagavad-Gita* a chance. Stopping at a material understanding of life will almost certainly leave one with a feeling of purposelessness as all material things end with death. But by understanding the spiritual significance to life, one can understand and come into their own life’s true purpose which extends far beyond this realm” (Deepika Dasi, personal email communication, 9 July, 2021).

Deepika Dasi hopes that the skeptic can embrace sacred consciousness through the *Bhagavad Gita* and the ISKCON movement’s teachings because this will invest human existence with ultimate meaning and purpose. The *Bhagavad Gita* is believed to contain authentic, authoritative spiritual knowledge that can transition one from profane consciousness to sacred consciousness. Sacred texts, as in the case of the *Bhagavad Gita*, function to enliven the “sacred” consciousness by subverting its “profane” counterpart.

Sacred Space

Sacred space in religions has been the subject of rigorous academic investigation (e.g. Eliade 1959; Jackson and Henrie 1983; Kong 1993; Mbalazi, Mushishi, and Ramokhoro 2000). Although definitions of sacred space or what makes a place sacred are debatable, a helpful interpretation is in it constituting a section of the Earth's surface that has been rendered worthy of devotion and loyalty by a religious group or individuals (Jackson and Henrie 1983, 94). The symbolic dimension to sacred space is expressed in how real estate is invested by religious persons with a transcendent significance and importance irreducible to the land itself.

Sacred space varies. It includes significant physical, material structures such as churches, mosques, and synagogues, among countless other religious structures (Smart 1992, 21; Mbalazi, Mushishi, and Ramokhoro 2000), various meeting spaces like covens, circles, and groves (Pearson 2002, 84, 128, 130), and sites such as the river Ganges, the sacred mountains of China, the Jordan, Mount Fuji in Japan, Uluru in Australia, and so on (Smart 1992, 21). The religious group's activities and rituals are constitutive of its sacred space.

The ISKCON movement owns space it renders sacred. Foremost is the temple. There are several hundred temples worldwide in which artifacts, such as images of gods, mostly of Lord Krishna, are found. In a Durban temple, devotees chant (*kirtan*) passionately and loudly in complete devotion to Lord Krishna (Haridas Thakur Das Acbsp 2019). Many members of the congregation, including men, women, children, and the disabled (to the best of their capability), dance and advance together in circular motions while in the background a worship leader chants and sings via a microphone. Some devotees lie flat on their bellies before a wax model of Srila Prabhupada.

Also part of this ritual dimension to unfold in the sacred space is worshiping the divine in embodied forms (or images) known as *murtis* (Karapanagiotis 2018, 77-78). For devotees, *murtis* are physical embodiments of Lord Krishna symbolizing his grace and love for humanity. Their presence in temples allows congregants to witness a physical representation of Lord Krishna, express their love for him, and strengthen their relationship with him through the offering of flowers, incense, and lamps.

Sacred space is not limited to the temple. There are also rural communes, retreats, and farms (Zeller n.d.[b]). Some of these host important festivals and conferences for the ISKCON movement. India is viewed as home to much sacred space given the religion's historical connection to that country. Although ISKCON was founded in the United States and most devotees live there and in Europe, certain spaces in India where Krishna is believed to have walked maintain a special sacredness, leading many devotees to visit on pilgrimage. For example, ISKCON devotees pilgrimage to the city of Mathura in the Uttar Pradesh state of northern India as it is believed to be the traditional birthplace of Krishna (ISKCONZA n.d.[m]). Another location of significance is Bhalka Teerth where devotees believe Krishna died after a wandering hunter shot him in the foot with an arrow.

Despite sacred space often being restricted (Mbalazi, Mushishi, and Ramokhoro 2000, 123), the ISKCON movement opens it up to outsiders. There are restaurants and large *prasādam* halls connected to temples or located in temple compounds that visitors are welcome to visit (King 2012, 195). The public is also invited to Sunday Love Feasts (dandapro 2013) and temple tours (Nikunja Vilasini Devi Dasi 2015). The ISKCON movement is not an isolationist religious

movement, but a strong missionary religion seeking to bring into the fold as many outsiders as possible.[20]

The ISKCON movement's sacred space has been in contestation with broader sociopolitical forces in South Africa. Paying close attention to the situational context, historically under apartheid, the movement's sacred space encountered considerable opposition. There were difficulties in registering the society itself because the government thought it would encourage the mixing of races (Nikunja Vilasini Devi Dasi 2015). Sacred space thus emerged in rural settings because existing in the countryside made it easier for races to mix. Aarushi Dasi reflects on these challenges,

> "There were struggles to have places of worship but things got better once they were able to get land to build the Chatsworth temple on Durban. Chatsworth is an Indian community so there wasn't a lot of resistance there, but other parts of SA were more of a struggle because the aim was to bring together many races to worship together" (Aarushi Dasi, personal email communication, 17 July, 2021).

According to a former temple president, his community was threatened with fines for allowing non-Whites to live in the temple and attend programs (Nikunja Vilasini Devi Dasi 2015). There were cases when the police raided Indian homes in search of foreigners and non-Indians living there. Devotee Aryan Dasa did not experience these events firsthand but tells of a spiritual master who did,

[20] Until the early 1980s, the ISKCON movement and its leadership possessed significant control over its members and required that they cut ties with the outside secular culture to live a disciplined, communal way of life.

> "A disciple of Srila Prabhupada told a story about that time. It was very strict back then. The government wanted to know who is this person, what are they doing. They [devotees] had to be underground much of the time. He mentioned that the government thought at one point they were terrorists trying to topple the government. He mentioned one time that the police arrested him, one of the devotees, and interrogated him asking why he was here. He was from America. Who he was working for? Probably they were just trying to scare him. He made up a story about his mom being a high government official in the American government and that they would get in trouble if they did something [to him]. Besides that, it was difficult for White devotees to go to Indian communities, Black communities. It was difficult for them to mingle with different races. Everything they had to do was underground" (Aryan Dasa, interview by author, 24 June, 2021).

The apartheid government's actions were an attempt to alienate devotees from ownership of and access to their sacred space. There are losers on the battlefield of symbols but devotees, despite the difficult circumstances, refused to give up in the presence of such external pressures. The first temple farm opened in 1977 in KwaZulu-Natal roughly eighty kilometers from Durban. From this farm, devotees could engage in missionary campaigns and travel to residential areas around Durban. They also succeeded in establishing congregational groups called *Nama-Hattas*. Devotees today continue the legacy of Srila Prabhupada's teachings preaching against racism in the country,

> "When Srila Prabhupada visited [South Africa], there was no integration of races, so in his lectures he strongly emphasized that we are not a man or a woman or black or white but we all are eternal servants of God, and therefore equal" (Nikunja Vilasini Devi Dasi 2015).

Srila Prabhupada considered apartheid ideology inconsistent with his religion's spiritual principles because it was fixated on unequal division rather than on unity. For Srila Prabhupada, people do not merely have material bodies but also spiritual souls. Therefore, apartheid was constructed upon a flawed philosophy because it emphasized the material body above all else.

Sacred Text

The *Bhagavad Gita* ("song of God") is the chief sacred text for devotees and its content is revered as divine truth: it is "the essence of India's spiritual wisdom" that provides "answers to questions posed by philosophers for centuries" (ISKCONZA. n.d.[h]). Many sacred texts have an essential function and importance to the religious because they represent a God behind them and their production. This God is believed to communicate divine truth through the religious text, a view expressed by devotee Madhudvisa Dasa,

> "*Bhagavad Gita* contains the essence of all spiritual knowledge spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead Krishna. Because *Bhagavad Gita* is spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one need not read any other spiritual literature. One need only regularly and attentively hear and read *Bhagavad Gita*" (Madhudvisa Dasa n.d.[a]).

Inspiring to devotees in the *Bhagavad Gita* is the well-known conversation between the warrior Arjuna and Lord Krishna posing as Arjuna's charioteer. Arjuna hesitates to fight in a battle because he notices friends and relatives among his enemies, which leads him to contemplate the meaning of life. Through Lord Krishna, incarnated in the charioteer, Arjuna learns several spiritual truths including the difference between the soul and the material body, devotion,

reincarnation, the purpose of yoga, and the ultimate purpose of life. In addition to the *Bhagavad Gita*, Srila Prabhupada's *The Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* (1968) is treated with great respect, "[The] *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* is more than a book. It is alive with knowledge and devotion; thus it has the power to change your life for the better" (ISKCONZA. n.d.[h]). *The Bhagavad-Gita As It Is* is a commentary and translation that promotes having a personal relationship with Lord Krishna. Through Srila Prabhupada's translation and commentary, the truths of the *Bhagavad Gita* are unlocked and made available to those seeking self-improvement and spiritual fulfillment.

To present their sacred texts to a broader audience, devotees realize the need to engage in missionary and apologetic strategies (Chandidas Dasa n.d.). They need to bring their sacred scriptures to audiences in a compelling manner. ISKCON is a "Missionary religious" movement that "characteristically seek[s] new adherents by proselytizing. Proselytizing involves communicating religious ideas to non-adherents as persuasively as possible" (Bird and Westley 1985, 159). Such audiences and non-members not only include religious skeptics but also those who already access other religious scriptures in their devotional lives (Schoeman 2017, 2-3) and who do not access any sacred texts at all (Pew Research Center n.d.[a]). For some devotees, it can be difficult to share their faith and the *Bhagavad Gita* with those already committed to other religious scriptures (and practices),

> "We make all of our scripture available and have no problems sharing… I do occasionally have challenges regarding the dogmatic belief of some Christians who claim that Jesus is the only way and somehow the aspect of time/place/circumstance is ignored… I am happy to engage in the philosophical debate of any scripture or belief, and maybe I can learn or impart some of my understanding. If someone is simply interested in making a noise, I see no reason to associate" (Bhakta Rudra, personal email communication, 21 July, 2021).

Bhakta Rudra believes that insights can be drawn from various religious scriptures, but the importance of the *Bhagavad Gita* is clearly stressed because it is very old and its "teachings remain." Madhudvisa Dasa, however, is less charitable towards other scriptures. He maintains that persons should not access the sacred texts of other religions because the "*Bhagavad Gita* is spoken by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one need not read any other spiritual literature" (Madhudvisa Dasa n.d.[a]). He encourages as many readers as possible to access the *Bhagavad Gita* "in a spirit of devotion" (Madhudvisa Dasa n.d.[a]). Readers are to "regularly and attentively hear and read [the] *Bhagavad Gita*." This effort involves apologetic engagement through presenting reasons to consider the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Vedas* as worthwhile believing. As one devotee explains,

> "Now we might ask, "Why do you accept the statements in the Vedic literature about the form of God?" But if we reflect for a moment, we can understand that every day we accept the statements of superior authorities on subjects we know nothing about" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.).

The apologetic strategy is displayed in Chandidas Dasa's argument that the *Bhagavad Gita* contains authoritative spiritual knowledge. Through the *Bhagavad Gita*, the devotee acquires important spiritual truths such as "God is the highest understanding of the Absolute Truth as the Supreme Personality of Godhead" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.). Readers will discover that Krishna is both God and a person, and that through scripture he communicates spiritual lessons such as reincarnation and the differences between the soul and body, and between the soul and the Supreme Soul (God) (ISKCONZA n.d.[h]).

Srila Prabhupada argued that the event of Arjuna's and Krishna's engagement in the *Bhagavad Gita* is not mythology but "a true historical event" (Srila Prabhupada 2018, 8). The *Bhagavad Gita* is a perfect authority for acquiring flawless knowledge because it is "the word of God" and not the product of the brain or imagination (Srila Prabhupada 2018, 21, 30).

Science, Scientific Knowledge

Science is often viewed as the prevailing supplier of accurate knowledge about reality. Symbolically, scientific knowledge is more than merely the accumulation of facts about the universe. It is ascribed a symbolic and moral dimension in that it is viewed by many as an invaluable means through which to drastically enhance the quality of human life and existence.

Scientific knowledge is relevant to religion because religions also claim to provide knowledge about reality. The relationship between religion and science is of interest in the study of religions, and in philosophy and theology (Van Huyssteen, Gregersen, Howell, and Wildman 2003; De Cruz 2017). Questions are asked as to what extent the two are compatible. For example, is religion an obstacle to science? Do they address different dimensions or aspects of reality? Or do they overlap? We will limit our engagement in this discussion to the discourse devotees provide us with.

Discourse analysis demonstrates that the ISKCON movement realizes the importance of engaging with science and interpretations people have of science. The devotees' strategy is to demonstrate the legitimacy of their religion in a world in which scientific knowledge continues to progress and replace previously accepted beliefs.

Devamrita Swami evaluates the scientific and technological advancements many believe supports "scientific materialism" (Devamrita Swami n.d.). Scientific materialism fits into the

mold of what was previously considered "profane consciousness" that rejects any legitimacy to religious and transcendent truth. As an epistemology, scientific materialism advances a reductionist interpretation of knowledge. Ontologically, it maintains that the only substances to exist in the universe are material ones, which leaves no room for religious and transcendent dimensions to reality. Devamrita Swami realizes this threat. He objects to scientific materialism and wants to safeguard his religion as a legitimate provider of knowledge. What is the problem devotees are facing in light of scientific progress? Devamrita Swami explains it this way,

> "Many scientists mock any acceptance of an afterlife. No evidence whatsoever, they say, shows that consciousness survives death… Based on this illusion, matter-bound scientists feel secure to dismiss transcendentalists and their teachings. After all, unlike science, they believe, such spiritual knowledge bases itself on only subjective experience" (Devamrita Swami n.d.).

He locates skepticism of religious truth in "arrogance" that has accompanied technological advancement, which has contributed to many viewing spiritual experiences and knowledge as delusions and unscientific subjective sentiments. No longer does one take religious texts like the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Srimad Bhagavatam* seriously as sources of knowledge about reality, which undermines the devotee's claim of knowing religious truth.

This skepticism has motivated devotees in South Africa to host morning temple classes wrestling with the implications scientific progress has for spiritual truths and knowledge (Devamrita Swami n.d.). Belief in the soul is one topic of group discussion: "Well, the soul is strictly a religious entity. There is no empirical proof for it; no technological device has detected it. The idea of the soul sounds sweet, but the notion doesn't make it in today's high-tech world of

hard data" (Devamrita Swami n.d.). The relationship between science and the ISKCON movement's philosophy continues to prove difficult for some devotees,

> "The only place science and the Hare Krishna movement differ is with God. I mean not all scientists are atheists, but most scientists don't believe in God, they believe in science. Not everything can be scientifically proven. That's from my observation, that's the only place that Hare Krishna and scientists differ, and how the universe came about. With me personally, you could say I am in between. I still believe in Western science and what they say. So I am still trying to bring these two different philosophies together. Science and the Vedic philosophy, they are two different philosophies, I am trying to understand the two points" (Aryan Dasa, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

Aryan Dasa seemingly pits scientists and belief in God against each other and attempts to locate himself inside the area of difference as being "in between." He believes that most scientists are atheists who do not believe in God. Scientists are depicted monolithically and in opposition to belief in God, which motivates Aryan Dasa to argue that "Not everything can be scientifically proven." If science cannot explain or account for everything, then this lacuna opens a gap for non-scientific, religious knowledge to exist.

Situationally, there is force behind religious concerns with scientific materialism and its penetration into the sciences. As historically suggested by James Leuba's surveys conducted in 1916 and 1934 on the attitudes of American scientists towards Christian belief, scientists are less likely than the general population to believe in the existence of God (Leuba 1916, 1934). But despite Leuba's mistaken prediction of widespread decline in traditional forms of religiosity,

later research buttressed his findings on the differences between scientists and the general population regarding the perception of science (Stark 1963; Stark and Finke 2000).

In an analysis of religion among academic scientists, sociologists Elaine Ecklund and Christopher Scheitle agree that scientists, particularly social and natural scientists, working at elite research universities are less religious than many in the general public (Ecklund and Scheitle 2007, 290). This is not necessarily for scientific reasons since the authors found that other factors have an influence, including age, marital status, and presence of children in the household (Ecklund and Scheitle 2007, 302-304).

Devamrita Swami is aware of these difficulties and his strategy to deal with them is primarily apologetic. He counters that science cannot explain away religious truths. In particular, it cannot explain the phenomenon of consciousness. This strategy is similar to the one employed by Aryan Dasa highlighting the explanatory limitations of science which opens up space for religious truth. For Devamrita Swami, science cannot explain or provide evidence of consciousness although everyone takes conscious experience for granted. This opens up space to appreciate the ancient Vedic wisdom about consciousness and for considering systems of inquiry "outside of Western culture." The religious knowledge from ancient India illuminates the mysteries of human existence and Devamrita Swami recommends combining Vedic knowledge with scientific methods as a means for understanding reality (Devamrita Swami n.d.).

The importance of legitimizing spiritual truth is of obvious significance to devotees. It is one of the movement's primary goals to "propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life…" (Sooklal 1987). Spiritual knowledge brings to people an awareness that they are souls. But before this religious epistemology can be accepted with any confidence, scientific materialism must be challenged and shown to be

erroneous. As devotees like Devamrita Swami argue, we need "spiritual scientists" who emphasize Krishna consciousness and who work in the "bhakti laboratory of personal transformation" (Devamrita Swami n.d.). Based on this view, spiritual scientists, rather than scientific-materialists, will provide answers to humanity's deepest questions and illuminate the darkest mysteries science is incapable of explaining.

Sexual Intercourse

Religions ascribe to sexual relations significantly more than the physical act alone. Sexual intercourse, for many, entails the transcendent in the form of moral decisions that possess spiritual significance. For some religions, sexual intercourse is celebrated and encouraged as, for instance, an expression of female empowerment and freedom from perceived patriarchal religion (Christ 1987, 184). For other religions, there are teachings against having sexual intercourse before marriage and an active discouragement of the free mixing of the sexes (Adamczyk and Hayes 2012). Some, as with the ISKCON movement, hold to negative views of (illicit) sexual intercourse because it is perceived to be a threat to the devotional life that is meant to focus on God (krishna.com n.d.[b]).

As we have analyzed earlier with regard to gender and marriage, the ISKCON movement asks that devotees restrain from illicit sexual intercourse and embrace total celibacy except for procreation. Some devotees go as far as to say that intercourse is the "biggest obstacle to our peace, satisfaction, and self-knowledge… Sexual indulgence is the number one enemy of spiritual awareness" (krishna.com n.d.[b]). Kripamoya Das explains that sexual intercourse is part of the individual's material nature and will regularly frustrate "our plans for finding ultimate contentment with people or things" (Kripamoya Das 2011). Illicit intercourse, which is any

intercourse not solely for procreation, is one of several sinful activities Srila Prabhupada forbade (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]; Urmila Dasi 2012). As Srila Prabhupada taught, "If you can remain without sex life, brahmacari, it is very good. But if you cannot, then get yourself married, live with wife, but have sex only for progeny. Not for sense enjoyment" (Rochford 2007, 58). The only exception is intercourse within marriage for procreation. It is limited to conceiving children.

Devotees maintain that in the path to Krishna consciousness, one will become less interested in sexual intercourse and gradually do away with it altogether (krishna.com n.d.[c]). This is because Krishna consciousness motivates one to focus on Lord Krishna, which reduces the focus on one's temporary, material body. The more individuals pursue the sexual gratification of the material body, the more ignorant they become of their spiritual nature. Devotees are encouraged to be cognizant of the fact that the physical body is merely a bodily dress and that their real self is an eternal, spiritual being. Devotees address the problem of sexual lust by encouraging others to avoid seeing or contemplating the opposite sex (krishna.com n.d.[c]). Sexual lust emerges from contemplating the objects of the senses and this can be overcome by simply avoiding such objects. According to one woman devotee,

> "I had to try and avoid all association from all the men… I wasn't allowed, ever, to look up from the floor if there was a man around… And if a man walked near me, I'd put my face in a corner until they walked past" (Rochford 2007, 56).

Bhakta Rudra's emphasis on controlling the senses seems to be informed by his past experiences,

> "As someone who has been married twice and had more partners than I can reliably count before joining the movement, I have some experience. One of the keys to spiritual advancement is the mastery of the senses. The ability to control one's senses releases us from their bondage. Most people spend most of their lives chasing various forms of sense gratification, thinking that when I get this then I will be happy, then when they get the object of their desire, they look for something else to make them happy. This cycle has no end" (Bhakta Rudra, personal email communication, 21 July, 2021).

As he observes, happiness and pleasure derived from the material senses, whether sexual or in another form, are temporary and fleeting. Engaging in sexual activities with different partners might be fun for a time, but it loses its appeal and soon becomes unfulfilling: "There is no end to the demands of the senses."

But how might one suggest these perspectives of our devotees are being received today? Based on data from studies on attitudes toward sexual intercourse, any group, movement, or religion advocating for celibacy except for procreation is going to have its stance contested.

The acceptance of premarital intercourse is the norm for the majority of people today (Warner 2006). The increase in sexual activity is not unprecedented as a sexual revolution occurred in the 1960s and 1970s resulting in sexually permissive attitudes and behaviors (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2015, 2275). Sexual activity among adolescents increased between the 1950s and the 1990s (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2015, 2276), and therefore around the time the ISKCON movement was emerging in the West. More people are having sexual intercourse at an earlier age (Meier 2003, 1032).

General South African attitudes towards sex also vigorously contest the ISKCON movement's advocating for celibacy. Sexual intercourse is important to the majority and

according to a 2017 Lifestyle Sex Survey, those who are single are less happier than those who are in sexual relationships (Times Live 2017). For six out of ten (62.9%), intercourse is important for the emotional connection between partners and most couples were content with their sex lives. Other sexual activities, like masturbation and viewing pornography, are also common and important to the sexual lives of many South Africans. These attitudes contest the ISKCON movement's firm stance advocating for celibacy. The devotee's counter-strategy is to argue that promiscuity and sexual intercourse have harsh social consequences and are best avoided,

> "Modern society is suffering because of large numbers of unwanted and/or uncared for children, single mothers struggling to support children with social grants, spiraling crime, unemployment, drug and alcohol addiction, rape and prostitution, etc. What to say of all-pervading graft and corruption by the so-called leaders" (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

The solution is Krishna consciousness,

> "Krsna-consciousness places a high value on solid, caring families who desire to bring children into the world who will be a credit to society. Krsna-consciousness also focuses on training children for sense control and a godly life as opposed to the wild, reckless and hedonistic products of modern education" (Rehan Medhavi, personal email communication, 24 June, 2021).

The movement's strong position is strongly contested by most who engage in casual sexual intercourse and premarital intercourse. Many are having an increased number of sexual partners

(Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2015, 2277). The only exception to these trends is that most have become less accepting of extramarital sex (Twenge, Sherman, and Wells 2015, 2278, 2282).

Despite the devotee's counter-strategies, only a limited number of people will be open or receptive to the movement's stance on sexual intercourse, its demand for embracing celibacy, and to only have intercourse within marriage for procreation.

Soul, The

For many religious persons, the soul is an essential reality. For devotees in the ISKCON movement, the soul, or *ātman*, symbolizes the eternal, transcendent connection persons have with Lord Krishna (Prabhupada 2018, 101). It represents the continuation of conscious existence and life after the death of the physical body. But there is significant contestation. To cite a major one, the doctrine of reincarnation generates contention that is primarily philosophical and concerns the perennial ideological struggle between substance dualist and materialist/physicalist conceptions of the mind and body (Andrade, n.d.; Lycan 2013). It is important to recognize this contestation to make sense of this ideological skirmish between devotees and their materialist counterparts.

The substance dualist maintains that the mind and body are distinct substances that can exist independently of each other (Robinson 2003). This allows for the mind, sometimes viewed as the soul, to exist after the death of the physical body. In the Western intellectual tradition, René Descartes (1596-1650) famously proposed the thesis that the mind and body are distinct (Skirry n.d.; Robinson 2003). In his view, the mind, conceived as a non-extended, thinking thing, is completely distinct from the body, meaning that one could essentially exist without the other.

It is Descartes' influential text *Meditations (*1641) that underpins modern notions of substance dualism.

Contesting substance dualism is materialism, which maintains that what one believes to be the soul is merely mental activity to which death will bring an end (Block 1980; Stoljar 2001). Materialism is monistic because it affirms that only material processes exist and that what one conceives of as a mind (or soul) is reducible to the brain. The brain is an organ of the physical body that produces thought just as, say, the stomach is an organ that enables digestion.

It is easy to notice on which side of this debate the ISKCON movement and its devotees locate themselves. Devotees affirm substance dualism as expressed in their discourses reflecting their dualistic convictions. As Travis Vande Berg and Fred Kniss noted in their study, there is a "bodied" language that the Hare Krishnas self-identify with. They observe how this bodied language, in which some people are referred to as "black-bodied," "brown/Indian-bodied," "white-bodied," "female-bodied," or "male-bodied," is meant to signify the arbitrariness of physical distinctions and reemphasize the importance of the separate "spirit-soul" and its connection to Lord Krishna (Vande Berg and Kniss 2008, 82-83).

Linguistically, discourse differentiates between spiritual and material realities. The discourse is also replete with how these realities are understood to relate to each other. We find terms such as "spiritualists" (Jayadvaita Swami. n.d.), "spiritual master" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.), "spiritual warrior" (Bhakti Tirtha Swami. n.d.), "spiritual seekers" (Bhakti Tirtha Swami. n.d.), "Spiritual master", "advanced spiritual knowledge", and "spiritual soul" (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]).

This "spiritualist" discourse affirms a transcendent spiritual reality and the spiritual nature of people who can pursue Krishna consciousness. It points people to a transcendent reality

beyond material existence: one is to acknowledge his "spiritual consciousness" in contrast to his mere "mundane consciousness" (Bhakti Tirtha Swami, n.d). Devotees are urged to "elevate your consciousness" by seeking after "Krishna consciousness" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.; Devamrita Swami n.d.), "higher level of consciousness" (Bhakti Tirtha Swami n.d.), "God consciousness" (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]), and a "creative expression of consciousness" (Bhakti Tirtha Swami n.d.). This "spiritualist" language makes it clear that devotees firmly root themselves in the camp of substance dualism. This dualistic concept is captured well by Gopa Kumar Das who claims that people are eternal living beings who are not limited to the material body that dies,

> "The main proposition is to understand oneself, to understand that we are not this body… One has to understand I am a spirit soul, my body is only made of material elements and therefore material elements don't have senses simply because there's a soul within. That soul makes a body look alive but actually the living entity is the soul" (Sadhana - The Inward Path 2018).

Here again, we find such terms as "spirit", "soul", and "spirit soul" being constructed in opposition to "material elements" and "body". One also discovers "spiritualist" language permeating discourse beyond the substance dualism and materialist/physicalist contestation. It is, for example, used about mental health concerns such as depression and suicide where devotees offer an analysis of mental illness and how to treat it. For Bhakti Tirtha Swami, it is important for "spiritualists" to "understand mental illness so that we can help people who suffer from some of these problems" (Bhakti Tirtha Swami n.d.). This "spiritualist" language is bound to God in that one is led to a transcendent "spiritual reality" (Chandidas Dasa n.d.).

Through discourse, devotees construct the philosophy of their ideological counterparts, namely the materialism they contest. Without "God consciousness" we are left with mere

material existence and the inability to eradicate negative karma that keeps us "inmates of the material world" (Ravindra-svarupa Dasa n.d.). The discourse claims that the material world is inferior to the spiritual, transcendent reality. The material world is the locus of suffering. According to Anandini Dasi, the pursuit of material wealth leads to the suffering of society, the world, and their disintegration (Anandini Dasi n.d.). Because of greedy materialistic pursuits humanity causes the Earth to suffer through its exploitation (Mukunda Goswami 2011). The material world is a downright miserable place to be. It is home to socially disruptive and self-destructive activities. It is a place where people "will continue to suffer" in the cycle of rebirth and death (Ravindra-svarupa Dasa n.d.). But devotees offer hope in how the material world can be overcome. This can only be done through rejecting the lower modes of material life for Krishna consciousness.

There are several contestations between devotees and their opponents. Pavanesana Dasa acknowledges that the independence of the soul from the material body is not necessarily accepted today and that many are skeptical,

> "Unfortunately, today human society is rejecting all spiritual knowledge and is priding itself on so-called advancement in science and technology. What kind of advancement is it that degrades people to animal existence in their next life?" (Pavanesana Dasa n.d.)

Part of Pavanesana Dasa's strategy is to identify the source of this contestation. He identifies the source in how people interpret science and technology as undermining religious truth. This raises the same complex contestation identified earlier in devotees rubbing up against certain interpretations of scientific knowledge believed to undermine religious truth. As Pavanesana Dasa notices, for secular-materialists, advancements in science and technology are deemed to

have delivered a decisive blow to religious conceptions of immortality, an afterlife, God, the soul, and more.

This skepticism is prevalent in contemporary philosophy. In a 2013 study, more than 56.5% of surveyed academic philosophers in the English-speaking world embrace a materialist-physicalist conception of the mind and body and non-physicalism attained just 27.1% (Chalmers and Bourget 2013, 15). This suggests that many university professors who teach philosophy do not accept dualistic conceptions of the mind and body.

This skepticism of traditional religious concepts is one reason motivating devotees to reach out to "very skeptical" students on South African university campuses through the Bhakti Yoga Society (Nanda Kishor Das 2014). The ISKCON movement maintains an "aggressive recruitment, particularly on college campuses" (Bozeman 2000, 383) and its societies encourage many activities (e.g. yoga, mantra meditation, *kirtans*, reading sacred texts, and learning spiritual truths and ISKCON philosophy), one of which is group discussion on the "differences between the body and the soul" that is the "focal point behind all the societies' meetings, workshops and activities" (Nanda Kishor Das 2014). Part of the Bhakti Yoga Society is to teach spiritual truths that are contrary to secular-materialist conceptions and beliefs.

Bhakta Rudra's apologetic counter-strategy is to offer a direct assault on the root of religious skepticism. He identifies atheism as the nemesis and offers a counter-argument,

> "The atheist generally believes that he is some sort of advanced biochemical reaction and that his consciousness has arisen from matter. The question that defeats this philosophy is: How does a biochemical reaction have choice? The logical conclusion therefore is that matter descended from consciousness. Empirical evidence is: We see nonliving material coming from a living source all

around us (hair, nails, stool etc.). Where do you ever see life coming from a non-living source?" (Bhakta Rudra, personal email communication, 21 July, 2021).

He offers a monistic interpretation of the atheist's philosophy. Consciousness has arisen from matter and is reducible and limited to material elements. Only matter exists. But Bhakta Rudra retorts by claiming ownership of "empirical evidence" in support of his dualistic religious philosophy. According to this apologetic strategy, since consciousness cannot derive from matter, it must be separate and distinct from the material body, and thus proof of substance dualism.

Pavanesana Dasa attempts to defend substance dualism by maintaining that belief in the spirit-soul is essential as it is a basic conviction one needs to have before he can attempt to escape the endless cycle of rebirth. Through viewing human beings without ultimate value, which Pavanesana Dasa alleges many today do, one neglects spiritual truth and will fool himself into living an illusory, misguided existence.

There are two strategies used by devotees to win this contestation. One is to identify the locus of the problem and who constitutes the problem. Once identified, the apologist then offers an intellectual assault on the worldview he perceives contradicts his religious one. The second strategy is to defend religion and spiritual truths against criticism, which is not concerned with undermining other worldviews but rather with defending one's own. This dual strategy is not uncommon because religious apologetics appears to have a two-pronged approach. One prong defends the faith in question, whereas the other assaults the edifice of opposing worldviews.

One does not expect these contestations to cease as proponents on opposing sides will continue to affirm antithetical views. The contestation between devotees and religious skeptics (secular-materialists, atheists, physicalists, and philosophical naturalists) is one between the

philosophies of substance dualism and materialism. This debate goes back to Plato (428-348 BCE) and will continue to be of interest today given rapid developments in neuroscience that raise fresh questions on immortality and the soul (De Gruchy 2014).

Suffering

According to Ravindra-svarupa Das, the problem of the suffering of good people has "long preoccupied Western religious thinkers, so much so that it has created a special discipline called theodicy, a branch of theology concerned with justifying the ways of God to man" (Ravindra-svarupa Dasa. n.d.).

For most people, suffering is significantly more than experiencing physical and/or emotional pain. For many, suffering demands a reflection on the nature of reality. It poses questions of ultimate existential concern, such as why suffering exists and whether or not it serves to undermine belief in religious concepts, such as God or a supremely good and loving deity. Srila Prabhupada observed this challenge when he asked, "If God exists, why is there so much suffering? Why is He so cruel that He allows His children to suffer?" (Prabhupada 2018, 39). Capetonian devotee Brihat Mridanga Das has also considered this challenge,

> "Why is it that some person is always praying to God, is going to the church, or to the mosque or the temple. He is always doing good to others but he is then cheated, he gets hurt, he gets taken advantage of, so how can God be good and allow his servants to suffer like this? This is one question I had and if somebody couldn't give me a proper answer I wouldn't be satisfied…" (Hare Krsna TV 2014).

For Brihat Mridanga Das, no satisfying answer could be found in the Christian religion he was brought up in during his youth, which led him to seek a different religious worldview. He found in the ISKCON movement a philosophically and intellectually satisfying solution to the problem of suffering. Brihat Mridanga Das is just one of many to contemplate this question. It has produced swathes of theological reflection over the millennia in what is commonly called the problem of suffering. The problem of suffering evaluates an omnipotent God's goodness and/or existence/non-existence in a world permeated with suffering. It asks tough questions such as if God is all-good, all-loving, and all-powerful, then why is there suffering? (Craig n.d.[b]; Thiel 2002; van Inwagen 2008; Meister and Dew 2017).

In the Western historical tradition, this challenge was put forth by the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BCE) in the mode of a logical problem that has ever since generated theological reflection (McBrayer and Howard-Snyder 2014; Meister and Dew 2017). As demonstrated by recent engagements with theodicy, the problem of suffering is as relevant today as it was in the fourth century BCE and for some convinces of atheism or theistic finitism; as Ravindra-svarupa Das recognizes:

> "Those who find the problem of evil intractable usually deny the existence of God outright rather than settle for a God limited either in power or goodness. Would such a finite being really qualify to be called "God"? Would he be worthy of our worship?" (Ravindra-svarupa Dasa. n.d.)

Ravindra-svarupa does not want to give up his belief in an all-good God because of the problem of suffering. He recognizes the problem is a powerful contender to the devotee's conception of an all-good and all-loving God, Lord Krishna. But Ravindra-svarupa wants to offer a reason to show that there is no incompatibility between God and the problem of suffering. His apologetic

strategy is constructed upon the foundation of his strong faith: “When bad things happen, I don’t find myself calling into question either His power or His goodness” (Ravindra-svarupa Dasa. n.d.).

What strategies do devotees use to contest this challenge to their faith? First, they identify the framework through which a rational answer can be sought and provided. Here Ravindra-svarupa Das argues that the answer lies in a religious framework since the problem of suffering is inherently a spiritual question.

First, he urges readers to view people as beings who “are spiritual entities, souls.” He then asks that one accepts the authority of the *Bhagavad Gita* that teaches the spiritual truths of rebirth, the law of karma, and how karma shapes rebirth. In the *Bhagavad Gita* one will discover the answer to the problem of suffering. Once those convictions are accepted, Ravindra-svarupa Dasa probes deeper by explaining the relevance of the law of karma to suffering. Karma is of two kinds: positive and negative. If a decision is informed by the scriptures, it will generate positive karma and reap beneficial results: “For example, if a person is born in an aristocratic family, is beautiful, well-educated, or wealthy, he is reaping the benefits of good karma.” Negative karma is generated when people “disregard scriptural injunctions and restrictions in our pursuit of sense pleasure” (Ravindra-svarupa Das n.d.).

Negative karma is further produced when God’s rules and principles for civilized human society are violated (Prabhupada 2018, 134). These include eating meat, gambling, killing, stealing, and drinking alcohol. To live sinfully, karma will produce for one suffering and misfortune that can make him be born into poverty or a degenerate family or with disease or physical ugliness, and other defects. Exceptionally bad karma can cause one to be born on lower

planets of torment or as an animal. Karma is relentless and operates as callously as the natural laws of motion and gravity (Ravindra-svarupa Das n.d.).

Karma is the devotee's answer to the problem of suffering. It explains why suffering exists in a world under the providence of a good and loving God. Karma is proof that suffering in the world is not incompatible with the existence of an all-good and all-loving God. God is removed from all culpability where suffering is concerned: "He does not engineer our suffering—we do. We are the authors of our karma. And it is our decision, not His, that brings us down into the material world, into the realm of suffering" (Ravindra-svarupa Das n.d.). Suffering is therefore the product of a person's choices.

Devotees affirm a strong love for God. Their discourses do not shy away from affirming a passionate love for the Divine and how the Divine also loves people (ISKCONZA n.d.[d]; Karnamrita Das n.d.[a]; Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami 2011; Satyaraja Dasa 2011). Love is what makes "the world go 'round'" and "love for Krishna" is celebrated (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami 2011). People's lives only experience completeness when they "fully express our affection and love for Krishna, and everything in relationship to this love" (Karnamrita Das n.d.[a]). Rituals like *kirtan* function to produce "feelings of love and compassion and Connection with the Divine…" This ought to move one to a state of ecstasy, perhaps as apparent in one experiencing "goose bumps and tears as the heart jumps with joy." (ISKCONZA n.d.[d]).

Love is emphasized by this religious organization, yet some ask if its God is worth loving in the first place. Devotees answer that even in the presence of suffering in this material world, God is still worth loving. We also should not doubt that God loves humanity. But many skeptics of religion contest this and argue that suffering is a defeater of belief in an all-good God. Influential twentieth-century atheist philosopher J. L. Mackie expressed this criticism,

> "I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another…" (Mackie 1955, 200).

To Mackie, the problem of evil is linked to the problem of suffering. Theologians and philosophers recognize two types of evil that cause suffering: natural and moral evil (Beebe n.d.; Mildenberger 2013; Calder 2018). Natural evil is suffering brought on by nature through tsunamis, diseases, earthquakes, and so on. Moral evil is suffering produced through human actions such as abuse, murder, genocide, and so on. The British writer and actor Stephen Fry offered an emotionally charged condemnation of God because of perceived natural evil in the world. When asked what he would say to God should he die and then meet him, Fry answered that "I'd say, Bone cancer in children? What's that about? How dare you? How dare you create a world to which there is such misery that is not our fault? It's not right, it's utterly, utterly evil" (Linshi 2015).

There is no way, these skeptics argue, that one could show that God's existence is compatible with the problem of suffering. If one accepts the reality of suffering in the world, then he is obligated to question the existence of an all-good God. At the very least, the problem of suffering makes belief in God difficult. Theistic philosopher William Lane Craig conceded that "The problem of evil is certainly the greatest obstacle to belief in the existence of God. When I ponder both the extent and depth of suffering in the world, whether due to man's inhumanity to man or to natural disasters, then I must confess that I find it hard to believe that God exists" (Craig n.d.[b]).

Further, the doctrine of karma believed by devotees to solve the problem of suffering is not without contestation. Some philosophers and scholars have criticized the doctrine as being morally and ethically objectionable. These critics counter that the doctrine is built upon a philosophical basis that is inherently unfair. Is it fair, the critic asks, that one suffers in his present life because of the misdeeds in past lives of which he lacks knowledge? (Kaufman 2005; Burley 2014).

Critics also argue that belief in karma produces a lack of compassion in societies (khanpadawan 2014). If the present experience of an impoverished man begging for food on the sidewalk is the result of negative karma from previous lives, then why would a passerby show him compassion if she believes he is paying off his debt for past misdeeds? The impoverished man's suffering is deemed legitimate because he is paying off his karmic debt. Scholar of religion Dale Tuggy notices how this doctrine could "take away your motivation to prevent injustice and bad things happening in the world. Who are we to stand in the way of these cosmic wheels of justice that are turning?" (khanpadawan 2014). The critic argues that if everyone reasoned this way it would produce a society that neglects the suffering of vulnerable people.

The problem of suffering has been articulated, advanced, debated, and disputed for thousands of years and continues to be today. We do not expect these contestations to cease as devotees and skeptics of religion continue asking probing existential questions about the topic.

A Final Thought on Symbol Contestation

The twenty-one contestations and what they entail (e.g. various viewpoints, points of contact between counterparts, symbol ownership, and appropriation) have been identified and expounded.

The analysis demonstrates the lively "battlefield" on which contestations over symbols occur. This study has aided us in gaining insight into the symbols themselves and concepts being contested and how strategies have been employed by devotees to monopolize ownership of them. It is now apparent how devotees choose to respond to their counterparts who do not share their views as seen in, for example, their apologetic counter-strategies, engagement in public demonstration, and how they communicate with members of their religion (ascetics, those who are married, homosexual devotees, those struggling to live out their religious principles, etc.). We also noted the various interests served and that lie behind attempts to own and appropriate symbols and alienate others from them. For instance, interests often amounted to procuring worldview and ethical superiority through justification of certain items like doctrines, moral positions, and lifestyles.

With these details drawn from the analysis in mind, we move onto the next phase of classifying these contestations in general categories and then providing concluding thoughts.

Chapter 4: Classification of Contestations, Contextual Considerations, and Possibilities for Future Research

Having provided a detailed exploration of various themes and contestations relevant to the ISKCON movement and its negotiations within the South African context, this concluding chapter categorizes several areas of symbol contestation and offers insights drawn from Chidester's theory of symbolic exchange before concluding with possibilities for future research.

I wish to reemphasize that my attempt throughout this thesis has been to analyze the tensions, appropriations, and contestations of symbols, as well as the "stealing back and forth" of sacred symbols between representatives of diverse worldviews and religious and philosophical traditions. We have attempted to open up a "demilitarized zone" for academic inquiry and analysis of sacred symbols (Chidester 1989, 25-26). It has been an effort to state the affairs and contestations as they are, rather than to take any one side in the battlefield over symbols. To use Chidester's phraseology, the scholar of religion engages in "a strategic renunciation of ownership itself" (Chidester 1989, 26).

Classification of Contestations

The analysis of contestation over symbols has demonstrated areas of tension between the ideological and ethical values of the ISKCON movement and its members and the values of a plurality of voices and ideologies within the South African context. In sum, my analysis has shown that these tensions and contestations span several domains: the ethical, pragmatic, doctrinal, social, and scientific.

Ethical Contestations. There are clashes in the attempts to "own" symbols in the domain of ethics. Devotees wish to "own" these symbols because they think their religious perspective of the relevant matters (animal killing, sexual intercourse, etc.) and behaviors is morally superior to the "immoral" ones of their counterparts. This is apparent in the contestations on circumstances surrounding abortion, divorce, sexual intercourse, and animal killing in the cattle industry, especially given the ISKCON movement's austere ethical perspective on these.

Several "interests" served are the religiously motivated desires for prosperous human relations, keeping avoidable Earthly and materialistic issues at bay, maintaining the sacredness of all life, and for the devotee to live an existence consistent with and that fulfills ISKCON's religious principles for pursuing Krishna consciousness and escaping the endless cycle of rebirth.

Devotees view divorce as devaluing marriage and it constitutes a source of harm to vulnerable persons. Yet to their displeasure, legislation permits divorce as a legitimate end to marriage and evidence is demonstrating divorce to be increasingly common. Abortion is faulted by devotees, despite the practice being legal under certain conditions in the Western and South African contexts. That legislation affirms the legality of abortion and that some women are deciding to exercise their rights to have them causes considerable distress and moral objection in devotees who view such acts as committing murder.

Devotees hold an inflexible ethic on sexual intercourse, which is intercourse exclusively for the purpose of procreation. But this value is not embraced by most who engage in casual sexual intercourse. Very few have intercourse solely for the purpose of procreation. Few desire to live celibate lives and will instead engage in intercourse regularly and for sensual pleasure. Homosexual intercourse is opposed because it cannot fulfill the exclusive purpose of sexual

intercourse, which is to produce children within the marriage union. All sexual intercourse, heterosexual, homosexual, or other, beyond the purpose of procreation is considered illicit.

Animal and Environmental Contestations. It is notably here given the moral concerns underlying these contestations that symbols become visible "vehicles of power" (Chidester 1989, 21). This "power" is apparent in how devotees collectively claim ownership of a symbol and the extent to which they go to do so (e.g. public demonstrations). For example, the symbols of the cow (and animals in general) and Earth are particularly sensitive to devotees who wish to "own" them to satisfy their moral interests. The interests lie with the devotee's moral sensibilities regarding the killing of life and the abuse of animals. The interest is also to keep Srila Prabhupada's teachings condemning the "murder" of animals relevant and authoritative in the twenty-first century. Owning the symbol to satisfy these interests is apparent in the devotees' animated public demonstrations they partake in such as, for instance, protests to have the government take seriously the issue of climate change (e.g. the Peoples Climate March in 2017). The "power" here has heightened visibility because the contestation takes on an active, public role via demonstrations and protests rather than only being limited to online discourse on websites, blogs, and social media. Visibly contesting symbols are also apparent in devotees' efforts to create physical spaces buttressed by their own moral views (e.g. rural retreats that house cows). The contestation over symbols becomes visible.

Revisiting these contestations, we notice how the cow is deeply symbolic and of importance to devotees who are grieved by the many slaughterhouses littering the cattle industry legitimating what is, in their view, "murder". There is no sign that this will cease despite devotees advertising vegetarian diets and publicizing their opposition to animal cruelty. The

strict vegetarian diet of devotees does not cohere with the eating habits of most South Africans as the consumption of meats remains high and is anticipated to grow.

The exploitative treatment of the Earth is a source of contestation. Devotees advocate for the perseveration of the ecosystem, yet watch on in horror as the Earth is plundered, exploited, and polluted because of human greed. Attitudes and practices favoring a green, eco-friendly, and environmentally sustainable existence are improving, but, to devotees, this is occurring at an agonizingly slow pace.

Pragmatic Contestations. The "battlefield" of symbol contestation rages on matters of practical significance and value. For example, there is contestation regarding the ascetic disposition of devotees seeking to detach themselves from the material world. Asceticism renders the religion difficult for many to embrace because of the stringent requirements it entails such as full-time membership and marked changes in habit, dress, diet, routine, and community (Urban 2015, 209). Peoples' embeddedness in consumer culture is evidence of attachment and the desire for material opulence. It is the ascetic disposition of devotees that makes their religion to be perceived as a radical alternative to more conventional social, family, and communal values.

Further, many people in South African society do not view material wealth as having much spiritual significance, unlike devotees. ISKCON devotees contend that all wealth must be devoted to Lord Krishna. Yet for most, wealth is used for irreligious purposes, notably as it is employed in the context of consumer culture for material prosperity. Materialistic consumer culture is anathema to the worldview of devotees because it makes one fail to transcend the material world of pleasure and focus on Krishna consciousness.

Many devotees have an aversion to inequitable distinctions resulting from religious, racial, cultural, social, geographical, and material factors. Distinctions exacerbate prejudiced divisions between people and prevent unity. Apartheid inflamed racial tension by foregrounding racial, cultural, and geographical distinctions between people according to a hierarchy of value. That system led to a pronounced social and geographical separation of races that is still much felt in the post-apartheid era. The legacy of apartheid has served to magnify distinctions between race groups. Devotees contest these distinctions through their anti-racism stance and embrace of reconciliatory symbols such as Nelson Mandela.

Material wealth can also amplify distinctions because it separates persons into social classes to which value is ascribed. As mentioned earlier, devotees do not inherently oppose divisions such as those in the *varna* system; rather, they object to divisions that engender inequitable relations between persons such as in, for example, the apartheid system. Devotees eschew such distinctions because they constitute temporary constructions fixing persons to the material world that disconnects them from Lord Krishna. But devotees press the point that persons and Lord Krishna are intimately connected. This inspires them to pursue unity that rejects inequitable distinctions and feeds into spiritual development and knowledge.

Doctrinal and Philosophical Contestations. Here attempts at "stealing" religious symbols are particularly visible, as we noted in the contestations over reincarnation, God (God's existence and form), miracles, the soul, theodicy, sacred consciousness, and sacred texts to occur between many devotees and their skeptical counterparts. The "interest" served is worldview intellectual superiority which explains the significant apologetic discourse offered by devotees on these various topics. The interest lies in the apologist's attempt to demonstrate that his religious beliefs and philosophy can be supported by reason and that it does not require ignoring evidence or

suspending one's critical thinking. This interest is notably apparent in the contemporary age's marketplace of available religious options requiring the devotee to defend his own religion for it to be taken seriously.

Foreign to the religious thought of most Westerners and South Africans living in societies where Christian religiosity and secularism are most prevalent is the doctrine of reincarnation (Walter and Waterhouse 1999, 187). Belief in reincarnation is accepted by a minority of people and those who do embrace this belief do so loosely or because they find the idea attractive (the 'soft' notion). These reasons for accepting reincarnation (that it is merely attractive and sounds nice, etc.) are unacceptable to devotees because, in their view, it constitutes a cardinal doctrine of spiritual significance that must exist at the center of one's doctrinal web (the 'hard' notion).

That God exists objectively is another non-negotiable doctrine in the devotee's doctrinal web. But this exists in ideological tension with views presented by secular-materialists and religious skeptics explaining God's existence away as the derivation of some aberration within the human mind or experience (Capps 1995, 39-42).

Belief in miracles has increasingly been viewed as superstitious and unscientific, a perception that has largely been influenced by David Hume. But devotees affirm the reality of the supernatural and miracles and maintain that numerous wonders and miracles were performed by Krishna, Jesus Christ, and Sri Chaitanya. To dispute skepticism over miracles, devotees offer apologetic strategies endeavoring to demonstrate that miracles are not irreconcilable with reason and science.

Secular-materialists discard notions of the ontological objectivity of the soul deemed to survive the death of the body, which is another central tenet within the devotee's doctrinal web. This tension reflects in the apologetic discourse engaging secular culture by demonstrating the

reasonableness of embracing religious explanations as legitimate options in the marketplace of ideas.

The devotee's conceptualization of God as corporeal and tangible sits in ideological contestation with much philosophical and classical theological thought found in history and in contemporary South African theological academia. This classical conception clashes with the devotee's notion of God because it offers a concept of a deity who is incorporeal and lacking in physicality.

Many religious skeptics claim that the presence of evil and suffering in the world are defeaters of an all-good and all-powerful God's existence, but devotees argue that there is no inconsistency between the objective existence of Lord Krishna and evil and suffering in the world. Devotees argue that suffering is the result of negative karma materializing from immoral decisions and actions, such as murdering human life through abortion and animal life via slaughterhouses.

The doctrine of karma has not gone uncontested as some philosophers and theologians have mounted conceptual challenges arguing that karma is an inherently unjust doctrine that can produce in societies a lack of social concern.

The ontology of morality has been a source of contestation. Many secular-materialists and humanists maintain that morality is subjective and created by human beings, but for devotees, human actions have an objective moral and spiritual significance in that a decision in the here-and-now affects a person's karma and how he will transmigrate to be reborn in his next life.

Tension and contestation exist regarding sacred texts. Devotees embrace sacred scriptures (the *Vedas*, *Baghavad Gita,* and *Srimad Bhagavatam*) believed to be inspired, but such recognition of these texts is not shared by most in the Western and South African contexts. To

most, these texts are unknown, obscure, or perceived as foreign. Most access other sacred scriptures like the *Bible* although a growing number of persons (in the religiously unaffiliated demographic) are not accessing sacred scriptures and view them as man-made as opposed to divinely inspired (Pew Research Center 2015). This illustrates the challenges devotees experience in presenting their sacred scriptures as viable options to their audiences, as is apparent in their discourses striving to demonstrate that the religion's sacred scriptures constitute authoritative spiritual knowledge.

Contestation exists between the "sacred" and "profane" forms of consciousness. There is an increasing number of people embracing a profane consciousness, especially in the religiously unaffiliated population, many of whom do not consider there to be truth in religion. This is in contestation with the sacred consciousness embraced by devotees who affirm spiritual concepts and consider there to be truth in religion. Tensions are apparent in devotees generating apologetic materials to challenge the profane consciousness held by religious skeptics, secular humanists, secular organizations and associations, and more.

Scientific Contestations. The ISKCON movement cannot avoid contestations arising from advances in the sciences. In the public consciousness, science is typically considered the supreme provider of reliable knowledge about the universe. That scientists are less religious than the general public feeds into the narrative that to embrace science one must reject religion or vice versa. Devotees contest this interpretation by offering discourses insisting that science, rather than conflicting with their religious convictions, can serve to support Krishna consciousness, the ancient wisdom from India, and the Vedic system. Devotees also contest the philosophical ideology of scientism by illustrating the limited explanatory scope of science that provides space for spiritual truths.

Geographical Contestations. Sacred space has historically sat in tension with sociopolitical forces in South Africa, notably under apartheid. There were difficulties in registering the ISKCON movement and devotees were viewed with suspicion, especially when mixing with different races. The state made it difficult for the movement to flourish and sacred spaces emerged in rural settings where it was easier for races to mix.

We can conclude that the symbols constituting these categories are important and that no one wants to concede defeat by stating that "We don't own them [symbols], you do" (Chidester 1989, 22).

Numerous forms of discussion and engagement were observed such as discourses offered in books written by important devotees in positions of leadership, across official ISKCON websites presented by devotees, video media, word of mouth, and more. The general impression I receive regarding devotees and their counterparts is the intention to win arguments through ideas. Ideas are shared and contrasted, and there are attempts to refute some ideas and support others by devotees as well as their counterparts.

The contemporary tolerant political context supporting religious pluralism and the right to the freedom of religion and expression makes it easier for devotees (and religious people in general) to share ideas and claim "ownership" of symbols. No one is coercing them through strategic mobilization of force and power to give up symbol ownership. This is fortunate because in some areas across the globe, the state, police, and armed forces interfere in religious life and impose some point of view (or a specific interpretation of a set of symbols) on its population and reject others. This is especially so in areas and countries where the freedom of religious belief and expression is near non-existent or undermined.

The Linguistic, Cultural, and Situational Contexts

I now focus on several contexts of the ISKCON movement in South Africa. This draws insights from the symbol analysis and Lichao Song's three areas of discourse analysis, namely the linguistic, cultural, and situational contexts (Song 2010, 876-877).

Briefly, the linguistic context focuses on words, phrases, and sentences of and around a discourse to determine its meaning. The cultural context refers to the cultural backgrounds of the participants and intends to determine how language is shaped and influenced by age, sex, social role, and social status. The situational context alludes to the environment, time, and place a discourse occurs. An engagement with these contexts aids our understanding of the ISKCON movement in the South African context.

Linguistic Context

As just mentioned, the linguistic context focuses on words, phrases, and sentences of and around a specific discourse. I consider the efforts devotees put into language usage, which includes practical considerations and communication with God in what is known as the "problem of presence" (Keane 1997, 51).

There is an effort to offer discourse catering to an English-speaking audience. This traces back to Srila Prabhupada who translated Vedic literature into English from Sanskrit and Bengali to make it accessible to his English-speaking followers. Srila Prabhupada's *The Bhagavad Gita As It Is*, often seen as his masterpiece, was translated and published in English in 1968 and devotees today continue translating various texts and discourses into English (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]). The ISKCON South Africa National Council has the goal to "Distribute Srila

Prabhupada's books widely" to English speakers (International Society for Krishna Consciousness 2019, 6).

There are isiZulu, isiXhosa, and SeSotho translations of scriptures and commentaries (Aarushi Dasi, personal email communication, 17 July, 2021) produced by the African branch of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust. Emphasis is placed on translating texts into African languages because in the aftermath of twentieth-century colonialism, "locals place tremendous cultural and personal value in their mother tongues. For them, language is a sense of pride and a sovereign asset" (ISKCONZA n.d.[l]).

Religious discourse focuses on the linguistic and discursive characteristics of various practices and gestures departing from "ordinary" communication. This includes prayers, liturgies, trances, rituals, divination, spells, mantras, and speaking in tongues (Hamilton, Tannen and Schiffrin 2015, 905). Religious people make "highly marked and self-conscious uses of linguistic resources" departing from the way people ordinarily speak (Keane 1997, 48). Questions arising for religious people regarding their communication with invisible and incorporeal agents are several. These questions are the manifestation of the "problem of presence" (Keane 1997, 51): how can we get them—invisible, incorporeal agents and entities—to respond to us? How will we know that they have responded? And how do we even begin talking to them? (Keane 1997, 48). The researcher is interested in how religious people communicate with incorporeal entities who do not speak back and how this might affect behavior.

The methods of communication for devotees with invisible agents like Lord Krishna (God) are several. The "problem of presence" is apparent in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Lord Krishna says to Arjuna that he is not "in such Form seen, in the world of men", other than in this

particular encounter with Arjuna in the form of a charioteer on the battlefield (11.48). How do devotees deal with the "problem of presence" in their communication with an invisible deity?

Foremost is prayer (*praṇām*) that "help[s] us establish a very solid relation with Krishna, our favorite Deity… there is necessity of prayer. And prayer to whom? To the Supreme Person to save us" (Giriraj Dasa 2017). Prayer is foundational to the devotee's life and inspiration is drawn from the *Bhagavad Gita* in which Arjuna offers many prayers to Lord Krishna in his discourses.

In one encounter, Arjuna prostrates his body in adoration before the "Father of the world" who is "greater than the great" (11.44). Arjuna's encounter with Lord Krishna is a partial answer to the problem of presence. Although many devotees feel that Lord Krishna holds back his presence (form) from them, this is not to say that he could not present himself should he wish. Through prayer, devotees can offer their devotion to God. Prayer is offered in "petition, praise, adoration, and thanksgiving" and emerges from one's "feelings, thoughts, and words" (Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[d]). Prayers are offered while preparing *prasādam*, during temple worship services, chanting, in public, and in one's personal capacity.

The problem of presence is answered through *puja* (worship) which involves offering *murtis* (images and the divine in embodied forms) items such as flowers, incense, water, lamps, and bells. Through *murtis*, devotees witness a physical representation of the invisible Lord Krishna and strengthen their relationship with him.

Possibly out of the "ordinary" is *kirtan* involving the discursive performances of chanting and singing. *Kirtan* is an intense devotion to God often taking the form of social worship through chanting and using instruments (*mrdangas* and *karatalas*) in public spaces like parks, streets, and

at festivals. *Kirtan* is performed in temples but also in public as a demonstration of reuniting with God.

Motivating the public role of *kirtan* is the devotee's belief that spiritual benefit is not limited to the participant but also extends to listeners and the environment where God's names are sung. The Maha Mantra—"Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare Hare Rama, Hare Rama Rama Rama, Hare Hare"—is chanted during *kirtan* to elevate one's perception of the transcendent and God. *Kirtan* is a "highly emotional and intensely personal" experience (Henry 2002, 49-50) involving the musical and kinesthetic participation of "hear[ing] the names of God [being] melodiously and repetitively chanted for hours at a time, and to participate in the chant" (Black 2014, 455).

There is the implementation of a life-sized wax model of Srila Prabhupada in his chair (*vyasasana*) within temples. These models are adorned with a traditional saffron garb and are a way of "keeping him [Srila Prabhupada] 'alive'" well after his death (Callaway 1988-1989, 19). Some devotees lie flat on their bellies before these wax figures, offer them items such as flower petals at their feet, and engage in the discursive practices of reciting Sanskrit verses from scriptures like the *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

Cultural Context

The interest here lies in the cultural background of devotees and its various factors like age, sex, social role, and social status that shape their discourse and use of language.

The ISKCON movement in South Africa has never limited itself to any one race or cultural group. Although Indian South Africans constitute the majority (Krishna-kripa Dasa 2011), there are also Black and White devotees. This racial and cultural inclusivity is consistent with the

religion's values emphasizing unity. No racial or cultural group is prohibited from participating as long as the religion's principles, values, and practices are accepted by those who embrace it.

This cultural dynamic is not without tension. As I discovered, several devotees struggled to communicate their faith to family and friends, many of whom did not understand it. This motivated them to spend significant time at the temple and with fellow believers, and this included living in the temple studying scriptures.

That the ISKCON movement is not well understood by outsiders in the cultural context is evidence of its marginal and largely unknown status in South Africa. To those who have witnessed the religion (by seeing a temple, witnessing devotees in public, happening upon online discourses presented on official websites and across social media, and so on), it is perceived as unusual and foreign to more commonly accepted and dominant social, cultural, and religious conventions.

There is a strong male voice in the movement. The patriarchal and perceived sexist trends in the movement's history were noted in the male voices that dominated and dictated how female devotees were to worship, such as on what side of a temple women were to occupy. Today, despite changes in culture toward favoring gender equality, male voices exist opposing internal attempts to transform the religion by allowing women to become gurus. Historically, there was an emergence of new discourses challenging existing internal traditions of understanding. This discourse came to influence perceptions of notions of right and wrong, good and bad, normal and abnormal, and so on (Moberg 2009, 26). The voices of women devotees in the movement became louder as many sought gender reform, which, despite opposition, was largely successful in bringing to the attention of the leadership the plight of women inside the movement.

The male voice remains dominant, notably in the leading body and decision-making process. Of the thirty-five members of the Governing Body Commission (GBC), only two are women and the rest are men (GBC 2021). This evidences a strong male voice in the religion's chief governing and managerial body overseeing the movement's projects and ministries across geographical regions. Mostly men contribute to the discussion of proposals, specific issues, and projects.

Of the seventy-seven online articles I analyzed for discourses on official ISKCON websites authored by devotees, twenty-eight (60%) were authored by men and eighteen by women (40%). The additional thirty-one online articles evaluated did not offer indications of the author's gender (to identify gender one requires the suffix at the end of the individual's name: "Dasa" denoting a man and "Dasi" denoting a woman, often excluded in the articles) to include in the tally. Although women have a greater representation in official online articles offering discourses to readers than they have in the GBC, men do most of the speaking.

Srila Prabhupada still speaks in the contemporary cultural context well after his death (Rochford 2007, 126). The founder continues to live "through his lessons, tapes, and books and through the plethora of devotees' writings about him" (Callaway 1988-1989, 19-20). His teachings are embraced with passion by his followers and continue to exercise authority. For example, his teachings influenced women's voices in the movement to oppose feminism, even though they desired gender reform and equality. Still today devotees emphasize the importance of Srila Prabhupada's teachings in their devotional lives.

As Vivien Burr notes, discourses construct "the phenomena of our world for us" and a certain state of affairs (Burr 2003, 65). Their relevance to the cultural context is in how devotees have constructed various dichotomies between themselves and the Western and Western-

influenced societies they inhabit. There are references to “Western religious thinkers” (Ravindra-svarupa Dasa. n.d.), “Western religious philosophy” (Chandidas Dasa n.d.), “today’s Western world” (Suhotra Swami n.d.), “western culture” (ISKCONZA n.d.[b]), “Western empiricism” (Devamrita Swami n.d.), “western psyche” (Keshava Krsna Dasa n.d.), and “the West” (ISKCONZA n.d.[a]; ISKCONZA n.d.[c]).

Linguistically, using the terms “West” or “Western” is a means for devotees to construct their religion in opposition to perceived problematic values, principles, and practices. The West is, as many devotees maintain, permeated with social ills (divorce, abortion, illicit sexual intercourse, etc.) and the movement presents its values as a solution to these (Keshava Krishna Das 2013; Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami n.d.[a]).

More commentary could be offered on this point, but this paper has not attempted a full analysis of the ISKCON movement in the West, although occasionally the West needed to be considered given the religion’s embeddedness within that context and how it has “continually [been] adapting to changes in its larger [Western] social context” (Vande Berg and Kniss 2008, 80). What does, however, present itself in the analysis is that significant tensions exist between the values of devotees and their movement and the many values found in Western and South African contexts.

Situational Context

The situational context considers the environment, time, and place that discourses occur. Temporally, the ISKCON movement exists in the twenty-first century in an age science and technology continue advancing. These advances have both benefits and challenges.

Advantageously, technology and communication media enable devotees to share their teachings to a much wider audience than previously possible. Previously devotees had to travel physically but today can make use of the internet to present discourses through setting up social media accounts on various platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) employing broad media (such as video, text, graphics, and oral communication, etc.). Aware of these opportunities, the ISKCON South Africa National Council and its Communications Ministry are becoming "more digitally effective" and intends to "use digital technologies to reach and develop new audiences" for "those who are favourably disposed to Krishna Consciousness in society at large" (International Society for Krishna Consciousness 2019, 4).

There are also challenges. Religious skeptics are not shy to publicly present their atheistic, materialistic, and naturalistic convictions and discourses using social communication technologies. This is uncomfortable to many devotees because their religion claims to have privileged access to spiritual truth. Devotees feel compelled to offer apologetic discourses on matters essential to their movement's doctrinal dimension (the existence of God, the soul, miracles, etc.). Religious skepticism in the modern Western tradition traces back to discourses presented by thinkers like David Hume, Baruch Spinoza, Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and others. These skeptical views are still present today. The apologetic counter strategies opposing this skepticism are evidence devotees exist in societies in which religious truth is not necessarily taken for granted and often challenged.

Important in the situational context is the impact apartheid had on the ISKCON movement and its production of discourses emphasizing unity and non-racialism. The apartheid system presented practical challenges through strict policing of the movements of people, especially between race groups. The activities of devotees between members of different races had to take

place in secret. Policing made many devotees migrate to rural settings to establish communities beyond the invasive eyes of the state. Apartheid's emphasis on divisions between persons based on race was challenged by devotees and considered inconsistent with their religious principles emphasizing unity. Today devotees continue to support symbols of unity, such as Nelson Mandela and what he stood for. The speech of Nelson Mandela at the Festival for the Children of the Rainbow Nation emphasizing racial unity over division was warmly received by devotees who pledged to continue "respecting each and every individual as children of God, the Supreme Father…" in today's world (Champakalata Dasi 2013).

In the post-apartheid situational context, devotees continue to reach out to impoverished Black communities. It is Blacks who bear the brunt of apartheid's nefarious legacy, which makes them a particularly vulnerable group. As noted, poverty becomes a means through which devotees can spread their religion's teachings, philosophies, texts, and discourses while also doing good by assisting those in need.

Suggestions for Future Research

I would like to provide several reflections where I believe future research on the ISKCON movement in South Africa can be conducted.

A field that can be explored further is related to feminist research in the study of religions. The male representation in the group's Governing Body Commission (GBC) is pertinent. One can determine through qualitative analysis whether or not decisions made by the thirty-three male members serve the interests of male devotees. How might women devotees and the two female members of the GBC perceive the male overrepresentation on the GBC?

In this context, a gender-related linguistic analysis would be pertinent too. How might women perceive androcentric terminology used by fellow devotees in the movement? Although spiritually men and women are said to be equal (krishna.com n.d.[b]) and some devotees are mindful to use inclusive language (ISKCONZA. n.d.[j]; ISKCONZA. n.d.[k]), the discourse is replete with references to men, much more so than to women. To sample the discourse, the term "mankind" is frequently found (Madhudvisa Dasa n.d.[a]; ISKCONZA 2010; Mukunda Goswami 2011). For example, the ISKCON movement aims for the spiritual reorientation of "mankind" through chanting the holy names of God (Srila Prabhupada n.d.), scientific research can be a service to "mankind" (krishna.org 2021), the "purpose of education" is for the benefit of "mankind" (krishna.org n.d.[h]), God appearing in "the nether world for the benefit of mankind" (srila-bhaktivinoda-thakura 2021), and "mankind" almost reaching its peak of knowledge (back-to-godhead-magazine 2021). The caste system centers on a "group of men" and "classes of men" (Krishna.org. n.d.[f]). Despite there being some "advanced" women, traditionally "men" take "spiritual leadership" and are superior to women at "purposes of preaching" (krishna.com n.d.[b]).

Similar to other religious texts, there is the androcentric terminology of passages in the *Bhagavad Gita* referring exclusively to "men" (3.21) and Manu, the archetypal first man, is the "father" of "mankind" (4.1). According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, everywhere "men" follow God's path (4.11) in the "world of men" (4.12), there are those who are wise "among men" (4.18), and "men" try for liberation (7.3) (Debroy 2005). There are "men" interpreters of the *Bhagavad Gita* (ISKCONZA n.d.[f]). Women do find reference in the discourse, but in my analysis, it is often centered on matters of abortion, marriage, and family roles (krishna.com. n.d.[a]; krishna.org. n.d.[b]; Krishnanandini Dasi 2011).

Many scholars are interested in masculine language commonly used to refer to God presenting him as a dominant male figure and how this image becomes ingrained in the believer's consciousness (Frankenberry 2005; Neu and Hunt 2010; Sokolove 2010, 252-262; Moder 2019). In the ISKCON movement's discourses, God is commonly referred to in the masculine. To offer a few examples: without devotion one cannot appease "Him" (Giriraj Dasa 2017); "He" is satisfied when humanity "serves Him" and offers "Him" the fruits of its labor (Hare Krishna Devi Dasi n.d.); the movement started with Krishna "Himself" and those who worship "Him" will go to "His" spiritual planet after death (ISKCONZA n.d.[f]); Lord Krishna is "Himself" the Supreme Personality of Godhead (Madhudvisa Dasa n.d.[a]), and so on. Masculine references are in the *Bhagavad Gita:* God is the "Father of the world" (11.43) and the "Grandfather" (9.17). One must view "Him" (God) as being superior to the intellect (3.41). God is referred to as "Lord" or "Blessed Lord", which are strong masculine terms (2.2; 2.10; 3.2; 5.1; 6.34, 40; 8.2; 11.44; 12.2). This strong masculine terminology in religion and sacred texts continues to interest scholars and for religions like the ISKCON movement asks for further exploration.

Second, the scope of symbol analysis can be expanded. Evaluating contestation over symbols is for the researcher to learn how a religion communicates, to whom it communicates, the strategies it employs, discourses it offers to contest disagreeable interpretations of symbols, and the interests of its members that are served. This paper reduced its analysis size to twenty-one symbols given word limit constraints. But there are many more symbols beyond these ripe for analysis. To offer a few examples, the likes of clothing/attire, festival, sacred time, violence (warfare), and additional religious figures (like the devotee's interpretation of the Buddha or Confucius, for instance) will raise fascinating details. To use one example, an evaluation of

violence as a symbol would yield promising data. Devotees believe that only under certain conditions violence is permissible, such as if one is a member of the warrior caste and the call for defensive measures emerges, despite the movement's pacifist stance. How might this conception of violence as a symbol be in contestation with divine command theory forwarded by some theologians and historical thinkers like St. Augustine of Hippo, or some other theory of violence?

Third, this analysis focused on the ISKCON movement in South Africa and, to a lesser degree, Western culture and societies. These contexts raise unique contestations. But prospective researchers can evaluate contestations over symbols in other contexts. How is the symbol of reincarnation, for instance, being debated and contested between Zen Buddhists and ISKCON devotees in Japan? Likely a study of that contestation in the Japanese context will produce different results than what we have discovered in contestations between devotees and secular-materialists in South Africa. Perhaps the God symbol (God's existence) is not even debated between ISKCON devotees and Muslims in Indonesia. Both parties agree that God exists, but will disagree on their interpretation of the God symbol. Symbol analysis can bring to light the details of this debate, where disagreeing voices engage, and how they are communicating.

Concluding Reflections

Religions are in a continued state of negotiation and they mutate over time. The ISKCON movement provides an appropriate example of a religion that has transformed significantly in response to various dynamic internal and external factors.

We could cite many examples from this study, but consider the development of the movement in response to internal debates over whether or not women should be able to become gurus. The clash of opinions on this topic became apparent when, on the one hand, some

devotees believed women should have equal religious and occupational opportunities to men whereas, on the other hand, many devotees (notably those in the General Headquarters) maintained that men ought to have superior roles in the movement. Clearly, the views of women's role in the movement developed over the decades from many male devotees previously viewing them as "unintelligent" and "dangerous" and "threatening" to male spirituality to the more recent tolerant perspectives allowing women to have a representation on the Governing Body Commission (although their number is minimal), the opportunity to chant in temples alongside men, and to become temple presidents. Nonetheless, questions regarding the role of women in the ISKCON movement are far from settled and will continue to be negotiated and contested.

We saw that negotiations occur regarding founder Srila Prabhupada's views and teachings. This suggests his teachings, while clearly important to devotees, are not immutable. Devotees continue to wrestle with their founder's teachings and interpret them in new contexts. For instance, some devotees I interviewed were questioning whether or not Srila Prabhupada's views on homosexuality are acceptable and should be embraced today in an apparently more tolerant world in which homosexuals are afforded equal rights and should not experience discrimination. For one interviewee, he was unsure where to stand on this issue: Was he to affirm Srila Prabhupada's teachings on homosexuality condemning it, or was he to relativize the teachings to make them more palatable for the modern age? This is but one example of how devotees negotiate Srila Prabhupada's teachings with their real-life experiences. This negotiation occurs across the board from how one is to live in a way consistent with her religious principles to the role of women in the movement, the concept of an ideal family, how to perceive material wealth, and much else. Devotees negotiate these various topics in light of their founder's teachings.

Negotiations are strong evidence that religions are not static. I believe the scholar of religion should acknowledge the dynamism inherent in religion and how religions are mutable and adaptable as new circumstances emerge that are relevant to them. In some cases, religions adapt and manage to survive (e.g. the ISKCON movement has survived despite the death of its founder; other NRMs have not been so lucky) whereas in other cases, especially in some NRMs, they die out after being confronted by obstacles and circumstances they cannot overcome (e.g. the artificial intelligence religion called Way of the Future recently became insolvent after legal disputes regarding its founder). This raises important questions. For example, might religion's dynamism be a descriptive limitation or could it prove beneficial and energizing to the scholar?

For the ISKCON movement and its devotees, we can expect continued contestations and negotiations on the "battlefield of symbols" in the domains of the ethical, pragmatic, doctrinal, social, and scientific. Due to limits of space, there are domains that I did not consider and one can only speculate what future contestations will be. But what we can take with certainty is that new contestations will emerge to challenge religions and require new means of negotiation. To cite one example in support of this claim, there is a precedent of new scientific discoveries perceived by the religious to challenge their religion. One need only consider how Darwin's theory of evolution was not particularly warmly received in the ISKCON movement and motivated some devotees to identify the "Darwinist propaganda" and "refute it" (Smullen 2009). What other scientific theory might emerge in the future perceived by devotees to challenge their beliefs and require them to "refute it"?

An important insight to take from this study and application of Chidester's theory is that being religious is not effortless and that religiosity is strongly influenced by external and internal circumstances.

Being religious is highly contentious and entails work through the believer's active engagement, contestation, and negotiation with a plurality of disagreeable perspectives in a society. As I showed, disagreeable perspectives regarding symbols are broad. They come in various guises and range across several domains (the ethical, pragmatic, doctrinal, social, and scientific) indicating how extensive contestation can be. Very likely is that religious believers will at some point find themselves contesting others in one or more of these active domains.

Finally, contestation for symbol ownership is perennial. It is sustained because of the interests participants have motivating them to engage with others. Interests underlie the contestations on the battlefield as is apparent in, for example, participants attempting to demonstrate the intellectual and/or pragmatic superiority of their views or interpretations of a symbol over the interpretations of their counterparts.

As noted at the outset, interests are informative regarding points of analysis and are to be found behind debates between the religious and others. In this thesis, it is in discourse (e.g. texts, interpersonal communication, lectures, presentations, singing, chanting) produced and mobilized by religious persons (and their counterparts) where interests are identified, and the materials analyzed above, including interviews, have provided insight into the contestations over sacred symbols, their ownership, and alienation. Such an analysis has aimed to better understand how a New Religious Movement founded in the USA has tried to communicate and proselytize in South Africa and what strategies it employed to this end. Further research on "contending interests" would therefore be fruitful not only in the field of NRMs in South Africa but also in the study of NRMs and other religious groups in other parts of the world.

Appendix A: Data Collection

The data collected for this qualitative analysis of the ISKCON movement derives from a variety of sources:

Books. Discourses and data were accessed in the *Bhagavad Gita,* Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959), Srila Prabhupada's *The Bhagavad Gita As It Is* (1968), Srila Prabhupada's *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam: With a Short Life Sketch of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Ideal Preacher of Bhāgavata-dharma, and the Original Sanskrit Text, Its Roman Transliteration, Synonyms, Translation and Elaborate Purports, Volume 3, Part 3* (1974), Michael Ruse's and Edward's Wilson's *The Philosophy of Biology* (1989), Ninian Smart's *The World's Religions* (1992), Srila Prabhupada's *Srila Prabhupada Siksmrta: Nectarian Instructions from the Letters of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada* (1992), Walter Capp's *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (1995), Stanley Tweyman's *Hume on Miracles* (1996), John Thiel's *God, Evil, and Innocent Suffering: A Theological Reflection* (2002), Keith Ward's *God, A Guide for the Perplexed* (2002), Julian Baggini's *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), Wentzel Van Huyssteen's et al. *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion* (2003), Burke E. Rochford's *Hare Krishna Transformed* (2007), Peter Van Inwagen's *The Problem of Evil* (2008), William Lane Craig's *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (2010), Karen Armstrong's *A History of God* (2011), Yuval Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2011), John de Gruchy's *Led Into Mystery: Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death* (2013), Justin McBrayer's and Daniel Howard-Snyder's *The Blackwell Companion to The Problem of Evil* (2014), Chad Meister's and

James Dew's *God and the Problem of Evil: Five Views* (2017), and Srila Prabhupada's *Basics of Bhagavad-gita: A Thematic Study of Bhagavad Gita* (2018).

Chapters. Book chapters were used to attain discourses and data: Mary Douglas's "Deciphering a Meal" in *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (1975), Roland Barthes's "Towards a Psychosociology of Food and Consumption" in *Food and Drink in History* (1979), John Whitworth's and Martin Shiels's "From Across the Black Water: Two Imported Varieties of Hinduism; the Hare Krishnas and the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society" in *Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society* (1982), Michael Ruse's and Edward Wilson's "The Evolution of Morals" in *The Philosophy of Biology* (1989), Douglas Davies's "Contemporary Belief in Life After Death" in *Interpreting Death: Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice* (1997), Ekkehard Lorenz's "The Guru, Mayavadins, and Women: Tracing the Origins of Selected Polemical Statements" in *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Movement* (2004), Donald Treiman's "The Legacy of Apartheid: Racial Inequalities in the New South Africa" in *Ethnic Minority Disadvantage in Cross-national Perspective* (2005), Burke E. Rochford's "The Politics of Gender within the Hare Krishna Movement" in *Hare Krishna Transformed* (2007), Carl Mildenberger's "Introducing Moral Evil and Natural Evil" in *Economics and Social Conflict* (2013), Simone Heidegger's "Shin Buddhism and Gender: The Discourse on Gender Discrimination and Related Reforms" in *The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism* (2010), Brigitte Liebig's, Karin Gottschall's, and Birgit Sauer's "Gender equality: Policies and practices in Switzerland" in *Gender Equality in Context* (2016), Christian Smith's "What Is Religion's Future?" in *Religion Book: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters* (2017).

Competing discourses. Discourses contesting the ISKCON movement's perspectives were obtained in Mikael Stenmark's "What Is Scientism?," John Leslie Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence," Mikel Burley's "Karma, Morality, and Evil," Wes Morriston's "God and the ontological foundation of morality," and Willard Van Roman's "Naturalism; or, Living within One's Means" (Dialectica 49(2/4):251-261). William Lane Craig, a reputable theologian and philosopher, offered insights into contemporary debates between religionists and religious skeptics (e.g. "The Problem of Evil," "A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?" And "On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision".

Discourses and data were sourced from peer-reviewed online encyclopedias: James R. Beebe's "Logical Problem of Evil" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy n.d.), William Vallicella's "Divine Simplicity" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006), David Papineau's "Naturalism" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2007), Timothy McGrew's "Miracles" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010), Helen De Cruz's "Religion and Science" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2017), Todd Calder's "The Concept of Evil" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2018), Brian Morely's "Western Concepts of God" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020), Daniel Stoljar's "Physicalism" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020), Gabriel Andrade's "Immortality" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020), Howard Robinson's "Dualism" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020), Justin Skirry's "René Descartes: The Mind-Body Distinction" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020), and David Corner's "Miracles" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021)

Interviews. Data was obtained through eight interviews with congregants, ascetics, and temple members who were willing to participate in my study. One interview occurred in person and seven via email. It was difficult to meet up with several interviewees given COVID-19 restrictions and the unwillingness of some to attend spaces where people congregate (such as in the lunchroom in the temple I often visited). Of the eight interviewees, six were male. Two were female. All were members of the temple congregation. The interviews were semi-structured. This allowed for the questions to be open-ended and for interviewees to be flexible in their answers and explanations. The semi-structured nature of the interview process also allowed me to ask my interviewees other questions that were not planned ahead of time, especially when an interviewee produced a strand of thought that was unexpected and worth exploring. The interviews provided me with rich information on the rituals, practices, doctrines, insider perspectives, and ethical views of devotees within the ISKCON movement.

Journal articles. Journal articles authored by researchers on the ISKCON movement in South Africa are sparse, so only a few were helpful to my analysis: Anil Sooklal's "The Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa" (*Religion in Southern Africa*), Jan Hofmeyr's "Homogeneity and South African Hinduism" (*Journal of Religion in Africa*), and Travis Vande Berg and Fred Kniss's "ISKCON and Immigrants: The Rise, Decline, and Rise Again of a New Religious Movement" (*The Sociological Quarterly*). Numerous other journal articles on the ISKCON movement globally were utilized.

Online articles. Discourse and data across seventy-seven online articles presented on

official ISKCON linked websites authored by devotees were evaluated. These websites include iskconnews.org, ISKCONZA.com, krishna.com, and krishna.org. Most internet websites and articles on Google relevant to search inquiries were not used for various reasons including outdated content, unidentified author(s), lack of affiliation with an official body of the ISKCON movement, and for a lack of an insider perspective.

Statistics. Relevant statistical information was provided by organizations and authors: James Leuba's "The Belief in God and Immortality: A Psychological, Anthropological, and Statistical Study" (1916), Dasi Sudharma's "Presentation by Sudharma Dasi" (2000), INFORM's "Information on ISKCON" (2014), Pew Research Center's "Chapter 1: Importance of Religion and Religious Beliefs" (2015), Times Live's "35 titillating stats about South Africans' sex lives" (2017), Willem Schoeman's "South African religious demography: The 2013 General Household Survey" (2017), Claire Gecewicz's "'New Age' beliefs common among both religious and nonreligious Americans" (2018), Statistics South Africa's and Risenga Maluleke's "Inequality Trends in South Africa: A multidimensional diagnostic of inequality" (2019), INFORM's "Annual Report: April 2018–March 2019" (2019), Stat SA's "Five Facts About Poverty in South Africa" (2019) and "South Africa's Poor Little Children" (2020)

Video media. Video media is a source of qualitative data frequently accessed by qualitative researchers (Jewitt 2012). Video media includes home-made domestic videos, broadcast media, CCTV recording, and/or online published videos (such as published on sites including YouTube and Vimeo) (Jewitt 2012, 21). This paper evaluated discourse presented in nine YouTube videos. YouTube videos were used in this study because they present evidence of the activities, rituals, and practices of devotees (e.g. dandapro's "Food For Life in Nyanga Cape Town with Vraja

Krishna das," Haridas Thakur Das Acbsp's "Kirtan at the ISKCON Durban Temple," and Madhava Smullen's "Hare Krishna Cook Plans Fast Food Chain With A Difference"). Several of the videos included interviews with devotees (e.g. Daring Danielle's "Travel to South Africa: My visit to the Hare Krishna Temple in Durban pt.1," Hare Krsna TV's "Can a homosexual become a brahmachari?" and Hare "How I came to Krishna consciousness - Brihat Mridanga Das from Cape Town, South Africa"). One video provided useful information on doctrines in Eastern religions relevant to ISKCON (khanpadawan's "4a Hindu doctrines, schools, and history – Brahman, atman, and reincarnation").

References

Adamczyk, Amy., and Hayes, Brittany E. 2012. "Religion and Sexual Behaviors: Understanding the Influence of Islamic Cultures and Religious Affiliation for Explaining Sex Outside of Marriage." *American Sociological Review* (77)5:723-746. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122412458672

Allen, Douglas. 2002. "Toward a Theory of Consumer Choice as Socio historically Shaped Practical Experience: The Fits-Like- a-Glove (FLAG) Framework." *Journal of Consumer Research* 28:515-532. https://doi.org/10.1086/338202

Anandini Dasi. n.d. *"Affirmation, repetition, contagion."* Accessed January 9, 2021. https://iskconza.com/2010/10/26/affirmation-repetition-contagion-part-1-by-anandini-dasi/

Andrade, Gabriel. n.d. *"Immortality."* Accessed March 12, 2020. https://iep.utm.edu/immortal/

Armstrong, Karen. 2011. *A History of God.* New York: Random House.

Arnould, Eric., and Thompson, Craig. 2005. "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research." *Journal of Consumer Research* 31(4):868-882. https://doi.org/10.1086/426626

Asad, Talal. 2009. "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." *Qui Parle* 17(2):1-30. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20685738

Atsuko, Usui. 2003. "Women's "Experience" in New Religious Movements: The Case of Shinnyoen." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 30(3-4):217-241. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30234048

back-to-godhead-magazine. 2021. *"The State of Chaos in Education Throughout the World."* Accessed July 4, 2021. https://krishna.org/is-modern-civilization-an-example-of-virtue/

Baggini, Julian. 2003. *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Balcomb, Tony. 2008. "Mission as biography – case studies from the Eastern Cape frontier." *Missionalia* 36(1):29-45. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC76049

Barker, Eileen. 2001. "General Overview of the "Cult Scene" in Great Britain." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4(2):235-240. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2001.4.2.235

Barker, Eileen. 2004. "Perspective: What Are We Studying? A Sociological Case for Keeping the 'Nova.'" *Nova Religio* 8(1):88-102. DOI: 10.1525/nr.2004.8.1.88.

Barker, Eileen. 2014. "The Not-So-New Religious Movements. Changes in 'the Cult Scene' over the Past Forty Years." *Temenos* 50(2):235-256. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.48461

Barthes, Roland. 1979. "Towards a Psychosociology of Food and Consumption." In *Food and Drink in History*, edited by Robert Forster and Orest Rawum, 166-73. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Beckford, James. 2003. "The Continuum Between "Cults" and "Normal" Religion." In *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*, edited by Lorne Dawson, 26-35. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Beebe, James R. n.d. *"Logical Problem of Evil."* Accessed March 12, 2020. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/

Behera, Bhagirath., and Reddy, V. Ratna. 2002. "Environment and Accountability: Impact of Industrial Pollution on Rural Communities." *Economic and Political Weekly* 37(3):257-265. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4411634

Bhakta Kishore. 2018. *Durban Festival of Chariots Celebrates Its 30th Year*. Accessed October 5, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/durban-festival-of-chariots-celebrates-its-30th-year,6501/

Bhaktin Roma. 2012. *"What is the KC view on divorce."* Accessed November 14, 2020. http://www.krishna.com/forums/what-kc-view-divorce

Bhakti Tirtha Swami. n.d. *"Coping With Depression."* Accessed March 14, 2020. https://iskconza.com/q-a/coping-with-depression/

Bird, Frederick B., Westley, Frances. 1985. "The Economic Strategies of New Religious Movements." *Sociological Analysis* 46(2):157-170. https://doi.org/10.2307/3711058

Block, Ned. 1980. *Readings in the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume 1.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Blumetti, Jordan. 2019. *"'It's latent misogyny': Hare Krishnas divided over whether to allow female gurus."* Accessed November 15, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/04/hare-krishna-india-hinduism-florida-women

Bowker, John. 2014. *God: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bozeman, John M. 2000. **"**ISKCON's Extensive Reform Efforts." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 3(2):383-391. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2000.3.2.383

Bromley, David G., and Melton, Gordon. 2012. "Reconceptualizing Types of Religious Organization: Dominant, Sectarian, Alternative, and Emergent Tradition Groups." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 15(3):4-28. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2012.15.3.4

Burley, Mikel. 2014. "Karma, Morality, and Evil." *Philosophy Compass* 9(6):415-430. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12138

Burr, Vivien. 2003. *Social Constructionism.* London: Routledge.

Calder, Todd. 2018. *"The Concept of Evil."* Accessed March 12, 2020. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concept-evil/

Callaway, Megan. 1988-1989. *"Of Cults and Krishna: An Investigation of the Psychological and Social Dynamics Behind Membership in a New Religious Movement."* Accessed July 20, 2021. http://hdl.handle.net/10066/21072

Capps, Walter. 1995. *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Carruthers, Jane. 2006. "Tracking in Game Trails: Looking Afresh at the Politics of Environmental History in South Africa." *Environmental History* 11(4):804-829. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3985803

Catainya Das. n.d. *"Feminist Theories and their Effect on ISKCON."* Accessed November 18, 2020. https://www.harekrsna.com/sun/editorials/05-08/editorials2928.htm

Chaitanya Charan Das. *"Everything Is A Miracle."* Accessed February 11, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/everything-is-a-miracle,6346/

Champakalata Dasi. 2013. *"ISKCON's Journey Through Apartheid With Mandela - A Tribute to Nelson Rohihlalha Mandela (1918-2013) Father of the South African Nation."* Accessed March 16, 2020. https://iskconnews.org/iskcons-journey-through-apartheid-with-mandela-a-tribute-to-nelson-rohihlalha-mandela-1918-2013-father-of-the-south-african-nation,4182/

Chalmers, David., and Bourget, David. 2013. “What Do Philosophers Believe?” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 170(3):465-500. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42920613

Chandidas Dasa. n.d. *“The Form of God: Fact or Fancy?”* Accessed March 16, 2020. https://iskconza.com/q-a/the-form-of-god-fact-or-fancy/

Chidester, David. 1985. “Word against Light: Perception and the Conflict of Symbols.” *The Journal of Religion* 65:46-62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1203269

Chidester, David. 1989. “Worldview analysis of African Indigenous Churches.” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 2(1):15-29. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44945190

Christ, Carol. 1987. *Laughter of Aphrodite: reflections on a journey to the goddess.* Manhattan: Harper & Row.

Cintamani Devi Dasi. 2012. *“The Importance of Appreciation in Householder Life.”* Accessed March 20, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2012/01/15/the-importance-of-appreciation-in-householder-life-cintamani-devi-dasi/

commongroundchurch. 2021. *“What we Believe.”* Accessed July 2, 2021. https://www.commonground.co.za/grounded-theology

Corner, David. n.d. *“Miracles.”* Accessed June 6, 2021. https://iep.utm.edu/miracles/

Craig, William Lane. 2010. *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision*. Colorado Springs: David C Cook.

Craig, William Lane. 2011. *“Is the Foundation of Morality Natural or Supernatural? The Craig-Harris Debate.”* Accessed March 12, 2020. https://www.reasonablefaith.org/media/debates/is-the-foundation-of-morality-natural-or-supernatural-the-craig-harris-deba/

Craig, William Lane., Wielenberg, Erik., and Johnson, Adam Lloyd. 2020. *A Debate on God and Morality: What is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?* Abingdon: Routledge.

Craig, William Lane. n.d.[a] *“The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective.”* Accessed February 11, 2021. https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/historical-jesus/the-problem-of-miracles-a-historical-and-philosophical-perspective/

Craig, William Lane. n.d.[b] *“The Problem of Evil.”* Accessed March 12, 2020. https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-problem-of-evil/

dandapro. “Food For Life in Nyanga Cape Town with Vraja Krishna das.” YouTube, March 18, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4A6xZ-Xs77w

Danielle, Daring. “Travel to South Africa: My visit to the Hare Krishna Temple in Durban pt.1.” YouTube, January 3, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPh_e2H38Zc

Dasi, Visakha, and Sudharma Dasi. 2000. “Women in iskcon: Presentations to the gbc, March 2000.” *ISKCON Communications Journal* 8(1):1-4.

Davies, Douglas. 1997. “Contemporary Belief in Life After Death.” In *Interpreting Death: Christian Theology and Pastoral Practice*, edited by Peter Jupp and Tony Rogers, 130-142. London: Cassel.

Davidson, Alan. 2014. *The Oxford Companion to Food*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DeAngelis, Tori. 2004. *“Consumerism and Its Discontents.”* Accessed March 15, 2020. https://www.apa.org/monitor/jun04/discontents

Debroy, Bibek. 2005. *The Bhagavad Gita.* New York: Penguin Random House India.

De Cruz, Helen. 2017. *“Religion and Science.”* Accessed June 22, 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-science/

De Gruchy, John. 2014. *Led Into Mystery: Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death.* London: SCM Press.

Dessì, Ugo. 2020. “Soka Gakkai International in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” *Religions* 11(598):1-19. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110598

Devamrita Swami. n.d. “*Technology’s Blind Spot.”* Accessed February 22, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/08/15/technologys-blind-spot-devamrita-swami/

Devi Dasi, Jyotirmayi. 2002. *“Women in iskcon in Prabhupada’s Times.”* Accessed November 29, 2020. http://www.chakra.org/discussions/WomenNov29_02_02.html.

Devi Dasi, Pranada. 2002. *“Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.”* Accessed November 29, 2020. http://www.chakra.org/discussions/WomenNov29_02_03.html.

Devi Dasi, Urmila. 1992. *According to Religious Principles: A Guide to Sexual Relations in a Krsna Conscious Marriage.* Hillsborough: iskcon Education of N.C.

Dobscha, Susan., and Ozanne, Julie. 2001. “An Ecofeminist Analysis of Environmentally Sensitive Women Using Qualitative Methodology: The Emancipatory Potential of an Ecological Life.” *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing* 20:201-214. https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.20.2.201

Donovan, Peter. 1990. “Neutrality in Religious Studies.” *Religious Studies* 26(1):103-115. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20019390

Donahue, Michael. 1993. “Prevalence and Correlates of New Age Beliefs in Six Protestant Denominations.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32:177-184. https://doi.org/10.2307/1386797

Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Douglas, Mary. 1975. “Deciphering a Meal.” In *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology,* edited by Mary Douglas, 249-275. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Dunbar, Danielle., and Swart, Sandra. 2012. “‘No less a foe than Satan himself': The Devil, Transition and Moral Panic in White South Africa, 1989—1993.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38(3):601-621. DOI: 10.1080/03057070.2012.719688

Earman, John. 2000. *Hume’s Abject Failure.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ecklund, Elaine., and Scheitle, Christopher. 2007. “Religion among Academic Scientists: Distinctions, Disciplines, and Demographics.” *Social Problems* 54(2):289-307. DOI:10.1525/sp.2007.54.2.289

Eichinger Ferro-luzzi, Gabriella. 1987. *The self-milking cow and the bleeding lingam: Criss-cross of motifs in Indian temple legends.* Germany: Harrassowitz.

Einstein, Mara. 2007. *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age.* Abingdon*:* Routledge.

Eliade, Mircea. 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane.* New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Falkof, Nicky. 2012 “Satan has come to Rietfontein: Race in South Africa 's Satanic Panic.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38(4):753-767. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2012.732290

Fitzmaurice, Julie., and Comegys, Charles. 2006. “Materialism and Social Consumption.” *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 14(4):287-299. https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679140403

Frankenberry, Nancy. 2005. *“Feminist Philosophy of Religion.”* Accessed July 20, 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-religion/

Free Press Journal. 2020. *“ISKCON bags 'IGBC Green Champion Award 2020’.”* Accessed February 9, 2021. https://www.freepressjournal.in/india/iskcon-bags-igbc-green-champion-award-2020-2

Finke, Roger., and Stark, Rodney. 2005. *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Free Society Institute. 2021. *"Home."* Accessed June 26, 2021. https://www.fsi.org.za/

Furseth, Inger. 2001. "Women's Role in Historic Religious and Political Movements." *Sociology of Religion* 62(1):105-129. https://doi.org/10.2307/3712233

Gallagher, Michael Paul. 2012. "Revisiting the 'New Atheism.'" *An Irish Quarterly Review* 101(401):57-68. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23209779

Gandhi, Mahatma. 1921. "The Cow in Hinduism." *Young India.*

Garelli, Franco. 2007. "The public relevance of the church and Catholicism in Italy." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 12(1):8-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545710601132722

GBC. 2021. *"Members' Profiles."* Accessed July 4, 2021. https://gbc.iskcon.org/members-profile/

Gecewicz, Claire. 2018. *"'New Age' beliefs common among both religious and nonreligious Americans."* Accessed August 19, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/01/new-age-beliefs-common-among-both-religious-and-nonreligious-americans/

GHQ. 1999. "Notes from a Think Tank." *Vaisnava News Network.*

Giriraj Dasa. 2017. "Personal prayers should be part of our daily sadhna." Accessed July 18, 2021. https://www.iskconbangalore.co.in/personal-prayers-should-be-part-of-our-daily-sadhna/

Goshadze, Mariam. 2018. "Religion: Introduction." *Transition* 125:1-7. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/transition.issue-125

Granholm, Kennet. 2013. "Esoteric Currents as Discursive Complexes." *Religion* 43(1):47-70. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2013.742741

Gresh, Ashley., and Maharaj, Pranitha. 2014. "Termination of Pregnancy: Perspectives of Female Students in Durban, South Africa." *African Population Studies* 28(1):681-690. DOI:10.11564/28-0-524

Gross, Rita. 1996. *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Hamilton, Heidi E., Tannen, Deborah., and Schiffrin, Deborah. 2015. *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis.* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

Harari, Yuval. 2011. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.* Israel: Dvir Publishing House Ltd.

Hare Krishna Devi Dasi. n.d. *"What Do We Mean by Varnashrama?"* Accessed April 9, 2021. http://www.krishna.com/what-do-we-mean-varnashrama

Formatted: German (Germany)

Hare Krsna TV. “Can a homosexual become a brahmachari?” YouTube video, October 25, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU67az1_iXY

Hare Krsna TV. “How I came to Krishna consciousness - Brihat Mridanga Das from Cape Town, South Africa.” YouTube video, March 20, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgtnjeNtCDY

Haridas Thakur Das Acbsp. 2019. “Kirtan at the ISKCON Durban Temple.” YouTube video, April 26, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYGEWADetAQ

Harper, Brad. 2016. “Food As a Symbol of Grace, or Why The Eucharist Isn't Kit Kat Bars and Diet Pepsi.” *Cultural Encounters* 11(2):66-82. https://doi.org/10.11630/1550-4891.11.02.66

Harvey, Graham. 2011. “Field Research: Participant Observation.” In *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler, 217-244. Abingdon: Routledge.

Heidegger, Simone. 2010. “Shin Buddhism and Gender: The Discourse on Gender Discrimination and Related Reforms.” In *The Social Dimension of Shin Buddhism*, edited by Ugo Dessì, 165-208. Leiden: BRILL.

Hendricks, Ashraf., Postman, Zoe., and Binda, Musa. 2019. “*South African youths march for action against climate change.”* Accessed April 23, 2021. https://www.groundup.org.za/article/climate-strike/

Henry, Edward 2002. “Rationalization of Intensity in Indian Music.” *Ethnomusicology* 46(1):33-55. https://doi-org.ezproxy.uct.ac.za/10.2307/852807

Hexham, Irving. 2001. “New Religions and the Anticult Movement in Canada.” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4(2):281-288. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2001.4.2.281

Hinnells, John R. 2005. *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. Routledge.

Hodgson, Janet. 1986. “The Symbolic Entry Point: Removing the Veil of Structure from the Study of Religious Movements.” In *Religion Alive: Studies in the New Movements and Indigenous Churches in Southern Africa*, edited by Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen, 48-67. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Hofmeyr, Jan. 1982. “Homogeneity and South African Hinduism.” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13(2):139-149. https://doi.org/10.2307/1581208

INFORM. 2014. *Information on ISKCON*. PDF.

INFORM. 2019. *“Annual Report: April 2018–March 2019.”* Accessed March 22, 2020. https://inform.ac/annualreports

Inose, Yuri. 2017. “Gender and New Religions in Modern Japan.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 44(1):15-35. https://www.jstor.org/stable/90017629

Iqani, Mehita., and Kenny, Bridget. 2015. “Critical consumption studies in South Africa: roots and routes.” *Critical Arts* 29(2):95-106. DOI: 10.1080/02560046.2015.1039198

ISKCON Birmingham. n.d. *“Why Krishna is God?”* Accessed March 13, 2021. http://iskconbirmingham.org/why-krishna-is-god

ISKCON News. 2013. *“Mr. Mandela's Speech at Hare Krishna Event Remembered.”* Accessed December 17, 2020. https://iskconnews.org/mr-mandelas-speech-at-hare-krishna-event-remembered,4183/

ISKCON Seshadripuram. 2016. *“The Curer of Cancer – The Miracle that shocked German Doctors”*. Accessed February 11, 2021. https://www.iskconbangalore.co.in/curer-cancer-miracle-shocked-german-doctors/

ISKCON Vaishnava Research Forum. 2012. *“When ISKCON First Came to South Africa.”* Accessed December 19, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/when-iskcon-first-came-to-south-africa,3089/

ISKCON. 2021. *“Cow Protection.”* Accessed February 21, 2021. https://www.iskcon.org/activities/cow-protection.php

ISKCONZA. 2010. *“Beautiful Game, Beautiful Festival – Kesava Krsna dasa.”* Accessed May 6, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2010/05/31/beautiful-game-beautiful-festival-kesava-krsna-dasa/

ISKCONZA. 2011. *“Viewpoint – 10 Spiritually Transmitted Diseases.”* Accessed May 6, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/11/16/viewpoint-10-spiritually-transmitted-diseases-mariana-caplan-ph-d/

ISKCONZA. 2013. *“South Africa Chants, Dances and Feasts with the Hare Krishna’s in Prayer for Nelson Mandela."* Accessed May 6, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2013/12/09/south-africa-chants-dances-and-feasts-with-the-hare-krishnas-in-prayer-for-nelson-mandela/

ISKCONZA. 2014. *“Bhakti Yoga Society wins Most Outstanding Student Society of 2014.”* Accessed May 6, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2014/10/21/bhakti-yoga-society-wins-most-outstanding-student-society-of-2014/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[a]. *“Seven Purposes of ISKCON.”* Accessed May 6, 2020. https://iskconza.com/official-site-of-the-international-society-for-krishna-consciousness-iskcon-the-hare-krishna-movement-in-south-africa/seven-purposes-of-iskcon/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[b]. *“Interview: Gauravani of Mantralogy – Gurunistha dasa.”* Accessed May 9, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2012/01/24/interview-gauravani-of-mantralogy-gurunistha-dasa/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[c]. *"Seven Purposes of ISKCON."* Accessed May 9, 2020. https://iskconza.com/official-site-of-the-international-society-for-krishna-consciousness-iskcon-the-hare-krishna-movement-in-south-africa/seven-purposes-of-iskcon/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[d]. *"What are the benefits of Kirtan?"* Accessed May 9, 2020. https://iskconza.com/chanting/what-are-the-benefits-of-kirtan/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[e]. *"On Campus – Bhakti Yoga Society."* Accessed May 9, 2020. https://iskconza.com/community-programs/university-programs/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[f]. *"On the Strength of Chanting Hare Krishna."* Accessed May 9, 2020. https://iskconza.com/chanting/srila-prabhupada-on-chanting/on-the-strength-of-chanting-hare-krishna/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[g]. *"Food for Life."* Accessed May 10, 2020. https://iskconza.com/community-programs/food-for-life-2/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[h]. *"Bhagavad Gita."* Accessed May 10, 2020. https://iskconza.com/books/bhagavad-gita/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[i]. *"ISKCON Durban."* Accessed May 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/iskcon-temples/iskcon-durban/

Formatted: Italian (Italy)

ISKCONZA. n.d.[j]. "*Krishna Janmastami."* Accessed May 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/community-programs/holy-days/krishna-janmasthami/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[k]. *"They Aim to Please: Dimensions of Service on the Path of Bhakti-yoga – Steven J. Rosen (Satyaraja Dasa)."* Accessed July 4, 2021. https://iskconza.com/2011/03/23/they-aim-to-please-dimensions-of-service-on-the-path-of-bhakti-yoga-steven-j-rosen-satyaraja-dasa/)

ISKCONZA. n.d.[l]. "*Bhaktivedanta Book Trust."* Accessed July 20, 2021. https://iskconza.com/books/bhaktivedanta-book-trust/

ISKCONZA. n.d.[m]. *"Anniversary of Srila Prabhupada's acceptance of sannyasa."* Accessed August 21, 2021. https://iskconza.com/2010/09/23/anniversary-of-srila-prabhupadas-acceptance-of-sannyasa/

Jackson, Richard., and Henrie, Roger. 1983. "Perception of sacred space." *Journal of Cultural Geography* 3:94-107. https://doi.org/10.1080/08873638309478598

Jayadvaita Swami. n.d. "*Why Chant Hare Krishna."* Accessed May 8, 2020. https://iskconza.com/chanting/why-chant-hare-krishna/

Jewitt, Carey. 2012. “An introduction to using video for research.” *National Centre for Research Methods*. Accessed September 20, 2019. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d3ab/7c696a10669fd4ef62c6d50eab64a4375e43.pdf. 1-3.

Jordan, John. 1971. *Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria.* Dublin: Elo.

Joseph Sirgy, M., Gurel-Atay, Eda., Webb, Dave., Cicic, Muris., Husic, Melika., Ekici, Ahmet., Herrmann, Andreas., Hegazy, Ibrahim., Lee, Dong-Jin., and Johar, J. S. 2012. “Linking Advertising, Materialism, and Life Satisfaction.” *Social Indicators Research* 107(1):79-101. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41427023

Karapanagiotis, Nicole. 2018. “Of Digital Images and Digital Media: Approaches to Marketing in American ISKCON.” *Nova Religio* 21(3):74-102. https://online.ucpress.edu/nr/article-abstract/21/3/74/71045/Of-Digital-Images-and-Digital-MediaApproaches-to?redirectedFrom=fulltext

Karnamrita Das. n.d.[a]. *“We Love Krishna, Therefore We Are: The Importance of Serving with Affection part 2.”* Accessed May 8, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/10/23/we-love-krishna-therefore-we-are-the-importance-of-serving-with-affection-part-2-karnamrita-das/

Karnamrita Das. n.d.[b]. *“The Problem with the World: Selfishness*.” Accessed April 2, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2012/01/15/the-problem-with-the-world-selfishness-karnamrita-das/

Kaufman, Whitley. 2005. “Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil.” *Philosophy East and West* 55(1):15-32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4487934

Keane, Webb. 1997. “Religious Language.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26:47-71. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2952514

Keshava Krishna Das. 2013. *“Durban Ratha-Yatra – Making ISKCON Relevant.”* Accessed April 2, 2020. https://iskconnews.org/durban-ratha-yatra-making-iskcon-relevant,3796/

khanpadawan. “4a Hindu doctrines, schools, and history – Brahman, atman, and reincarnation.” YouTube video, March 8, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx9eKZmKb7s

King, Anne. 2012. “Krishna’s Cows: ISKCON’s Animal Theology and Practice.” *Journal of Animal Ethics* 2(2):179-204. https://doi.org/10.5406/janimalethics.2.2.0179

Knight, Jonathan T. 2010. “Sing On, Ntsikana: The Story of Christian Music among the Xhosa People of South Africa.” *Musical Offerings* 1(1):21-31. DOI: 10.15385/jmo.2010.1.1.3

Kohnert, Dirk. 2003. “Occult Beliefs, Globalisation and the Quest for Development in African Societies.” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 16(1):27-46. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24764362

Formatted: German (Germany)

Knott, Kim. 2004. “Healing the heart of ISKCON: The place of women.” In *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, edited by Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand, 291-311. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kripamoya Das. 2011. *“Vedic Wisdom: 12 Points of Philosophy.”* Accessed April 5, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/12/11/vedic-wisdom-12-points-of-philosophy-kripamoya-das/

krishna.com. n.d.[a]. *“Abortion.”* Accessed May 28, 2020. http://www.krishna.com/info/abortion

krishna.com. n.d.[b]. *“Sex and Gender Issues: What do the teachings of Krishna consciousness say about gay marriage?”* Accessed April 6, 2020. www.krishna.com/taxonomy/term/2281

krishna.com. n.d.[c]. *“How to control sex desire.”* Accessed May 28, 2020. http://www.krishna.com/how-control-sex-desire

krishna.org. 2011. “*Jesus was an empowered incarnation of Krishna.*” Accessed March 13, 2021. https://krishna.org/you-are-not-eternally-conditioned-you-are-eternally-liberated/

krishna.org. 2021. *“Room Conversation with Scientists (MP3 Audio).”* Accessed May 29, 2020. https://krishna.org/room-conversation-with-scientists-july-2-1974-melbourne-mp3-audio/

krishna.org. n.d.[a]. *“Prabhupada on Abortion.”* Accessed April 1, 2020. https://krishna.org/prabhupada-on-abortion/

krishna.org. n.d.[b]. *“Combination of Male & Female through Marriage.”* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://krishna.org/combination-of-male-female/

krishna.org. n.d.[c]. *“Homosexual Marriages in ISKCON?”* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://krishna.org/homosexual-marriages-in-iskcon-the-ideal-is-the-reality/

krishna.org. n.d.[d]. *“Comments on Homosexuality by Srila Prabhupada.”* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://krishna.org/comments-on-homosexuality-by-srila-prabhupada/

krishna.org. n.d.[e]. *“The Homosexual Appetite of a Man for Another Man is Demoniac.”* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://krishna.org/the-homosexual-appetite-of-a-man-for-another-man-is-demoniac/

Krishna.org. n.d.[f]. *“The Horrible Indian Caste System.”* Accessed December 17, 2020. https://krishna.org/the-horrible-indian-caste-system/

krishna.org. n.d.[g]. *“Eco-Villages.”* Accessed December 17, 2020. https://www.iskcon.org/activities/eco-villages.php

krishna.org. n.d.[h]. “*Modern Education–Making them Demons, That’s All.”* Accessed December 17, 2020. https://krishna.org/modern-education-making-them-demons-thats-all/

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Formatted: German (Germany)

Krishna-kripa Dasa. 2011. *"The Key to Unity in a Rainbow Nation."* Accessed March 10, 2020. https://btg.krishna.com/key-unity-rainbow-nation

Krishnanandini Dasi. 2011. *"Healthy, Loving Marriages in ISKCON."* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://iskconnews.org/healthy-loving-marriages-in-iskcon,2450/

Krumina-Konkova, Solveiga. 1999. "New Religions in Latvia." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 3(1):119-134. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.1999.3.1.119

Kurma Dasa. 2012. *"Why No Onions and Garlic."* Accessed April 13, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2012/01/24/why-no-onions-and-garlic-kurma-dasa/

Lake, Nadine Catherine. 2017. "Corrective rape and black lesbian sexualities in contemporary South African cultural texts." PhD diss., University of the Free State.

Lappeman, James., Egan, Paul., Rightford, Gillian., and Ramogase, Thabang. 2021. *Marketing to South African Consumers.* Cape Town: UCT Liberty Institute of Strategic Marketing and UCT Libraries.

Lerche, Ian. 2001. "Natural and Anthropogenic Environmental Problems." *Energy & Environment* 12(1):73-88. DOI: 10.1007/3-540-29709-X_1

Leuba, James. 1916. *The Belief in God and Immortality: A Psychological, Anthropological, and Statistical Study*. Boston: Sherman, French, and Company.

Liebig, Brigitte., Gottschall, Karin., and Sauer, Birgit. 2016. "Gender equality: Policies and practices in Switzerland." In *Gender Equality in Context*, edited by Brigitte Liebig, Karin Gottschall, and Birgit Sauer, 21-42. Germany: Barbara Budrich.

Linshi, Jack. 2015. *"Here's What Stephen Fry Would Say to God."* Accessed March 11, 2021. https://time.com/3691225/stephen-fry-god/

Loobuyck, Patrick. 2017. "Neutrality and impartiality in RE: an impossible aim?" *British Journal of Religious Education* 39(1):1-6. https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2016.1218219

Lorenz, Ekkehard. 2004. "The Guru, Mayavadins, and Women: Tracing the Origins of Selected Polemical Statements in the Work of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami." In *The Hare Krishna movement: the postcharismatic fate of a religious transplant*, edited by Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand, 112-128. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mangcu, Xolela. 2012. "African Modernity and the Struggle for People's Power: From Protest and Mobilization to Community." *The Good Society* 21(2):279-299. DOI:10.5325/goodsociety.21.2.0279

Formatted: German (Germany)

Lycan, William G. 2013. “Is property dualism better off than substance dualism?” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 164(2):533-542. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41932742

Lynch, Gordon. 2005. *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Mackie, John Leslie. 1955. “Evil and Omnipotence.” *Mind, New Series* 64(254):200-212. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2251467

Macleod, Catriona., Sigcau, Nomakhosi., and Luwaca, Pumeza. 2011. “Culture as a Discursive Resource Opposing Legal Abortion.” *Critical Public Health* 21(2):237–245. DOI: 10.1080/09581596.2010.492211

Madhudvisa Dasa. n.d.[a]. *“The Spirit of Bhagavad Gita.”* Accessed April 19, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/01/14/the-spirit-of-bhagavad-gita/

Madhudvisa Dasa. n.d.[b]. *“Our Opinion on Homosexuality?”* Accessed May 29, 2020. https://krishna.org/our-opinion-on-homosexuality/

Madhudvisa Dasa. n.d.[c]. *“Modern Day Miracles–Jesus Christ, God, and PRABHUPADA are NOT Dead!”* Accessed June 6, 2021. https://krishna.org/modern-day-miracles-jesus-christ-god-and-prabhupada-are-not-dead/

Magesa, Laurenti. 1997. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life.* New York: Orbis Books.

Mbalazi, Chrispin., Mushishi, Clifford., and Ramokhoro, Litelu. 2000. “Religion and National Space: Defining National Sacred Space in Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Zambia.” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 13(1/2):123-141. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24764044

McBrayer, Justin., and Howard-Snyder, Daniel. 2014. *The Blackwell Companion to The Problem of Evil.* Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.

McGrew, Timothy. 2010. *“Miracles.”* Accessed February 11, 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/miracles/

Meier, Ann. 2003. “Adolescents' Transition to First Intercourse, Religiosity, and Attitudes about Sex.” *Social Forces* 81(3):1031-1052. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3598185

Meister, Chad., and Dew, James. 2017. *God and the Problem of Evil: Five Views.* Westmont: InterVarsity Press.

Melton, John Gordon. 1993. “Another Look at New Religions.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 52:97-112. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1048679

Formatted: Italian (Italy)

Formatted: Italian (Italy)

Formatted: Italian (Italy)

Melton, John Gordon. 2001. “The Fate of NRMs and their Detractors in Twenty-first Century America.” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4(2):241-248. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2001.4.2.241

Melton, John Gordon. 2004. “Perspective: Toward a Definition of “New Religion.”” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 8(1):73-87. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2004.8.1.73

Messer-Davidow, Ellen. 2002. *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mildenberger, Carl D. 2013. “Introducing Moral Evil and Natural Evil.” In *Economics and Social Conflict*, edited by Carl D. Mildenberger, 8-33. New York: Springer.

Moberg, Marcus. 2009. *Faster for the Master! Exploring Issues of Religious Expression and Alternative Christian Identity within the Finnish Christian Metal Music Scene.* Turku: Åbo Akademi University Press.

Moder, Ally. 2019. “Women, Personhood, and the Male God: A Feminist Critique of Patriarchal Concepts of God in View of Domestic Abuse.” *Feminist Theology* 28(1):85-103. https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735019859471

Moore, Elizabeth., Wilkie, William., and Lutz, Richard. 2002. “Passing the Torch: Intergenerational Influences as a Source of Brand Equity.” *Journal of Marketing* 66:17-37. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3203413

Morely, Brian. n.d. *“Western Concepts of God.”* Accessed June 16, 2020. https://iep.utm.edu/god-west/

Morriston, Wes. 2012. “God and the ontological foundation of morality.” *Religious Studies* 48(1):15-34. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41349066

Mosley, Elizabeth., King, Elizabeth., Schulz, Amy., Harris, Lisa., De Wet, Nicole., and Andersonb, Barbara. 2017. “Abortion attitudes among South Africans: findings from the 2013 social attitudes survey.” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 19(8): 918-933. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2016.1272715

Mukunda Goswami. 2011. *“Environmental Pollution is a Spiritual Problem.”* Accessed February 8, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/environmental-pollution-is-a-spiritual-problem,2604/

Murphy, Séamus. 1995. “Marriage and Divorce: In Support of Marriage.” *An Irish Quarterly Review* 84(335):239-246. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30091133

Nadkarni, M. V. 2021. *The Bhagavad-Gita for the Modern Reader: History, Interpretations and Philosophy*. India: Routledge India.

Nanda Kishor Das. 2014. *"Bhakti Yoga Society Wins 'Most Outstanding Student Society of 2014' at Top African University."* Accessed August 21, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/bhakti-yoga-society-wins-most-outstanding-student-society-of-2014-at-top-african-university,4655/

Nanda Kishor Das. 2015. *"ISKCON South Africa 2014 Annual Report."* Accessed June 7, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2015/04/12/iskcon-south-africa-2014-annual-report/

Nanda Kumar Das. 2011. *"Blood, Sweat and Tears."* Accessed June 4, 2021. https://iskconza.com/2011/10/10/bloodsweat-and-tears-nanda-kumar-das/

Nicolle. 2019. *"Durban Diwali Festival."* Accessed August 21, 2021. https://www.ilovedurban.co.za/durban-diwali-festival/

Nikunja Vilasini Devi Dasi. 2015. *"The Sun Behind the Rainbow."* Accessed June 1, 2020. http://btg.krishna.com/sun-behind-rainbow

Oliver, Willem., and Oliver, Erna. 2019. "God as One." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1). https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/4959

Palmer, Susan. 2003. "Women in New Religious Movements" In *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, edited by James R. Lewis, 378-385. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pandita Dasa, Dhananjaya. n.d. *""God"—An Objective Fact?"* Accessed April 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/q-a/god-an-objective-fact/

Papineau, David. 2007. *"Naturalism."* Accessed June 5, 2021. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/naturalism/

Pavanesana Dasa. n.d. *"Reincarnation."* Accessed April 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/q-a/reincarnation/

Pearson, Jonanne. 2002. *Belief Beyond Boundaries: Wicca, Celtic Spirituality and the New Age*. Fanham: Ashgate Publishing.

Perelli-Harris, Brienna., Sigle-Rushton, Wendy., Kreyenfeld, Michaela., Lappegård, Trude., Keizer, Renske., and Berghammer, Caroline. 2010. "The educational gradient of childbearing within cohabitation in Europe." *Population and Development Review* 36(4):775-801. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25749225

Pew Research Center. 2015. *"Chapter 1: Importance of Religion and Religious Beliefs."* Accessed August 19, 2020. https://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/chapter-1-importance-of-religion-and-religious-beliefs/#belief-in-god

Pew Research Center. 2020. *"The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists."* Accessed May 29, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/

Formatted: Italian (Italy)

Pew Research Center. n.d.[a]. "*Frequency of Reading Scripture.*" Accessed August 19, 2020. https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/frequency-of-reading-scripture/

Pew Research Center. n.d.[b]. *"Views about homosexuality among Christians."* Accessed May 29, 2020. https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/christians/christian/views-about-homosexuality/

Pillay, Kavitha. 2017. "*Festival of lights: Celebrate Diwali in SA and beyond."* Accessed August 21, 2021. https://www.news24.com/news24/travel/festival-of-lights-celebrate-diwali-in-sa-and-beyond-20171011

Posel, Deborah. 2010. "Races to consume: revisiting South Africa's history of race, consumption and the struggle for freedom." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33(2):157-175. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870903428505

Pratap Kumar, P. 2009. "The Hare Krishnas in Durban : transmitting religious ideas in a modern city." *Nidan: International Journal for Indian Studies* 21(1):92-109. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC84455

Priyanka. 2014. *"Miracles happen."* Accessed June 6, 2021. https://www.iskconbookdistribution.com/miracles-happen/

Provine, William. 1988. *"Scientists, Face it! Science and Religion are Incompatible."* Accessed July 3, 2020. https://www.the-scientist.com/opinion-old/scientists-face-it-science-and-religion-are-incompatible-62695

Pure Bhakti n.d. *"Life of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu."* Accessed August 23,2021. https://www.purebhakti.com/mission/bhakti-is-love/799-life-of-sri-chaitanya-mahaprabhu

Puttick, Elizabeth. 1999. *Women in New Religious Movements*. London: Routledge.

Quine, Willard Van Roman. 1995. "Naturalism; or, Living within One's Means." *Dialectica* 49(2/4):251-261. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42970677

Ravindra-svarupa Dasa. n.d. *"Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?"* Accessed May 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/q-a/do-bad-things-happen-to-good-people/

Reimer, Johannes. 2019. "Trinitarian spirituality: Relational and missional." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1). http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0259-94222019000100031

Reinke, Jens. 2020. "The Buddha in Bronkhorstspruit: The Transnational Spread of the Taiwanese Buddhist Order Fo Guang Shan to South Africa*" Contemporary Buddhism*. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2020.1723286

Rivard, Ry. 2009. *This Farm is Dedicated to Happy Cows, Not Happy Meals.* Accessed February 21, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/this-farm-is-dedicated-to-happy-cows-not-happy-meals,1367/

Robbins, Thomas., and Bromley, David G. 1993. "New Religious Movements in the United States." *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 38(83):91-106. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30129726

Robbins, Thomas. 2001. "Introduction: Alternative Religions, the State, and the Globe." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4(2):172-186. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2001.4.2.172

Robbins, Thomas, 2005. "Perspective New Religions and Alternative Religions." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 8(3):104-111. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2005.8.3.104

Roberts, James., and Clement, Aimee. 2007. "Materialism and Satisfaction with Over-All Quality of life and Eight Life Domains." *Social Indicators Research* 82(1):79-92. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20734447

Robinson, Howard. 2003. *"Dualism."* Accessed June 15, 2020. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/

Rochford, E. Burke. 2007. "The Politics of Gender within the Hare Krishna Movement." In *Hare Krishna Transformed,* edited by E. Burke Rochford, 116-140. New York: New York University Press.

Ronquest-Ross, Lisa-Claire., Vink, Nick., and Sigge, Gunnar. 2015. "Food consumption changes in South Africa since 1994." *South African Journal of Science* 111(9/10):1-12. https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2015/20140354

Rosen, Steven. 2017. *Sri Chaitanya's Life and Teachings: The Golden Avatara of Divine Love.* United States: Lexington Books.

Rousseau, Jacques. 2014. *"Agnosticism vs atheism, redux."* Accessed August 17, 2020. https://skepticink.com/freesociety/agnosticism-vs-atheism-redux/

Ruse, Michael., and Wilson, Edward. 1989. "The Evolution of Morals." In *The Philosophy of Biology,* edited by Michael Ruse. New York: Macmillan.

Ryan, Lisa., and Dziurawiec, Suzanne. 2001. "Materialism and Its Relationship to Life Satisfaction." *Social Indicators Research* 55(2):185-197. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27526951

Saccidananda Bhaktivinoda Thakura. 1897. *Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu: His Life and Precepts.* India: Gaudiya Press.

Sacinandana Swami. 2012. *"The One Thing that Changes Everything – A New Year's Message."* Accessed June 11, 2021. https://iskconza.com/2012/01/05/the-one-thing-that-changes-everything-a-new-years-message-sacinandana-swami/

Sadaputa Dasa. n.d. *"The Miracle of the Milk."* Accessed June 6, 2021. http://www.krishna.com/miracle-milk

Sadhana - The Inward Path. "ISKCON Cape Town." YouTube video, November 16, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1x0HCAHjEE

sahistory.org. 2014. *"The History of LGBT legislation."* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-lgbt-legislation

Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami. 2011. *"Srila Prabhupada's Presentation of Srimati Radharani."* Accessed May 17, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/09/05/srila-prabhupadas-presentation-of-srimati-radharani-satsvarupa-dasa-goswami/

Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami. n.d.[a]. *"All Problems Solved by Krsna Consciousness?"* Accessed May 8, 2020. https://iskconza.com/q-a/all-problems-solved-by-krsna-consciousness/

Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami. n.d.[b]. *"Nature, God and Us."* Accessed February 9, 2021. http://www.krishna.com/taxonomy/term/88

Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami. n.d.[c]. *"Save Earth Now."* Accessed February 10, 2021. www.krishna.com/taxonomy/term/88

Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami. n.d.[d]. *"The Power of Prayer."* Accessed July 18, 2021. http://www.krishna.com/power-prayer

Satyaraja Dasa. 2011. *"They Aim to Please: Dimensions of Service on the Path of Bhakti-yoga."* Accessed May 8, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/03/23/they-aim-to-please-dimensions-of-service-on-the-path-of-bhakti-yoga-steven-j-rosen-satyaraja-dasa/

Shaunaka Rishi Dasa. n.d. *"Jesus through Vaishnava Eyes."* Accessed February 22, 2021. https://www.utahkrishnas.org/jesus-through-vaishnava-eyes/

Schiffman, Leon., and Kanuk, Leslie. 2006. *Consumer Behavior, 9th edition*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Schoeman, Willem J. 2017. "South African religious demography: The 2013 General Household Survey." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(2):1-7. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i2.3837

Schoen, Brigitte. 2001. "New Religions in Germany: The Publicity of the Public Square." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 4(2):266-274. https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2001.4.2.266

Sherkat, Darren. 2015. “Religiosity.” In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Second Edition), edited by James D. Wright, 377-380. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

Shri Radha Krishna. 2017. *“Why is Krishna blue?”* Accessed April 15, 2021. https://krishnablog.github.io/why-is-krishna-blue

Shterin, Marat. 2000. “New Religious Movements in Russia in the 1990s.” In *Religious Transition in Russia*, edited by Matti Kotiranta. Helsinki: Alexander Institute.

Skirry, Justin. n.d. *“René Descartes: The Mind-Body Distinction.*” Accessed March 12, 2020. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dualism/

Smart, Ninian. 1992. *The World’s Religions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, Christian. 2017. “What Is Religion’s Future?” In *Religion Book: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters*, edited by Christian Smith, 234-261. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Smullen, Madhava. 2009. *“Interview: The Darwin Delusion.”* Accessed August 18, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/interview-the-darwin-delusion,973/

Smullen, Madhava. 2010[a]. *“Hare Krishna Cook Plans Fast Food Chain With A Difference.”* Accessed February 18, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/hare-krishna-cook-plans-fast-food-chain-with-a-difference,1916/

Smullen, Madhava. 2010[b]. *“Krishna Valley Teaches Sustainable Living to Thousands.”* Accessed June 6, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/krishna-valley-teaches-sustainable-living-to-thousands,2118/

Smullen, Madhava. 2015. *“ISKCON South Africa Reports a Year of Inspiring Achievements.”* Accessed June 4, 2020. https://iskconnews.org/iskcon-south-africa-reports-a-year-of-inspiring-achievements,4947/

Smullen, Madhava. 2017[a]. *“Johannesburg Brahmacharis Reach Out To Townships.”* Accessed June 2, 2020. https://iskconnews.org/johannesburg-brahmacharis-reach-out-to-townships,6192/

Smullen, Madhava. 2017[b]. *“Isopanisad’s Message of Care For Earth Shared at D.C. Climate March.”* Accessed January 23, 2021. https://iskconnews.org/isopanisads-message-of-care-for-earth-shared-at-dc-climate-march,6153/

Song, Lichao. 2010. “The Role of Context in Discourse Analysis.” *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 1:876-879. doi:10.4304/jltr.1.6.876-879

Sooklal, Anil. 1987. “The Hare Krishna Movement in South Africa.” *Religion in Southern Africa* 8(2):19-39. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24763812

South African Government. 2020. *“Terminate pregnancy.”* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://www.gov.za/services/birth/terminate-pregnancy

South African Government. 2021. *“How to get a divorce.”* Accessed July 26, 2021 https://www.gov.za/services-residents/relationships/marriage/how-get-divorce

srila-bhaktivinoda-thakura. 2021. “*Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu: His Life and Precepts.”* Accessed May 11, 2020. https://krishna.org/sri-caitanya-mahaprabhu-his-life-and-precepts/

Srila Prabhupada. 1974. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam: With a Short Life Sketch of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the Ideal Preacher of Bhāgavata-dharma, and the Original Sanskrit Text, Its Roman Transliteration, Synonyms, Translation and Elaborate Purports, Volume 3, Part 3.* Alachua: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Srila Prabhupada. 1989. *Bhagavad-gita As It Is.* Alachua: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Srila Prabhupada. 1992. *Srila Prabhupada Siksmrta: Nectarian Instructions from the Letters of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.* Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta.

Srila Prabhupada. 2018. *Basics of Bhagavad-gita: A Thematic Study of Bhagavad Gita.* Alachua: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

Srila Prabhupada. n.d. *“A Manifesto of Krishna Consciousness.”* Accessed May 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/chanting/srila-prabhupada-on-chanting/a-manifesto-of-krishna-consciousness/

Stark, Rodney. 1963. “On the Incompatibility of Religion and Science: A Survey of American Graduate Students.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 3:3-20. https://doi.org/10.2307/1385002

Stark, Rodney., and Finke, Roger. 2000. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Statista. 2021. *“South Africa: Urbanization from 2010 to 2020.”* Accessed August 20, 2020. https://www.statista.com/statistics/455931/urbanization-in-south-africa/

Statistics South Africa., and Maluleke, Risenga. 2019. *Inequality Trends in South Africa: A multidimensional diagnostic of inequality*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa,

Stats SA. 2019. *“Five Facts About Poverty in South Africa.”* Accessed June 3, 2020. http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=12075

Stats SA. 2020. *"South Africa's Poor Little Children."* Accessed June 3, 2020. http://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=13422

Steinrucken, John D. 2010. *"Secularism's ongoing debt to Christianity*." Accessed August 23, 2021. https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2010/03/secularisms_ongoing_debt_to_ch.html

Stenmark, Mikael. 1997. "What Is Scientism?" *Religious Studies* 33(1):15-32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20008069

Steyn, Chrissie. 1994[a]. "The New Age Movement in South Africa." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 7(2):83-106. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24764191

Steyn, Chrissie. 1994[b]. *Worldviews in transition: An investigation into the New Age movement in South Africa (Studia originalia).* Cape Town: University of South Africa.

Steyn, Corine. 2018. *Overview of the South African Red Meat Industry*. PDF.

Stoljar, Daniel. 2001. "*Physicalism."* Accessed June 16, 2020. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/physicalism/

Strenski, Ivan. 2015. *Understanding Theories of Religion*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.

Sudharma, Dasi. 2000. "Presentation by Sudharma Dasi." *ISKCON Communications Journal* 8(1):13-16. https://www.academia.edu/39617116/ISKCON_Comunitation_Journal

Suhotra Swami. n.d. *"Freedom."* Accessed April 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2013/07/10/freedom/

Thiel, John. 2002. *God, Evil, and Innocent Suffering: A Theological Reflection.* Chestnut Ridge: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

Thompson, Craig. 1996. "Caring Consumers: Gendered Consumption Meanings and the Juggling Lifestyle." *Journal of Consumer Research* 22:388-407. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2489789

Thompson, Craig., and Haytko, Diana. 1997. "Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings." *Journal of Consumer Research* 24:15-42. https://doi.org/10.1086/209491

Thompson, John. 1987. "*SCRUTINY*." Accessed August 17. 2021. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1987/2/19/scrutiny-pbcboming-off-copley-streets-opulent/

Tibetan Buddhist Encyclopedia. 2014. *"Eight primary Siddhis".* Accessed August 21, 2021. http://tibetanbuddhistencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Eight_primary_Siddhis

Times Live. 2017. *"35 titillating stats about South Africans' sex lives."* Accessed July 27, 2020. https://www.timeslive.co.za/sunday-times/lifestyle/health-and-sex/2017-11-04-35-titillating-stats-about-south-africans-sex-lives/

Treiman, Donald. 2005. "The Legacy of Apartheid: Racial Inequalities in the New South Africa." In *Ethnic Minority Disadvantage in Cross-national Perspective*, edited by Anthony Heath and Sin-Yi Cheung. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Twenge, Jean., Sherman, Ryne., and Wells, Brooke. 2015. "Changes in American Adults' Sexual Behavior and Attitudes, 1972–2012." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 44:2273-2285. DOI: 10.1007/s10508-015-0540-2

Tweyman, Stanley. 1996. *Hume on Miracles*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press.

Urban, Hugh. 2015. "ISKCON (Hare Krishna): Eastern Religions in America and the "Brainwashing" Debate." In *New Age, Neopagan, and New Religious Movements: Alternative Spirituality in Contemporary America*, edited by Hugh Urban, 201-220. Berkley: University of California Press.

Urmila Dasi. 2012. *"What Is ISKCON? Who Is a Member of ISKCON?"* Accessed June 2, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2012/01/31/what-is-iskcon-who-is-a-member-of-iskcon-urmila-dasi/

Vallicella, William. 2006. *"Divine Simplicity."* Accessed June 16, 2020. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/divine-simplicity/

Vande Berg, Travis., and Kniss, Fred. 2008. "ISKCON and Immigrants: The Rise, Decline, and Rise Again of a New Religious Movement." *The Sociological Quarterly* 49(1):79-104. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40220058

Van Huyssteen, Wentzel., Gregersen, Niels Henrik., Howell, Nancy R., and Wildman, Wesley. 2003. *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion.* New York: Macmillan Publishers.

Van Inwagen, Peter. 2008. *The Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Varga Christine. 2002. "Pregnancy Termination among South African Adolescents." *Studies in Family Planning* 33(4):283-298. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3181091

Venkatesananda, Swami. 2010. *The Concise Srimad Bhagavatam*. New York: SUNY Press.

Verhoef, Anné H. 2019. "Post-structuralism and the Trinity: A reading of The Brand New Testament." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(1):1-8. DOI:10.4102/HTS.V75I1.5403

Visakha, Devi Dasi., and Sudharma, Dasi. 2000. "Women in ISKCON: Presentations to the GBC, March 2000." *ISKCON Communications Journal* 8(1):1-4. https://www.cesnur.org/2006/sd_burke.htm

Vishakha Devi Dasi. 2011. *"Money, Krishna, and Us."* Accessed June 11, 2020. https://iskconza.com/2011/09/03/money-krishna-and-us-vishakha-devi-dasi/

Wallace, Dale. 2006. "The construction and articulation of a pagan identity in South Africa: a study of the nature and implications of a contested religious identity in a pluralistic society." PhD diss., University of Kwazulu-Natal. https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/handle/10413/7820

Wallendorf, Melanie., and Arnould, Eric. 1988. "'My Favorite Things': A Cross-Cultural Inquiry into Object Attachment, Possessiveness, and Social Linkage." *Journal of Consumer Research* 14:531-547. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2489159

Wallendorf, Melanie. 2001. "Literally Literacy." *Journal of Consumer Research* 27:505-511. https://doi.org/10.1086/319625

Walter, Tony., and Waterhouse, Helen. 1999. "A Very Private Belief: Reincarnation in Contemporary England." *Sociology of Religion* 60(2):187-197. https://doi.org/10.2307/3711748

Ward, Keith. 2002. *God, A Guide for the Perplexed.* London: Oneworld Publications.

Warner, Jennifer. 2006. *"Premarital Sex the Norm in America."* Accessed June 8, 2020. https://www.webmd.com/sex-relationships/news/20061220/premarital-sex-the-norm-in-america

westerncape.gov.za. n.d. *"South African Food-Based Dietary Guidelines 2012."* Accessed May 10, 2020. https://www.westerncape.gov.za/westerncape-on-wellness/south-african-food-based-dietary-guidelines-2012

Wheeler, Stephanie., Zullig, Leah., Reeve, Bryce., Buga, Geoffrey., and Morroni Chelsea. 2012. "Attitudes and Intentions regarding Abortion Provision among Medical School Students in South Africa." *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 38(3):154-163. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23317668

Whitworth, John., and Shiels, Martin. 1982. "From Across the Black Water: Two Imported Varieties of Hinduism; the Hare Krishnas and the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society." In *New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society*, edited by Eileen Barker. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.

Wittenberg, Martin. 2017. "Wages and Wage Inequality in South Africa 1994–2011: Part 2–Inequality Measurement and Trends." *South African Journal of Economics* 85(2):298-318. https://doi.org/10.1111/saje.12147

Zablocki, Benjamin., and Robbins, Thomas. 2001. *Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Zeller, Benjamin. n.d.[a]. *"Religion Library ISKCON: Gender and Sexuality."* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://www.patheos.com/library/iskcon-hare-krishna/ethics-morality-community/gender-and-sexuality

Zeller, Benjamin. n.d.[b]. "*Religion Library ISKCON: Rituals and Worship."* Accessed May 28, 2020. https://www.patheos.com/library/iskcon-hare-krishna/ritual-worship-devotion-symbolism/sacred-space