

The Hare Krishnas, The Second Commandment, And Me

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.” (Exod. 20:4-5)



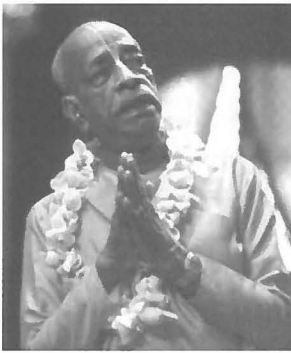
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INTRODUCTION

Sharp-edged shadows, October evening, clear, crisp. Kansas City Saturday on the Plaza. Northwest corner of 47th Street and Broadway Boulevard. Danavir Goswami, President of Kansas City's Rupangura Vedic College is out with a bunch of young guys, shaved heads, dhotis, out for Kirtan (*kīrtana*), singing chants to Krishna, whom they regard as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The name of the chant they are performing while I pause for a bit to listen was the *māha-mantra*. By now there are a number of versions of that famous chant available, but the one being sung tonight uses the tune from the old Radha Krishna Temple album, produced by Beatle George Harrison, which became a hit on the popular radio for a time in the UK back in 1969. I recognize the tune partly because I used to have the album, back in the early 1970s,

and though most of my readers will not have had that record, they'd probably recognize the tune anyway as that of famous American folk singer Woody Guthrie's classic: "This Land is Your Land." If they go way back, or take a special interest in such things, they may even remember where Woody got it, namely from the Carter Family's song, "When the World's on Fire." I put the words in parallel columns to help my readers envisage how the chant goes:

<i>Māha-mantra.</i>	This Land is Your Land	When the World's on Fire
Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna	This land is your land This land is my land From California	Oh my loving mother When the world's on fire. Don't you want God's bosom
Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare	to the New York island; From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters This land was made For you and Me.	To be your pillow Hide thee over in the rock of ages Rock of ages Cleft for me



To me it's amazing how long the Hare Krishnas themselves can go without recognizing the origin of the tune. Some years ago, at the 2003 meeting of the American Association of Religion in Atlanta, I asked a fairly prominent representative of ISCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness) whether the Krishnas still sang the *māha-mantra* to the tune of *This Land is Your Land*. Obviously puzzled he looked at me and answered: "We never did." So I sang him the first verse of the *māha-mantra* as he nodded in recognition of the fact that what I was singing was the version he knew, until I replaced the concluding "Rama Rama/ Hare Hare," with "This land was made for you and me." He suddenly exclaimed: "It's the tune of *This Land Is Your Land!*" I can't say for sure, but I wouldn't be surprised to hear that A. C.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (d. 1977), the founder of the Hare Krishna movement (hereafter: Prabhupāda), had intentionally taken over the tune of *This Land Is Your Land*, for use in introducing the *māha-mantra* to would-be American converts for the precise reason that that tune had become so deeply rooted in the fabric of American culture.



I sat down and made myself comfortable on the side walk where they were and snapped a few photos of them. I was sort of hoping one or more of them might come over and attempt to share his/their message with me, so that I could share mine with him. Their approach that evening was very direct. What they were doing was passing out little cards with the *māha-mantra* and trying to get people to chant along with them. For them the act of chanting itself is sanctifying and salvific. Prabhupāda explained:

When we chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa [Krishna] *mantra* [i.e., the *māha-mantra*] offenselessly we immediately contact Kṛṣṇa in His

internal energy. Thus we immediately become purified from all the dirty things in our heart.¹

And then later in the same discourse he explains:

Consciousness is already in you, but it is now dirty consciousness. What we have to do now is cleanse our consciousness of all dirty things and make it pure consciousness—Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. And we can easily do this by the pleasant method of chanting the glorious holy name of God: *Hare Kṛṣṇa. Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare / Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.*²

In making these remarks Prabhupāda was simply revealing his spiritual roots in the Vaishnavism of the teaching the 16th century Bhakti Saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1485-1533).³

Chaitanya himself wrote similarly with regard to the chanting of Krishna's name:

Chant the name of the Lord and His Glory unceasingly
That the mirror of the heart may be wiped clean
And quenched that mighty forest fire,
Worldly lust raging within.⁴

Nor is what these guys are doing here tonight, their “evangelistic” strategy of taking *kīrtana* to the streets as a means of spreading their teaching, new either. It goes back to Chaitanya as well.⁵ In an early study of reasons why people joined the Hare Krishna movement, it was

¹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *The Quest for Enlightenment* (Los Angeles, CA: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1997), 2. The remarks were from a talk Prabhupāda gave on 1 Jan 1969.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³ Prabhupāda and his followers actually believe Chaitanya to have been “the Supreme Lord appearing as His own greatest devotee” (Prabhupāda, *Quest for Enlightenment*, 258). Chaitanya was of the same generation as the Protestant Reformer Martin Luther, although the two men would almost certainly never have heard of one another, due the cultural, religious, and language barriers that separated them, to say nothing of the great distance.

⁴ *Vedanta for the Western World* (ed. Christopher Isherwood; New York: Viking, 1960 [Orig. ed. 1945]), 225.

⁵ Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), 101-103.

found that “the most common reason given by devotees for being attracted to the movement was the sound of the *mantra* (58%).”⁶ And before we dismiss what’s going on here tonight we need to consider that many of the most prominent Indologists and experts on Hinduism often with positions in major American universities, started, thirty, forty years ago, doing what these young guys are doing tonight.⁷ When generals study military strategists, they do not restrict themselves only to strategists on their own side. One of the reasons of course is that good strategy often applies regardless of what side you’re on, so in that sense there is much generals can learn from enemy strategists as a way of strengthening their own hands so as to make it more likely that they will be able to defeat their enemies. The other side of the coin is that ignorance of the enemy’s strategies increases the likelihood of his defeating you. It’s all there in the writings of that Ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu:

Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.

When you are ignorant of the enemy but know yourself, your chances of winning or losing are equal.

If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril.⁸

I sometimes ponder what we as Evangelicals can learn from the strategies of Prabhupāda, especially considering his story. Here he was a retired pharmacist who arrived alone in New York City in 1965 at the age of 69. Two years later he suffered a stroke. Altogether he labored for 12 years in the United States and elsewhere, and then died in 1977. In those years he founded an international movement that has influenced literally millions, though sadly in the wrong direction. One of the strategies I am going to promote in this article, one of the strategies I would use on this occasion, is one Prabhupāda himself used,

⁶ Robert D. Baird, “Swami Bhaktivedanta and Ultimacy,” in *Religion in Modern India* (4th rev. ed.; ed. Robert D. Baird; New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 576 n. 3.

⁷ See *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant* (Edwin F. Bryant and Maria L. Ekstrand; New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁸ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (trans. & intro. Samuel B. Griffith; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 84 (3.31-33).

and somewhat ironically, it relates to how he used the Bible in his apologetics. But more on that a bit later.

Eventually one of the guys leaves the line of singers and comes over to me and hands me a little card with the *māha-mantra* on it. I take the card and tell him that there was a time when I would have gladly joined them in chanting, that there was a time that I believed what they believed, but that I did not believe it anymore, because now I was a follower of Jesus. A discussion ensued. He told me that he was from Columbia, Missouri, and that he had become interested in the movement after reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, which had led him to come to Kansas City to study at the Rupangura Vedic College. I told him I thought I had seen some books published by the College, and he responded that indeed they did publish books, that they have a very advanced and distinguished teacher there, by which he meant the President of the College (formally addressed as: His Holiness Danavir Goswami), the guy who they were accompanying that evening.⁹ I asked whether they still distributed Prabhupāda's books. "Oh yes," he said. I asked him if he had read certain ones. "No," he said, "Only his translation of the *Gita*."

"Well there," I said, "I began to have trouble, because of the centrality of bowing down to the images of Krishna and Radha, on the one hand, and Krishna as Jagannatha, his brother Baladeva and sister Subhadra on the other. Prabhupāda and his early followers spent a great deal of time trying to explain why this was not a violation of the second commandment: 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them' (Exod 20:4-5). And for me, the harder they tried to explain why that commandment supposedly didn't apply to worshiping images of Krishna and Jagannatha, the more keenly I felt the force and validity of the commandment."

The reason I mentioned not only Krishna and Radha was because their images are quite human looking, whereas the Jagannatha Trio immediately strike the Western eye as very pagan looking idols. These images are associated with the Jagannath Temple in Puri, India, where every year there is celebrated Ratha-yātrā or the car festival in which the images are taken from the temple and paraded on very large float-

⁹ The title used for him, for example, in *Puranic Cosmology 1* (comp. Śrīla Kṛṣṇa-dvaipāyana Vyāsa; ed. His Holiness Danavir Goswami; Kansas City, MO: Rupanuga Vedic College, 2007).

like, or, better yet, pavilion-like carts. July 9, 1967, saw the first Ratha-yātrā festival in the West, starting at the Krishna Temple at 518 Frederick Street in San Francisco, and running all the way down to the way to the ocean.¹⁰

Despite the glowing descriptions of Jagannatha Trio in some earlier official Hare Krishna sources, I knew how they appeared to most Westerners because I knew how they appeared to me, as rather shocking, horrible idols. Even Satsvarūpa dās Goswami admits initially having a negative reaction to the Jagannatha image the first time he saw it:

Someone said that Lord Jagannatha had arrived and was in Prabhupada's room...so I went upstairs, and there was Lord Jagannatha, a three-foot-tall, black-faced, round-eyed, smiling Deity. Unfortunately, my first impression was one of resentment. Why did we have to worship such a strange form of God?...why did we now have to worship Lord Jagannatha? We had been doing fine with pictures of Kṛṣṇa as youthful, attractive Govinda holding a flute and standing in a threefold-bending form beside Srimati Radharani and a cow. Why go from that to this primitive form of Jagannatha?"¹¹

While never completely absent, concerns over the legitimacy of worshipping graven images was perhaps (and I suspect still is) most keenly felt in the context of Ratha-yātrā, when Krishna as Jagannath, his brother Baladeva and sister Subhadra are worshipped in the form of these crude stereotypically idol-like figures. It was in any case in that context that the most memorable and energetic attempts I encountered to defuse second-commandment concerns were expressed. They occurred, in particular, in the 1 July 1975 issue of ISCON's official *Back to Godhead* magazine, to which I then subscribed. The cover story and much of the issue was taken up with Ratha-yātrā which was to be celebrated on 10 July that year.¹² The main article explaining and

¹⁰ Satsvarūpa dās Goswami, Śrīla Prabhupada-lilāmṛta: *A Biography of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda* (6 vols.; Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1980-1983) 3:153-58; Also *idem*, *Your Ever Well-Wisher* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1983), 122-25. The latter title represents a one-volume abridgement of the former.

¹¹ Satsvarūpa dās Goswami, "Kindly be Visible," *Back to Godhead* 23.8 (Aug 1988): 7, repr. in *Back to Godhead* 3.27 (June 2006): 17-19, 28.

¹² See, "Kṛṣṇa Conscious Calendar," *Back to Godhead* 10.7 (July 1, 1975): 18.

significance of the festival opens with a brief apologetic for the worship of images:

God's energy is everywhere. God is not different from His energy just as the sun is not different from the sunshine; therefore it is correct to say that God, in His energy, is everywhere. However, it is not possible for us to establish an intimate relationship with this impersonal, all-pervasive aspect of God. Therefore, to enable us to relate to Him personally, God, the Supreme Person, descends to the material world in the authorized form of the Deity.¹³



R.-L. Jagannatha, Subhadra, Baladeva, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

The standard argument given for the worship of images was then articulated in the same magazine in an article dedicated to the question, entitled: "Whose Worship is Idol Worship?" by Jayādvaīta dāsa, which attempts to face the second-commandment problem head on by acknowledging that there are those who "hesitate to join the Ratha-yātrā parade, for they remember that God is 'a jealous God' who commands, 'Thou shalt have no other God before Me' and 'Thou shalt not worship a graven image.' What about this? Are the Hare Kṛṣṇa people really idol worshippers?"¹⁴ Not surprisingly, the author insists that they are not. His argument, which is the basic argument Prabhupāda always used when challenged on this, was that the second commandment only applied to worshipping images having their origin in the human imagination, and not in "authorized" images based on the Scripture. Authorized images are not idols, they are actually the gods

¹³ Viśākhā-devī dasī, "Ratha-yātrā: An Ancient Festival Comes to the West," *Back to Godhead* 10.7 (July 1, 1975): 7.

¹⁴ Jayādvaīta dāsa, "Whose Worship is Idol Worship?" *Back to Godhead* 10.7 (July 1, 1975): 14.

themselves. The point is made as well by Prabhupāda himself in the context of his being interviewed about the views of Immanuel Kant:¹⁵

Hayagrīva Dāsa: Kant rejected church-going as a means to salvation. He says that, “sensuous representations of God are contrary to the command of reason. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image,” etc.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: If someone imagines an image, that is not good. An image arises from the imagination. However, it is different to keep a photograph of your beloved. The photograph of your beloved is not imaginary. It is a fact.

One of Prabhupāda’s favorite analogies when describing the identity of the graven image of Krishna or Jagannatha and the god they both represent, is the letter box. One of the clearest expositions of this is found in the “Purport” he attaches to his translation of *Bhagavad Gita* 12:5, which also expounds on the reason he believes images are necessary:

The individual soul is embodied since time immemorial. It is very difficult for him to simply theoretically understand that he is not the body. Therefore, the *bhakti-yogī* accepts the Deity of Kṛṣṇa as worshipable because there is some bodily conception fixed in the mind, which can thus be applied. Of course, worship of the Supreme Personality of Godhead in His form within the temple is not idol worship. There is evidence in the Vedic literature that worship may be *saguṇa* or *nirguṇa* – of the Supreme possessing or not possessing attributes. Worship of the Deity in the temple is *saguṇa* worship, for the Lord is represented by material qualities. But the form of the Lord, though represented by material qualities such as stone, wood or oil paint, is not actually material. That is the absolute nature of the Supreme Lord.

A crude example may be given here. We may find some mailboxes on the street, and if we post our letters in those boxes, they will naturally go to their destination without difficulty. But any old box, or an imitation which we may find

¹⁵ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *Dialectic Spiritualism: A Vedic View of Western Philosophy* (Moundsville, WV: Prabhupada Books, 1985), 255.

somewhere but which is not authorized by the post office, will not do the work. Similarly, God has an authorized representation in the Deity form, which is called *arcā-vigraha*. This *arcā-vigraha* is an incarnation of the Supreme Lord. God will accept service through that form. The Lord is omnipotent, all-powerful; therefore, by His incarnation as *arcā-vigraha* He can accept the services of the devotee, just to make it convenient for the man in conditioned life.¹⁶

The *arcā-vigraha*, as he says in another place, “exactly represents the Supreme Lord.” Indeed, “worship of the *arcā-vigraha* is not idol worship. The *arcā-vigraha* is an incarnation of the Lord in a form appreciable by a devotee.”¹⁷

How literally Prabhupāda understood the idea that the image was an actual incarnation of the god is seen in a letter he wrote in 1974 relating to the question of closing a temple. If there is no image there, then fine, but if there is an image, you can't close it:

If there is no Deity, then it doesn't matter. If possible re-open the Hamburg temple and transfer the Deity again and worship. A center without a Deity can be closed, but a center with a Deity if closed it is a great offense. The Deity is not an idol; it is Kṛṣṇa. We cannot say to Kṛṣṇa personally, now go away.¹⁸

This same point was also made very definitively in the 1975 article we were discussing a little while ago: “The reason the Deity is accorded such reverence is that the form of God is God. There is no difference between the form of the Lord and the Lord Himself.”¹⁹

What is interesting to me as I look back on this after more than 35 years is that none of the arguments I have mentioned ended up being definitive in leading me to finally face the fact that the worship of images of Krishna was an act forbidden in the second commandment. Rather, what became decisive was an argument that was more peripheral:

¹⁶ What Prabhupada labeled “Purport,” we would call commentary. This passage can be found in both the complete and the abridged editions of Prabhupada’s *Bhagavad-gītā: As It Is*.

¹⁷ Purport to Prabhupada’s translation of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa)*, 4.12.17 (Online Baktivendanta VedaBase edition).

¹⁸ Prabhupada to Hamsaduta das, 1 Oct 1974 (at prabhupada.blogspot.com).

¹⁹ Jayādvaita dāsa, “Idol Worship?” 16.

Those who are addicted to the idea of a formless, impersonal God object to the worship of the Deity in the temple. "God is everywhere," they say. "Why should we worship Him in the temple?" But if God is everywhere, is He not in the temple also? God is certainly everywhere, but we cannot see Him everywhere. We are all eternal servants of the Lord, but we have forgotten our relationship with Him. Therefore the Lord, by His causeless mercy, appears as the Deity in the temple so that even in this world of material forgetfulness we can see Him and revive our eternal relationship with Him.²⁰

When I read this paragraph all those years ago I took it to mean something like this: Since God is everywhere and in everything, and therefore worshipable in and through everything, how could it be forbidden to worship him in and through an approved image in a temple. As I reflect on the passage now, several decades later, I am not sure I got the author's meaning precisely right. As one reads what follows the author tells us that what actually happens when "a pure devotee paints or carves the form of the Deity," is that Krishna acts upon it and changes matter into spirit.

In fact none of the arguments made by Prabhupāda and his early followers are really able to provide any real confidence to anyone worried that bowing down to Krishna might represent a violation of the second commandment. Even though at the time some of the arguments might have sounded plausible to me, in the end the force of the simple wording of the second commandment itself won out: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." The genius of the commandment, and its salvific usefulness, lies precisely in what it does *not* say. There is nothing there at all to support Prabhupāda's insistence that it only applied to imaginary images of God. There is, in fact, no theological discussion of what the idol is at all. We know from the Apostle Paul that "an idol is nothing in the world" (1 Cor 8:4), but as for the second commandment itself, it does not enter at all into whether an image made with human hands might actually in some sense become a conduit of divine power, or even become that divine power itself. There are occasions when such things happen in the Bible. One example is the

²⁰ Ibid., 19.

bronze serpent God commanded Moses to make when the people were suffering from a plague of snakes:

Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live (Numbers 21:4-9).

Jesus makes reference to this bronze snake in connection with what he himself would accomplish on the cross, when he says: "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The Bible, however, also explicitly addresses the question whether because God himself had commanded the making of the bronze serpent to use as an instrument of his healing power, it was therefore acceptable for the people of Israel to make it an object of worship. And the answer was a very definite no. In fact, the Bible reports that it was because the people began worshipping the bronze serpent that King Hezekiah (with God's explicit approval) had it destroyed:

And he [Hezekiah] *did what was right in the eyes of the LORD*, according to all that David his father had done. He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And *he broke in pieces the bronze serpent* that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan) (2 Kings 18:3-4).

I have not kept close track of the Hare Krishna Movement over the years, but I have noticed that the same sort of arguments are still put forth, as is seen in a 2011 special issue of *Back to Godhead* magazine devoted to the Ratha-yātrā festival, that included an article by Mathureśa Dāsa entitled: "Who is Worshipping an Idol? Idol Worship and Deity Worship—how they are different":

All the material elements are God's energies. He can use them as He likes and appear as He likes. He is omnipotent. For Him

there is no distinction between matter and spirit. One may fashion a deity of wood, stone, clay, or jewels, or the deity may be a painting or a drawing. Mind too is God's subtle material energy, so a mental image of the Lord in line with scripture is also a worshipable deity. The key is that the deity must be a form authorized by scripture, just as a mail box must be authorized by the post office. Dropping your mail in any old box will not do. As each mailbox has the support of the entire postal system, the deity form authorized by the Lord through scripture has the same unlimited potency as the Lord Himself. If service to the deity were material idol worship, as critics say, then the critics' own mental images of God would be idols as well.²¹

In addition, since his death Prabhupāda has been made into an idol himself, *mūrtis* (statues) of him appearing in temples around the world. Indeed, Kimmo Ketola informs us that “in every temple is a seat (*āsana*) for the *mūrti* of Prabhupāda, which is also worshipped by the congregation daily, immediately after the deity greeting. The seat or altar for the wax or brass image of Prabhupāda is usually facing the main altar at the opposite end of the temple room.”²²

One can even purchase one's own 10.5 inch murti of him from KrishnaStore.com for \$63.00, which comes “complete with dhoti, kurta, chadar, neck beads, brahmin thread and bead bag.” When you buy the statue, the advertisement promises,

Srila Prabhupada, in this most beautiful form, will be very happy to appear in your house and accept service from you. If you simply serve Srila Prabhupada in his murti form by cooking nice food and offering it to him, by chanting the Hare Krishna mantra in front of him, by reading his books in front of him, Srila Prabhupada will certainly give you his mercy.

²¹ Mathureśa Dāsa, “Who is Worshipping an Idol? Idol Worship and Deity Worship—How They Are Different,” *Back to Godhead* (Ratha-yātrā Special Issue) [2011]: 5.

²² Kimmo Ketola, *The Founder of the Hare Krishnas As Seen by Devotees: A Cognitive Study of Religious Charisma* (Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions 120; Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008), 93. See examples and further discussion on pp. 103 (fig. 8), 104, 114 (fig 14).

Without the mercy of a pure devotee of Krishna there is no chance of actually advancing in Krishna consciousness. This is the perfect chance to get the mercy of Srila Prabhupada. Simply install the Prabhupada murti in your house and keep him nicely clean and dressed and offer him nice foodstuffs and chant Hare Krishna in front of him and just see how your spiritual life will improve!

When we as Christians encounter a group of chanting Hare Krishna devotees on a crowded downtown street, we should keep in mind that despite the strange clothes, there is actually one point at which they have more in common with us, than we both have with the teeming crowd of shoppers around us, even though the latter look more like us. Hare Krishna devotees not only believe that there is a God, they also believe that they should seek and serve that God above all else. They also have the concept that there are Scriptures, *sāstras*, and that these Scriptures are to be regarded as divine revelation and as such are to be obeyed. In these shared assumptions, Christians and Hare Krishna devotees share a piece of common ground that stands at an almost infinite distance from the great company of self-identified “Spiritual But Not Religious,” non-seekers, who evidence no real hunger for God at all. I am not, of course, saying that all those who view themselves that way have no interest in God, but there is a significant number. I take an example from the November 2013 issue of the Buddhist magazine *Shambhala Sun*, which contains, as its feature article, a piece by Melvin McLeod, the magazine’s editor-in-chief, entitled “Are You Spiritual But Not Religious? 10 Reasons Why Buddhism Will Enrich Your Path.” Reason number 1? “There is no Buddhist God.”²³ There are many different opinions about the Buddha, McLeod tells us, “But one thing is certain: he was not a God, deity, or divine being. His faculties were purely human, any of us can follow his path, and our enlightenment will be exactly the same as his. Ultimately, we are no different from him, and vice versa.” “The Buddhist cosmos is a vast one,” McLeod goes on to say, but, he comfortingly assures his readers, “There is nothing and nobody fundamentally different from or outside of it.”²⁴

On the basis of our common ground with the Krishnas there is at least the possibility of discussion as to *which* Supreme Personality of

²³ Melvin McLeod, “Are You Spiritual But Not Religious? 10 Reasons Why Buddhism Will Enrich Your Path,” *Shambhala Sun* (Nov 2013): 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Godhead and *which* Scriptures tell the true story. Hindu's (which Hare Krishna devotees are) believe something that is ultimately impossible for Christians to do. They feel sure they can affirm both Krishna and Jesus. When it was becoming clear to Danavir Goswami, who was watching over his charges in much the same way as a mother hen watches over her chicks, that I was doing the talking and the devotee most of the listening, he had another devotee hand him a drum and instruct him to rejoin the line. At the same time Danavir offered me another *māha-mantra* card, and urged me to sing along.

"I'm sorry," I said, "But I can't sing those words. I'm a Christian."

"So are we," he said, "We're Christians too."

"No you're not," I said, rather emphatically, and he immediately disengaged. Later, when I approached him to inquire whether I could I could ask him a question, he said I could not. But when I persisted, and asked him if he'd been with the movement since the days of Prabhupāda, he responded: "Yes, and if you want to talk Prabhupāda, you have my ear."

I never asked Danavir Goswami directly why he claimed the Hare Krishnas were Christians, but I think I know. We see the general rational set out in the following paragraph from the May 1976 issue of the official Hare Krishna movement *Back to Godhead* magazine:

God has an unlimited variety of names. Some of them—Jehovah, Adonai, Buddha, and Allah—are familiar to us, while the names of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma may be less so. However, whatever name of God we may accept, all scriptures enjoin us to chant it for spiritual purification. Muhammed counseled, "Glorify the name of your Lord, the most high" (Koran 87.2). Saint Paul said, "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13). Lord Buddha declared, "All who sincerely call upon my name will come to me after death, and I will take them to Paradise" (*Vows of Amida Buddha* 18). King David preached, "From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised" (Psalms 113:3). And the world's oldest scriptures, the *Vedas* of India emphatically state, "Chant the holy name, chant the holy name, chant the holy name of the Lord. In this age of quarrel there is no other way,

no other way, no other way to attain spiritual enlightenment”
(*Bṛhan-nāradiya Purāna*).²⁵

When I first read this there were a number of things I didn’t catch, as for example the fact that the Buddha he refers to is not the Buddha we all think of when we think of the Buddha, not Siddhārtha Gautama Shakyamuni, but was rather Dharmākara as Buddha Amitāba, nor that the final passage quoted was not from the world’s oldest scriptures but was perhaps the latest of all the texts quoted. But more importantly I didn’t really catch that the author of the passage is co-opting statements from other religions and interpreting them from the perspective of what has been called “sonic theology.”²⁶ For Prabhupāda salvation lies in the spiritual energies created in the very process of chanting the divine name. This was dramatically illustrated in his response to a scandal in which Hare Krishna devotees were engaging in dubious practices in Chicago, including pick-pocketing at the airport. Ed Senesi (Jagannath-suta), who had been a prominent Hare Krishna leader and one time editor-in-chief of the movement’s *Back to Godhead* magazine, but who afterward became a Christian, reports writing a letter to Prabhupāda expressing grave concern after a newspaper exposé was done on various corrupt activities of certain Krishna devotees. Prabhupāda’s response, which rested on his view of the purifying power of the name of Krishna, left Senesi completely flabbergasted:

We wrote the guru a letter, back around 1976, saying, “At the airport girls are cheating. While in line they are stealing servicemen’s wallets. All these things are going on. It’s being written up in the papers.” We sent one of the clippings to Swami Bhaktivedanta in India...Well, a letter came back from India. The article we sent was printed in a Chicago newspaper by a syndicated columnist, and all these cases of deceptive solicitation techniques at O’Hare Airport were documented. So he sends a letter back after having read the article, and he says, “This is very good. This man has said ‘Krishna’ many times in his article. Therefore, when people read this article, they will

²⁵ *Back to Godhead* 11.5 (May 1976): 1. The name of the author of this paragraph is not given, but Steve Rosen (Satyarasa Dasa) repeats it almost verbatim in an interview in his book *The Agni and the Ecstasy: Collected Essays of Steven J. Rosen* (forward, Radhanath Swami; n.p.: Arktos, 2012), 258.

²⁶ Steven J. Rosen, *Essential Hinduism* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 219. See as well Ravi Shankar’s comment “Sound is God,” in the Martin Scorsese documentary, *George Harrison: Living in the Material World* (2011), Pt. 1, Sc. 06.

have the name 'Krishna' in their minds, and they will be benefitted and purified. It does not matter good or bad; all we are interested in is having the name of Krishna implanted in people's consciousness, because this will purify them."²⁷

To put the best face on Prabhupāda's answer possible, he might have actually believed that exposure to the positive energy of the divine name was powerful enough to counteract negative energy associated with the fact that it was being printed in the context of telling about a scandal.

"CHRISTOS" AND "KRISHNA" ETYMOLOGICALLY RELATED?

Prabhupāda tended to view Jesus as the son of Kṛṣṇa:

Kṛṣṇa is the father of all living entities. He is not happy that all these souls in the material world are rotting like hogs. Therefore He sends His representatives. In the case of Lord Jesus Christ, Kṛṣṇa sent His son. Lord Jesus claimed to be the son of God. Everyone is a son of God, but this son was an especially favorite son, and he was sent to a particular place to reclaim the conditioned souls back home, back to Godhead.²⁸

Prabupada once even made the entirely erroneous claim that "Christos is the Greek version of the word Kṛṣṇa," and, in the same context, even went on to suggest that "Christ" is the name of God the Father.²⁹

Thirty seven years ago, when I first read the paragraph quoted earlier with its claim that "whatever name of God we may accept, all scriptures enjoin us to chant it for spiritual purification," and its appeal to Paul's "Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved,"

²⁷ "Inside ISKCON [International Society for Krishna Consciousness]," *Forward: The News and Research Periodical of the Christian Research Institute* 4.1 (1981): 11.

²⁸ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *A Second Chance: The Story of a Near-Death Experience* (Los Angeles, CA: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1991), 55.

²⁹ "Kṛṣṇa or Christ: The Name is the Same," *Back to Godhead* 11.3/4 (March/April 1976): 4; Repr. in A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *The Science of Self Realization: Articles from Back to Godhead Magazine* (Los Angeles, CA: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1969-1997), 112. See, further, Baird, "Bhaktivedanta and Ultimacy," 573.

(Romans 10:13),” as the alleged Biblical proof, I was still 4 months from the time Jesus would take hold of me and bring me to himself. Even so I was not very biblically illiterate at the time. I had read the New Testament straight through once and then selected passages and books a number of times. I had even taken two courses on Paul, one on his theology and one on his letters at the Roman Catholic Newman Center associated with the university I was attending. Yet for all that I still could not see through the claim that the gods of the various religions were all the same God, simply referred to under different names. This was after all the era of Cat Stevens’ *Buddha and the Chocolate Box Album* (1974) with its song “Jesus,” the first verse of which began with a reference to Jesus and the second to Buddha, implying, or so it seemed to me, that they were both the same being. Or again there was George Harrison’s hit “My Sweet Lord,” on his first independent album, *All Things Must Pass* (1970), in which the chorus of singers in the background alternate back and forth between singing praises to the Christian God (Hallelujah) and praises to the Hindu gods Krishna, Rama, and so on (“Hare Krishna,” “Hare Rama,” etc.), implying by this back and forth, that both the Christian God and the Hindu gods were all one and thus also all the same “Sweet Lord” George was singing about. I loved both songs and bought into their theology, a theology which by now has become in many quarters something akin to a dogmatic orthodoxy.

At the time I could not put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:13-17), because I didn’t have most of it. As yet no shield of faith, no helmet of salvation. My belt of truth was more like a string or even a thread, and my sword of the spirit (the word of God) was more like the size of a needle that consisted for this particular battle primarily of the second commandment. But even a needle is better than nothing, when you’re faced with a serious threat. My needle saved me from long term bondage under spiritual idolatry. Very seldom do people think of the commandments as protection, but that is precisely what the second commandment represented for me. This is why I am very much in favor of teaching children the Ten Commandments. I learned them by rote as a child, and blessed be God that I did.

In his attempt to bring Vaishnavism to the West, Prabhupāda was frequently forced to attempt to explain away both the second commandment and the exclusive claims of and about Jesus such as Acts 4:12: “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Prabhupada actually knew little of the Bible and he seems to tend to respond to the Christian claims in the same way whenever he

encountered them. His strategy was to try to discredit Christians or at least keep them on the defensive through an appeal to the fifth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exod 20:13) which, he insisted, could only be obeyed by adopting a strict vegetarian diet. Any time anyone tried to help him see the command in the larger context he scornfully brushed them off as pathetic compromisers. He even tried using this technique in conversation with Roman Catholic Cardinal/theologian Jean Danielou:

Śrīla Prabhupāda: Jesus Christ said, “Thou shalt not kill.” So why is it that the Christian people are engaged in animal killing?

Cardinal Danielou: Certainly in Christianity it is forbidden to kill, but we believe that there is a difference between the life of a human being and the life of the beasts. The life of a human being is sacred because man is made in the image of God; therefore, to kill a human being is forbidden.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: But the Bible does not simply say, “Do not kill the human being.” It says broadly, “Thou shalt not kill.”

Cardinal Danielou: We believe that only human life is sacred.

Śrīla Prabhupāda: That is your interpretation. The commandment is “Thou shalt not kill.”³⁰

Notice how in his opening statement Prabhupāda seems to think that this is a commandment of Jesus, not one of the Ten Commandments, and he appears to be completely unaware of the centrality of animal sacrifice in the Jewish Temple, the long descriptive lists describing which animals can and can't be eaten, and so on. To those of his disciples with little knowledge of the Bible the use of this technique by Prabhupāda would make it appear that even a famous theologian like Danielou was no match for him.

³⁰ See a transcript of the exchange in A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *The Science of Self Realization: Articles from Back to Godhead Magazine* (Los Angeles, CA: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1969-1997), 122-123, esp. 122.

One of the most startling passages in which this strategy is used is where Prabhupāda essentially try's to sidestep the implications of the second commandment by an appeal to the fifth commandment:³¹

Rameśvara: "But the Christians say that according to the Bible, if God wanted us to believe in Kṛṣṇa He would have told us on Mount Sinai, and He would have told us through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, 'I am the only way.'"

Prabhupāda: "That's all right. But Jesus Christ did not explain more to you because you are rascals. You cannot follow even his one instruction, 'Thou shalt not kill.' It is not the foolishness of Jesus Christ. But because you [Christians] are so rascal, you cannot understand him. Therefore he avoided you rascals. Because whatever he said, you cannot follow. So what you will understand? Therefore he stopped speaking."

At the time this argument would not have had any teeth in it for me, since I was a vegetarian. After Christ brought me to himself I was a vegetarian for awhile but gave it up after a time after discovering that Prabhupāda's arguments really did not do justice to the teaching of Scripture on the subject. One scripture in particular helped me to see this, namely Romans 14: 2-3:

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

This passage turned the issue entirely on its head. I had been used to thinking it was the person who ate meat that was weak and the one who abstained who was strong. Such a conclusion was, and continues to be, the take on the subject within the Hare Krishna movement, as we read in a 2009 *Back to Godhead* article: "Many Bible scholars persist with the theory that Christ ate animal flesh, obviously swayed in their opinions by personal habits."³² Now, on reading the teaching of

³¹ Satsvarūpa dās Goswami, Śrīla Prabhupada-lilāmṛta: *A Biography of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda* (6 vols.; Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1980-1983), 6:225; Also *idem*, *Well-Wisher* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1983), 313.

³² Satyarāja Dāsa, "Kṛṣṇa Consciousness and Christianity," *Back to Godhead* 6.12 (Dec 2009): 10.

Scripture itself, I was struck in this case with yet another instance where my own inclinations had been causing me to look at things downside up. Had the teaching of the Bible really agreed with Prabhupāda's interpretation, no problem, I already had been a vegetarian and that for a number of years. Had the Bible taught it, I would have been content to continue being a vegetarian right down to the present day. But having heard the new terms, I certainly did not wish to remain in a state the Bible describes as weak.

In any case Prabhupāda's argument at the time would have simply made things more difficult for me in terms of worrying about the second commandment's forbidding of image worship. After all, if God withheld essential spiritual truth from the Christians because they invented compromising arguments to excuse them from having to obey the fifth commandment, what essential spiritual truth was God withholding from the followers of Krishna for inventing compromising arguments to excuse themselves from having to obey the second commandment?

From time to time Krishna books present very lurid and disturbing depictions of the terrible karmic implications of animal killing and meat eating. One picture that was reproduced in a number of the movements books and articles showed a man with a brutish animal face drawing back an axe to kill a cow with a terrified human face. The example given here was accompanied with a caption that read: "Animal killers do not know that in the future the animal will have a body suitable to kill them. This is the law of nature."



What then will be the parallel karmic implications of disobeying the second commandment? Although it was not a passage I recall knowing at the time, the Bible has a clear answer:

Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, *nor idolaters*, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, *nor thieves*, nor the greedy, *nor drunkards*, *nor revilers*, *nor swindlers* will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:9-11)

It is ironic that Prabhupāda would have heartily agreed with the condemnation of almost every sin in the above list, except one: idolatry.

NO ONE WORSHIPS ACTUAL IDOLS ANY MORE? REALLY?

Aldous Huxley once declared that “educated persons do not much run the risk of succumbing to the more primitive forms of idolatry. They find it fairly easy to resist the temptation to believe that lumps of matter are charged with magical power, or that certain symbols and images are the very forms of spiritual entities and, as such, must be worshipped and propitiated.”³³

In the interim between the time the book in which the statement was made, back in 1943, and now, Huxley has been proven to be completely wrong.³⁴ The issue is not the education of the mind, but the condition of the human heart. Such a statement on the part of someone like Huxley does not surprise me, but one thing that does surprise me is how often after I became a Christian, and right up until the present, I have heard the same basic sentiment—and scarcely any other—expressed from any number of Evangelical pulpits. How many

³³ Aldous Huxley, “Idolatry,” in *Vedanta for the Western World* (ed. Christopher Isherwood; New York: Viking Press, 1945), 427, also, *Huxley and God: Essays on Religious Experience* (intro. Huston Smith; ed. Jacqueline Hazard Bridgeman; New York: Crossroad, 2003), 178.

³⁴ As is chronicled particularly well in Huston Smith, *Tales of Wonder: Adventures Chasing the Divine: An Autobiography* (with Jeffery Paine; forward Pico Iyer, New York: HarperOne, 2009), Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), and Tony Schwartz, *What Really matters: Searching for Wisdom in America* (New York: Bantam, 1995).

sermons and books on the ten commandments, when they come to discuss the second commandment, start out by saying something along the lines of “Well, in America nobody engages in real idolatry anymore, so we will be talking instead about heart idolatry,” and then turn immediately to trying to apply the commandment spiritually, often even to something as comparatively innocuous as the dangers of watching too much TV, or of missing Wednesday night service when it conflicts with the annual bowling tournament.” How would one feel, I wonder, say as a pastor or youth leader, to discover that one had succeeded in shaming a member of the congregation into giving up Wednesday night bowling, only to learn that that same member was still all the while clinging to the idea that all gods are really one, that Jesus is the son of Krishna, and that we ought to offer our food to Christ’s or Krishna’s image before eating it?

Let me put a challenge before you in the form of a question: Do we as Evangelicals fail to teach the literal meaning of the Second Commandment because we really believe we all have such a firm grasp on the Scriptural teaching in that regard? Or is it rather that we have uncritically adopted, on the basis of some unspoken evolution of consciousness model we share with our larger culture, the idea that we have all somehow simply *outgrown* bowing down to idols?

One should never underestimate the inclination of the fallen human heart to bow down before idols, nor assume it’s somehow a thing of the past. Certain branches of Christendom have become deeply entangled in what can only be described as idolatry, and have justified it with a number of excuses. For Western Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy few theologians have been more important in providing supposed theological justification for the worship of images than the eighth-century theologian John of Damascus (675-753). John admitted that God had forbidden the Jews of the Old Testament making images and bowing down to them. So then, why did God disallow for the Jews what he now allows for the Christians? It was because, John says, the Jews were “still infants and ill with a diseased inclination to idolatry.”³⁵ Apparently John believed Christians were all spiritual adults and who had simply *moved beyond* all that! In a way this parallels the more recent popular notion that we have all simply *outgrown* idolatry.

³⁵ John of Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (trans. & into. Andrew Louth; Crestwood, NY: 2003), 84 (3.4).

SO WHAT AM I ADVOCATING?

It's very simple really: preach and teach the Second Commandment *As It Is!*³⁶ Go ahead and draw out the commandment's more subtle implications relating to heart idolatry, but only *after* you've laid the foundations of clearly explaining its literal meaning, along with such contemporary theologies inside the church and out that might violate that. You may think your congregation has the literal meaning figured out, but how will are they going to figure it out if you literally never teach them what the commandment literally means? Make your children memorize the Second Commandment. That way even if they ignore everything else you say, they will still have that little piece of the sword of the Spirit to prod and poke them in the right direction if they happen to fall under the sway of false arguments leading to idolatry.

Teaching the Second Commandment will also make believers better equipped to be able to discern the true spiritual situation of non-believers as well as new believers they encounter, to go to the mission field and know how to make sense of what they we encounter there.

We as Baptists place great importance on both missions and evangelism, why then should we hesitate when it comes to better preparing ourselves and our children to do both or either. "Well," someone will say, "All we really need to do is tell them about Jesus." Certainly that's true. But who is Jesus? Is he the son of Krishna? Will that work? Can your converts go on worshipping Krishna now that they have accepted Christ? A couple of years back I visited the Vedanta Society of Northern California. I did so because I wanted to see for myself what I had read about in Philip Goldberg's 2010 book, *American Veda*, where he glowingly reports that "virtually every Vedanta temple in the West displays images of Christ (and of Buddha) and holds special services on Easter and Christmas."³⁷ And sure enough, there was a statue of Jesus, sitting cross legged in a traditional lotus position with its hands carefully sculpted in the form of a particular set of yogic *mudras*. Prabhavananda (not to be confused with Prabhupāda), who was the founder of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, and a man exercised great influence on a number of important English thinkers and writers including Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and Christopher

³⁶ A play on the title of Prabhupada's translation of a principle text of Hindu Scripture: *Bhagavad-Gītā As It Is*.

³⁷ Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 83.

Isherwood, writes: “To worship a Christ or a Krishna it is to worship God, it is not, however, to worship a man as God, not to worship a person.”³⁸ Or again, prominent Buddhist writer Thich Nhat Hanh, in his book *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (1995), give a kind of affirmation to Jesus: “On the altar in my hermitage in France are images of Buddha and Jesus, and every time I light incense, I touch both of them as my spiritual ancestors.”³⁹

There is a popular and very appealing song to Jesus entitled “By Your Grace,” one verse of which is as follows:

I follow your footsteps through the flame.
 All that I ever need is in your name
 Carry your heart in mine, vast as space
 All that I am today is by your grace.
 By your grace...
 I live by your grace.

Who wrote the song? One of the Passion performers perhaps? Nope, it was Krishna Das, the “Rock Star” of *Kirtan*, who explains how it is that he, as a Jewish kid and celebrated singer of Hindu songs, came to sing about Jesus:

I never had much to do with Christianity, while I was in America, before going to India. So imagine my surprise sitting in a little Hanuman temple with my guru Maharaj ji [Neem Karoli Baba]. And he looks at us and he says Hanuman, Krishna, and Christ are the same.⁴⁰

What this quotation demonstrates is what I myself experienced as a non-Christian out in the world, namely that one’s doctrine of the oneness of God can become so confused that we don’t even realize that we are violating the first commandment: “I am the LORD thy God...Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3). At such times the Second Commandment can come to our rescue, as it did for me. I do not think my experience was that unusual when I wasn’t able to

³⁸ Swami Prabhavananda, *The Sermon on the Mount: According to Vedanta* (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1992 [orig. 1963]), 44.

³⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (forward, Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B; intro. Elaine Pagels; New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 86.

⁴⁰ Krishna Das told this story on 9 Dec 2011 at the Open Your Heart in Paradise Retreat on Maui.

work out the real difference between the Yahweh and Vishnu, between Krishna and Christ, but all the while the Second Commandment, which had to do with a simple point of religious practice, came to my rescue.



Hanuman (Denver Art Museum)

When I asked Danavir Goswami that evening when one could visit the Kansas City's Rupangura Vedic College he told me they have an open house every Sunday at 4 PM. The card they were giving out also announced this, noting that there would be an 11 course vegetarian feast. As a Christian, should I go? Will the food in that feast (called *prasadam*) be offered to Krishna? Yes it will. Here is a description of the procedure given in a book I used to own back in the early 1970s:

When the food is nicely prepared we offer it back to the Source from which everything emanates....Simply place...a generous portion of each item to be offered, on a plate of metal tray, along with a glass of fresh water, and set it before the Deity or picture of Kṛṣṇa. Then prostrate yourself and pray to the Lord

Kṛṣṇa to accept your humble offering.”⁴¹ There then follows a series of prayers to be recited, and then it instructs that “After offering the food to the Lord, you may distribute the *prasādam* to all who are present.” This is not the end. There will also be another prayer before everyone partakes.⁴²

Well, then, as a Christian, should I attend? Actually the Bible has something to say about that. The Apostle Paul writes this instruction:

If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—I do not mean your conscience, but his (1 Cor 10:27-29).

In the present instance the setting would clearly be more formal than a simple dinner invitation from, say, an unbeliever and his family. It is actually more like attending a church service in which food offered to idols is eaten. That setting brings another one of Paul’s instructions into play: “For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols?” (1 Cor 8:10).

If the second instruction wouldn’t have direct application for me in this case, there might well be no objection there. But could I plausibly attend the event acting as though I was not aware of the fact that the eleven dishes had been offered to the idol? And the answer there is that I could not, and that if I were to attend I should probably have to determine beforehand that I would not be partaking in the food. By way of contrast, at the national joint meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Association of Religion, many of the major publishers put out a dish of candies or other snacks at their book stalls in the huge auditorium where they all have their wares on display. Very often Bhaktivedanta Book Trust will put out a tray of some sort of sweet bread. Even though the Christian knows, as Paul knew when giving the instruction of 1 Corinthians 10:25, that the food was very

⁴¹ *The Hare Kṛṣṇa Cookbook: Recipes for the Satisfaction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead* (comp. Kṛṣṇa Devī Dāsī & Śama Devī Dāsī; intro. Kīrtanānda Svāmī; New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1973), 12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

likely offered to Krishna, it is not announced and he may decide to go ahead and take one. Doing so may even provide a comfortable opportunity for entering into conversation with the people manning the booth. Then, supposing they elect to share that the food was offered to Krishna, the Christian may simply not eat any more.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, we are reminded that, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” One very precious bit of that God-breathed Scripture is the Second Commandment. I, for one, greatly benefited from being taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained, and equipped by it.



AFTERWARD

I am standing in front of the Rapanuga Vedic College on the corner of East 52nd and Paseo in Kansas City in the old First Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Look there, above the entry: To this day the architecture is still bearing witness to the Gospel of God with its reference to John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” May God daily apply though His Holy Spirit this reference to his precious Word of promise and hope on the outside of the building to those ensnared by the worship of strange gods on its inside! Amen.