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## *Theocracy Alert*

### The my 'God is better than your God' madness

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I knew that my God was bigger than his [a Muslim's]. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol.—Lt. Gen. William Boykin (who headed the unsuccessful hunt for Osama bin Laden)

June 3, 2005—That evangelical Christians claim they alone know “God,” “His Will,” and “The Truth” is not new. Nor is the attempt by evangelicals and their missionaries to “convert” those of other religious beliefs to Christianity, which is itself a form of bigotry and intolerance. The Christian way or no way.

It was none other than St. Augustine who first advocated forcible conversions. Since then pious Christians throughout history have damned and waged holy war against infidel Jews and Muslims, and slaughtered the New World natives who didn't convert. Sometimes they murdered them even if they did, *ad majorem gloriam Dei*. Interesting how those political facts are omitted from Christian writers' historical descriptions of their benign religion, such as those offered by Fritz Ridenour.

On May 28, 2005, James Dobson's Focus on the Family's (FOF) website featured the following item in the “Teen” section:

What Goes Around Comes Around: What's Up With Hinduism?  
By Fritz Ridenour

Reincarnation. Karma. Yoga. Familiar terms. But did you know they all relate to Hinduism? And how does this faith compare to Christianity?

Beginning with the pseudo-hip “what's up with” title, the [article](#) is a snide, sarcastic, pejorative, simplistic, and extremely biased rendering of one of the world oldest belief systems. It's difficult to see it as anything other than an attempt to foster religious bigotry and intolerance.

As the FOF promo explained, “This story was excerpted from *So What's the Difference? How World Faiths Compare to Christianity* by Fritz Ridenour, © 2001 Gospel Light Publishing. Used with permission.” A link to purchase the book was, of course, provided.

According to the WorldCat database, *So What's the Difference?* was first published by Regal Books in 1967. It was reissued in 1973 and again in 1979. This latest “reincarnation” by [Gospel Light](#) is “revised and updated for 21st-century readers. To help Christians better understand their own beliefs” and not so subtly suggest they politicize those beliefs.

The fact that evangelical leader and political power broker Dobson chose to recommend this particular book to teenagers is hardly a surprise. *So What's the Difference?* seems little more than a follow-up to an earlier teen-directed Focus on the Family article by Susie Shellenberger. She urged teens to become a “[slave to Jesus](#)” and the political dogma espoused by leaders of the evangelical Christian Right, such as James Dobson. The [trinity](#) of Pat Robertson, Louis Sheldon and James Dobson have already proclaimed that Muslim Americans should not hold any important government office and definitely *not* serve in the

judiciary. Their absolute knowledge of “God’s will” would also vehemently argue against “sinners” like gays and lesbians on the federal bench. In fact, those “sinners” should not be working for the federal government at all. Special Counsel [Scott J. Bloch](#) is helping in that regard.

The FOF excerpt from Mr. Ridenour’s “assessment” of Hinduism began with

All approaches to God are good and equal. In fact, you can be god, or at least part of god, if you search deep enough within yourself.

Sound familiar? You might have heard these misguided thoughts from a friend, a popular band or even a teacher.

“All approaches to God are good and equal.” That would seem a no-brainer, but only if *everyone* had *exactly* the same understanding of the word “God.” Eastern beliefs have kept “God” as a concept capable of embracing differences. Western religions turned the Concept into a Being, and there can be only one Supreme Being. No differences allowed. Wars over whose “God” was God were inevitable.

The renowned Protestant theologian Paul Tillich argued frequently and convincingly that one of the worst mistakes made by Western religions was transmogrifying the Concept of “God” into a Being, which necessitated endless wars to determine whose Supreme Being was really “God.” Left as a concept, “God” could embrace all representations, even those “made like to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things,” which are common in Native American and Hindu representations as well as in Christian art where the “Holy Spirit” is most often depicted as a bird. As for blasphemous images “made like to corruptible man,” virtually all Christian art does just that, whether it be the muscle-bound, perpetually stern-looking “God the Father” appearing in clouds or the meek and mild European-looking Jesus surrounded by children and animals, the representations are “made like to corruptible man” which, along with animal representations, are explicitly condemned in [Romans 1](#).

Mr. Ridenour’s remark about becoming “at least part of god” would seem at odds with evangelicals’ claim to be united *with* the Holy Spirit and their becoming part of “the body of Christ.” Metaphors may differ, but their message is the same.

Ridenour unctuously mocked the concept of karma. Sadly, he failed to recognize karma is but another expression of the biblical “reap what you sow” and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” So what’s the difference? The Hindu version lacks the “all Loving God” who damns some of his human creations to eternal hell for being . . . “human.” Not a very loving thing for a Father-Creator to do to His children, is it?

Ridenour also criticized anything that argued against the concept of “sin” as defined by Christianity. That’s to be expected. After all, “sin” and its “forgiveness” are the most profitable parts of the Business of Christianity. Whether it be the medieval Church authorizing the selling of pardons and salvation, or today’s evangelical leaders clamoring to exchange prayers for the flock’s financial contributions, it’s ultimately motivated by self-interest and political power. And in the case of Dobson and Focus on the Family, that political power is obsessively used to encourage intolerance, discrimination and legislation against gay and lesbian Americans, regardless of their religious beliefs.

Consider the concept of “sin” in the same way Mr. Ridenour wanted his readers to consider what he called the “mythology” of Hinduism. “Sin against God” is an anthropomorphic expression. The psychology and emotions attributed to the “God” in such a statement are human. Surely Divinity would not suffer from such human flaws such as jealousy, anger and hate. Nor would Divinity become outraged and decree eternal damnation for the beings “He” created and supposedly loves. Nor would Divinity be the childish scatologist described by the politically motivated creators of monotheistic dogma:

If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.

Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it. (Malachi 2: 2–3)

Mr. Ridenour's "logic" is specious, to say the least. But his mocking bigotry and intolerance are clear:

The biblical record (see 1 John 5:11–12) states that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. If we have the Son, we have eternal life—not a series of mythological reincarnations. (In fact, the Hindu would say we believe in an absolutely unproven eternal life.)

Ridenour uses the Bible to prove what the Bible says so that he can then assert as *fact* that what the Bible says is literal and absolute truth while the sacred texts of other spiritual beliefs are "mythological." So much for logic, reasoned and reasonable arguments. But consider his terminology.

Mythology: an allegorical narrative; a popular belief or assumption that has grown up around someone or something.

The Bible is replete with "mythologies," beginning with the Genesis myth. The Old Testament also offers the Nephilim, Noah and the flood (a popular myth borrowed from the world's oldest piece of literature, the Babylonian epic poem Gilgamesh), people being turned into pillars of salt, the parting of the Red Sea, and a "God" who, like the Greek and Roman gods, favors some and damns others based on "His" edicts that embody the worst human flaws: jealousy, rage, hate, wrath, vengefulness, etc. The New Testament offers a virgin birth and resurrections from the dead. And the Book of Revelations is a mythological tour de force replete with characters and monsters equal to anything in Greek mythology.

But Mr. Ridenour's most insidious proposals came in the last line of the Focus on the Family promo: "You might have heard these *misguided thoughts* from a *friend*, a *popular band* or *even a teacher*" [italics mine]. To call Hindu beliefs "misguided" is the epitome of arrogance and bigotry, especially given the blood-soaked history of Christianity and the centuries of crimes against humanity committed in its name.

Is Ridenour suggesting young Christians should not befriend people of other faiths? He is certainly suggesting "teachers" who expose young minds to new ideas and other cultures are not to be trusted. Who knows . . . those teachers may commit heresy and suggest "evolution" is a scientific fact and that the dinosaurs really existed even though they're absent from the biblical record. Dianne Ravitch—a former education official in President George H.W. Bush's administration and a consultant to the Clinton administration—documented in her book, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*, that *academic textbook* publishers try to avoid the term "dinosaur" since it brings complaints from Christian fundamentalists whose biblical reckoning of time does not include dinosaurs or the concept of evolution.

As for those "popular band[s]," I must confess . . . I'm not up on what contemporary popular bands Mr. Ridenour might mean, but given the year *So What's the Difference?* was originally published and the years it was reissued, perhaps he's afraid young people in the twenty-first century will "[Imagine](#)" . . .