

**LEAD ME TO THE REAL:  
THE HINDU—CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE**

THE THIRD BISHOPS' INSTITUTE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS  
OF THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES  
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- I. Introduction
- II. The Meaning of the Bishops' Institute, by the Most Rev. Michael B. Duraisamy
- III. The Maturation of the Asian Church, by the Rev. Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J.
- IV. Towards a Culture of Wholeness: The Tasks of the Local Churches in Countries or Regions of Major Hindu Influence, by the Rev. Michael Amaladoss, S.J.
- V. Obstacles to Dialogue, by Swami Vikrant, S.D.B.
- VI. The Final Statement of the Bishops' Institute
- VII. Participants

**I. INTRODUCTION****The Opening of the Institute**

The inauguration of the Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs took place on November 15, 1982, in the auditorium of the Sacred Heart Seminary, with words of welcome from the Most Reverend Rayappa Arulappa, Archbishop of Madras and Mylapore, in the presence of a large audience made up of participants from India and other countries of Asia with a numerically significant Hindu population, and of seminary faculty and students.

The meeting also had an auspicious day for its beginning; it was the great Hindu feast of *Diwali*, the festival of lights and the gayest of all of India's feasts. The prayer service was centered that day on the theme "Christ, the Light of the World," with prayers, readings and reflections taken from Hindu and Christian scriptures and writings. The flickering light of the many candles, the aromatic smell of the flowers and incense and the community prayer, all brought an awesome holy atmosphere to the gathering.

## Evangelization and Dialogue

The opening address was given by Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of New Delhi, who in his characteristic style and from his wide experience brought much insight and light to various aspects of dialogue. The situation in the world that is becoming a global village, the diversity and plurality of the cultures and religions of the world, particularly in India, and the post-Vatican climate in the Church, he said, are calling on all men and women of good will for dialogue.

The most important thing about this dialogue between Church and the world is that God acts in and through it to influence both the Church and the world and to judge, purify and transform both. However, since the grave problems affecting mankind today involve the people not only of one but of all religious traditions, does this not become a task incumbent on all religions?

The relationship between evangelization and dialogue, he continued, has been one of the controversial topics in the past in such ecumenical meetings and workshops. Until recently, the attitude of the Church towards non-Christian religions (and towards their followers) has been negative. They were considered "false religions," and the followers to be heathens living in darkness and in the shadow of death. The changed attitude of the Church was expressed in the national seminar of India in 1969:

The other religions are not fortresses which we must attack and destroy; they are homes of the spirit which we have failed to visit; they are receptacles of the word of God which we have chosen to ignore.

Dialogue has been qualified as a "constituent part," "essential part," "normal expression," "authentic dimension," "integral part," of evangelization at different times. Sharing in common enterprises, participation in interreligious associations, common study, reflection and prayer are different methods of dialogue to be encouraged. Commitment to one's own religion, practice of prayer, instruction regarding various religious beliefs, and openness to their religions are some of the prerequisites for dialogue. Christ himself is an example of dialogue; his dialogue with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the woman with hemorrhage and Jairus are such instances. All are called to the Kingdom but humankind has responded to the call differently. Thus dialogue is a sharing in the call to the Kingdom.

Dialogue, then, can no longer be looked upon as a luxury in which we may or may not engage. It seems to be postulated by the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit working in us but also in our brothers and sisters of other faiths. Dialogue is the call of the Kingdom, by which the Church can rediscover itself in its fullness as it stretches out towards the universal Kingdom of God beyond its own visible boundaries, extending God's sovereignty over every human act of men and women of good will who thirst for freedom, peace, fraternity and love.

In concluding his talk, Archbishop Angelo said that our help lies precisely in the Holy Spirit and his continued work in us Christians and in persons of other faiths. He insisted that we must be faithful to history and to the call of God today in the plurality and diversity of religious experiences.

We must, therefore, be faithful to history, which means that, while accepting the heritage of the past, we bring it into dialogical tension with the vitality and needs of the present, even while our eyes are set on the future. In so doing, we shall be true both to ourselves and to God, as we respond to the call in faith, with submission, docility and with the utmost confidence, as the Spirit invades and pervades the whole of human history and makes of it the Kingdom of God ... a new people with a new song to their Lord.

### The "Other Side"

The national reports and the workshop discussions were, of course, Christians speaking to Christians. With the addresses of two Hindu scholars, the participants were able to learn how the "other side" of the dialogue feels, how the Hindu community perceives the Christian Church, and its new concern for dialogue as well.

Hinduism's real name should be *Vaideeha Dharma Marga* or *Sadhana*, said Dr. V. A. Devasenapathi, and this may not have anything to do with geography. A Hindu is someone who sees the sufferings of others and tries to give relief. Another name for Hinduism is *Veda*, which is the authentic explanation of one's experience of God. To explain such an experience all language is deficient; all languages are good but inadequate. Silence is the best way to experience God.

Both unity and plurality — monism and dualism — are expressed in the Hindu holy scriptures, with terms like *atman/paramatam*, or

*dvida/advida*, etc. Man's actions have physical, social and psychological implications as he is both body and soul, and *karma* is the expression of it. Purification by washing, bathing and other rituals are needed to remove bad *karma*. Saivites, a Hindu sect, apply ashes three times to remove three kinds of impurities. Even the priest must do *puja* (sacrifice) in order to get cleansed of impurities, both physical and spiritual.

Life passes through different stages: childhood, boyhood, married life, brahmacharya (the life of chastity), and finally sannyasa (the mendicant life). The universe is destroyed and it is born again. *Karma* is part of life and it is transformed or liberated through grace.

To be united with the ONE, with God, is to be free from "I" and "my" consciousness through yoga, guided by a guru (teacher). This union is known as *moksha*, or liberation in a negative sense. Sin is disharmony with the will of God. Reconciliation consists in surrendering to God's will by liberating ourselves from the "I" and "my" consciousness and by serving other people.

According to him, Hinduism has no problem with Christianity, provided the Western influences are removed from it. Some Hindu revivalist groups in India are afraid that Hinduism is becoming a minority religion because of the conversion activities of Christians and Muslims. Some practical ways, like praying together and working for common causes, may bring about better understanding between Hindus and Christians, more than by academic exercises.

Swamy Chidananda is the director of the Chidananda Ashram in Rishikesh, North India. Dressed as a typical Hindu monk and with head shaven, he gave all the impression of a true ascetic, both physically and spiritually. Starting his talk with a prayer in Sanskrit, he said God is the father of all, who existed before all religions. All must feel the nothingness before him. There is only one Being, eternal and real; other things are mere shadows. All of us worship the same God, although we may call him by different names. We can experience the *Sat-Chit-Ananda*, or the ever-blissful God. Outside of this is sadness. There is perfect joy and serenity in the innermost being of onself, and until we attain this ultimate reality, we shall remain unfulfilled. The kingdom of God is within us, as Jesus said, and he is the Alpha and Omega.

The world does not promise happiness but we go after it. It is our own fault, a lack of discernment. Hinduism is a way of faith, life

described through the Vedas. The experiences were memorized and later handed down in scriptures. The experience is not traced to any particular religion. God-consciousness is in the innermost being of oneself, and *moksha*, or heaven, is the realization of the same.

Hinduism, according to Chidananda, is monotheistic even while they speak of 33 crores (330,000,000) of gods. All these names are but so many aspects of the one supreme Being. Caste is a response to the different functions and needs of men, stratified in the course of time. The superior status of caste was given by mistake. Birth and rebirth in Hinduism are explained by *karma* as a means of purification ordained by God. The universe has neither a beginning nor an end.

Hindus feel all religions are equally good and there is no need of a dialogue. The Church must try to inculturate and indianize itself, and not try to hinduize. He suggested two things to create an atmosphere for dialogue: 1) as an experiment, the Church must call a moratorium on all conversions for the next twenty years; and 2) declare publicly that all religions worship the same and only God.

### **From Darkness Lead Me to Light**

The Bishop's Institute was solely pastoral in intention; it was meant to deepen the participants' understanding of and commitment to dialogue with Hindus. While the emphasis was not on academic progress but on personal experience, prayer and sharing, the need for formal presentations — for "input" — was strongly felt by the bishops. Two experts, Father Amaladoss, S.J. and Father Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J., well-known for their many years in Hindu—Christian discussions, provided an additional basis for the workshop's analysis and sharing. They were on hand to help formulate the final conclusions of the meeting in a way which faced up to the real problems of the Christian—Hindu life-situations in dialogue.

### **A National Follow-Up on the Bishops' Institute**

Something unique for bishops' meetings took place six months after BIRA III. A follow-up meeting of the Commission for Proclamation, Ecumenism, Dialogue and Social Communication of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India took up the statement of BIRA III and endeavored in prayerful reflection to specify further the requirements of this dialogue for the Church in India. This was the first time a national consultation of such a kind — with the pastoral conclusions of BIRA III in hand — has taken place in Asia. The meeting was held at the National

Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Center, in Bangalore, July 28-30, 1983. Nine bishop-members of the Bishops' Commission took part and were joined by five bishops, twelve priests and four sisters. Lay people were also invited but were unable to attend.

The participants found that, among other needs, the Church lacks sufficiently-trained personnel for some special kinds of dialogue. The consultation had one immediate result. The Ishvani Kendra Center of Pune, India, agreed to form people for dialogue, to develop research in the field of dialogue and to conduct seminars on dialogue at the regional level.

## **II. THE THIRD BISHOPS' INSTITUTE FOR INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

by Bishop Michael B. Duraisamy

The Third Bishops' Institute organized by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (FABC) is a reality today. BIRA I was held in Thailand in Sampran, near Bangkok, in the house belonging to the Salesians of Don Bosco. The venue for BIRA II was Kuala Lumpur. BIRA III is organized in Madras, in Sacred Heart Seminary, run by the Salesians of Don Bosco.

BIRA I: Delegates from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, Hong Kong and Macao met in Bangkok in October, 1979, for a weeklong reflection on Christian—Buddhist relations in Asia. "Their coming together was all the more meaningful since this was meant to be a springboard for many later efforts by the Asian bishops in developing interreligious dialogue in their countries."

BIRA II was held in November, 1979, at the residence of the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, in the center of the Federal Capital of Malaysia. The participants had come from West and East Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Philippines, Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The theme of BIRA II was Christian—Muslim dialogue. "The purpose of that colloquium was to deepen Christian understanding of and commitment to dialogue with Muslims. The intention of the conference was pastoral."

BIRA III: The focus of BIRA III is Christian—Hindu dialogue. The purpose of this colloquium is to gain a better grasp of the existential situation among Christians and Hindus, to explore the genuine interest of both these religions in influencing every aspect of man's life, and to

help the Church, the Sacrament of God's message in the world, to be the motivating and leavening agent in this culture. This pastoral concern brings together bishops from Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India, where Hinduism is present.

Religious dialogue is to be not merely a form of pre-evangelization but the ideal form of evangelization based on mutual trust and respect and a sense of discovery. Religious dialogue eventually should lead to the seeking together of the fulness of Christ, which is God's plan for the whole of creation. The beauty and purpose of creation are crowded out in the modern world. The energy crisis is focusing attention once again on the purpose of creation and on the Creator. The relationship of early man with the Creator was close and governed his lifestyle. Man at the dawn of history was awed by the power of energy: the blazing heat of the sun, the destructive velocity of the wind, the moving force of the thundering river and floods. The marvelous cycles of productive earth sustained the God—man relationship. The Industrial Revolution brought in its wake dehumanizing conditions and exploitations, such as child labor and unhealthy working conditions. Unions were formed to protect workers, their rights and dignity. The God—man relationship began to yield to inter-man relationship. The phenomenal scientific and technological advancement brought advantages as well as woes, such as rapid consumption and imbalanced use of earth resources and pollution. The inter-man relationship is giving way to a man—earth—Creator relationship. However gradually, ecologists, sociologists, anti-nuclear peacemarchers and freezers are drawing the attention of the 20th-century man to the beauty of creation and to saving God's creation. Nay, the theology of earth resources is in the offing. Third World countries, spared from the full weight of the technological, man-made marvels and afflictions, have become havens for those who seek meditation, prayer, beauty in nature and relationship with the Creator. Our own people seek the Creator in three ways: through *gnana* (knowledge) and through *bhakti* (sacraments, prayer, rituals, celebration) based on nature, and seasonal and religious festivals. Perhaps the moment is ripe for an intensive dialogue between Christians and Hindus to share their experiences and find the Creator in creation, before they succumb to the onslaught of technology and are forced to forget the Creator.

The avenues for discovery are many and beckoning. The days of this colloquium is a God-sent gift to the delegates of BIRA III to think anew about the economy of salvation. With the help of the Holy Spirit, with courage and confidence, we can launch into BIRA III.

I extend a hearty welcome to all the delegates of BIRA III to India, the Land of Great Religions; welcome to the Land of Buddha, the monarch who gave up his throne to seek enlightenment; welcome to the land of Ashoka, a great emperor who gave up violence to become a monk and who sent Buddhist monks across the sea to your countries; welcome to the sub-continent studded with temples and ashrams, the signs of man's quest for the Lord of Creation; welcome to the land where voices of millions are calling for "ONE who is to come"; welcome to a land where a symphony of voices from temples, mosques, churches and guruduwara are raised heavenward; welcome to the land of Tagore, who captured the soul of India in his poems and songs; welcome to the land of Gandhiji, the apostle of peace; welcome to the land of Vinoba Bhave, the friend of the poor; welcome to hear "the Lord's voice resounding on the waters, the Lord on the immensity of waters; the voice of the Lord, full of power, the voice of the Lord, full of splendor... The Lord's voice flashes flames of fire. The Lord's voice shaking the wilderness... The Lord will give strength to his people, the Lord will bless his people with peace" (Ps 28).

I wish you all a happy stay and fruitful deliberations and may the Lord help us to arrive at timely commitments to bring salvation to the teeming millions of people in Asia.

### III. MATURATION OF THE ASIAN CHURCH by the Rev. Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J.

#### Introduction

When St. Francis Xavier landed at Manapad in October, 1542, the Fishery Coast, from Cape Comorin to Rameswaram, was dotted with villages which had called themselves Christian for a decade or so. But the Christianity of the people consisted of a Christian name and a Portuguese surname and nothing else. He spent himself for two years to christianize them. His saintliness, heroic zeal and charisma, backed and supported by the secular arm of Portugal, achieved mass conversions on the coast. But it can honestly be said that the Saint never encountered the soul of India.

He encountered the soul of Asia when he reached Japan. "How about our forefathers? Have they found salvation?," the Japanese asked him. Let the dead bury the dead; let the living look out for their salvation by accepting his Gospel. The dialectical theology, which Xavier's brothers were employing in Trent, could only give this answer to Asia. And the Asian question refused to be brushed aside and has bedeviled

missionary proclamation for over four centuries. If Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Animism were heathenish inventions of the devil, Luther would let their adherents sink into hell and would not bother; but the Catholic missionary had to save them at all costs, even by the Gospel recipe of "*compelle intrare*," wherever he could. But the missionary was not sowing the seed of the Gospel, rather he was transplanting a Western tree over a thousand years old to replace those religions. And the East is still allergic to it, though certain ghettos may cling tenaciously to the branches of this Western tree which has no roots in the Asian soil.

"The Asian soul," one of the Asian bishops has said recently, "has been deeply wounded by the last four hundred years of the Church's missionary effort to make it Christian." We could give Indian examples to substantiate this saying. Are there not a handful of fundamentalists everywhere, clerical and lay, even today who are vociferously saving their faith by adding insults to injury on the non-Christian religions, refusing to accept that the Church's attitude to non-Christian religions has completely changed?

### **Towards a Theology of World Religions**

The change of Christian attitude to non-Christian religions started in India with the Protestant group that started "rethinking Christianity in India."

In the Catholic Church a kind of dialogical theology was given expression to by Cardinal de Lugo even during the heat of the Reformation, and later by Baron von Hugel and Cardinal Newman. These were only recapturing the early Fathers of the Church. In India eminent converts like Swami Upadhyaya Brahmabandab had spoken in this strain at their own peril. By and large, dialectical theology and a negative attitude to world religions prevailed. The modern ecumenical movement is said to have started with the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. But it could speak only of the great opportunity of the times, i.e., to save souls.

### **Evolutionary Fulfilment**

People like J. N. Farquhar were exploring the idea of evolutionary fulfilment of non-Christian religions by Christianity. Christ is the Crown of Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. This was echoed by the Second World Conference which took place at Jerusalem in 1928. Men like Dr. Radhakrishnan said that this missionary attitude was intolerably patronizing. But the axe of Biblical Realism, which Hendrik Kraemer

brought to the Tambaram Conference in 1938, axed even this theory of fulfilment and deepened the wound in the Asian soul. In the Roman Catholic Church the fulfilment theory endured and is to be found in many clerics even today. Non-Christian religions refused to accept the advice of Kraemer's understanding of revelation.

Theological focus shifted at Tambaram from missionary preoccupation to the relationship of Christian revelation to non-Christian religions.

### **Decentralization**

After the war the political decolonization was paralleled by ecclesial devolution of responsibility from missions to local Churches. The World Council of Churches was inaugurated in 1948 but the Church-centered thinking prevailed both in Protestant and Catholic theologizing and planning. Since 1952, the question of the Christian attitude to men of other faiths was raised anew. We stopped calling non-Christian religionists by the term unbelievers. Protestant theologians were preparing for dialogue. We stopped speaking of uniting religious forces against atheists and thought of the possibilities of dialoguing with Marxists. Kraemer revised his Tambaram position and wrote on "*the Coming Dialogue.*"

### **Anthropological Basis**

Kenneth Cragg's *Call of the Minaret* inspired the series of "Christian Presence" in a situation of acknowledged religious pluralism. Between 1955 and 1961 the focus shifted to the anthropological context, viz., the one common humanity. Dialogue could be tried with men of other religions on the basis not of their religion but of their humanness, as Bishop Leslie Newbegin used to say. We shall see how this concept entered Catholic thought.

### **Self-Understanding of the Church**

It required the good Pope John XXIII to awaken the Church and make it pray for a twentieth-century Pentecost which would see the dawn of self-understanding of the Church in maturity.

This mature self-understanding would be formulated in a Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The preparatory commission employed seventy experts to draw up a schema to be presented to the first session of the Council, due to start on October 11, 1962. This "Septuagint" scheme used the phrase "Mystery of the Church," rehashing the *Mystic*

*Corporis* of Pope Pius XII here and there, and this was introduced by the head of the Holy Office, Cardinal Ottaviani. The discussion was led by the senior member of the College of Cardinals, Lineart, who said that the schema had reduced the Church to a mere juridical society. Bishop De Smet of Bruges read three characteristics in the schema, i.e., triumphalism, clericalism and juridicalism. Cardinal Ritter said that the Church must declare how she understands herself today, and this cannot be done by repeating Trent and Vatican I. Cardinal Frings of Cologne, on behalf of the German bishops, said that the Italian schema did not represent the thinking of the whole Church but only that of a small section of it; it should be withdrawn and revised. Cardinal Lercaro of Bologna said that the Church should present to the men of this age the deep mystery of the Church as the sacrament of Christ. Cardinal Koenig brought in the concept of the Church as the sacrament of mankind and pleaded for an open, universal vision of the Church. Cardinal Alfrink wanted the schema to be withdrawn and reworked by a new commission. Cardinal Doppfner, Archbishop Marty, Cardinal Suenens and others wanted the schema redrafted. Cardinal Montini supported them. The Italian schema was withdrawn. The Italian concept of the Church had to be replaced by another. Pope John advised that during the period before the second session of the Council all the schemata should be reworked. And he went to his reward. Besides the Italian schema there were four others on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: the Belgian, the French, the German and the Latin American. There was no Asian, African or Anglophone schema.

The Belgian schema had gathered the findings of biblical, patristic and theological research. It used the term mystery in the sense of the Greek Fathers, rendered into Latin with the term *sacramentum*, and meaning God's universal plan of salvation. The French schema conceived the Church as mystery, as sacrament, having all men as its end and directed to all men as means. The German schema had been drawn up by the Council Fathers from Germany, Austria and Scandinavia. It was biblical, pastoral and ecumenical in tone. The Church was understood as the fundamental universal and eschatological sacrament of salvation of the world.

The Latin American schema also insisted on the concept of mystery. Cardinal Koenig proposed the Belgian schema to form the basis of the new schema, integrating the insights of the other schemata. Cardinals Ottaviani, Browne and a few bishops found the concept of the Church as the sacrament of salvation of mankind quite unacceptable and opposed it. But the new non-curialist schema was introduced in the second session of the Council, and Cardinal Montini, then Pope Paul VI, in his opening

allocation of the second session, on September 29, 1963, said: "The Church is a mystery. It is imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies therefore within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and greater exploration." He wished the Church to give herself a more profound definition.

The opening words of *Lumen Gentium*, as we have it, are taken verbatim from the German schema. The Church is seen as the sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind, the visible sacrament of salvific unity, as well as the universal sacrament of salvation.

It is in the light of this mature self-awareness of the Church that the other documents, like the Pastoral Constitution on the Church (*Gaudium et Spes*), the Decree on Missionary Activity (*Ad Gentes*), and the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), etc., have been thought out and formulated. The new attitude therefore of the Church towards non-Christian religions is not due to any tactical or strategic motivation but is the direct result of the mature self-understanding of the Church.

### Theology of World Religions

This positive attitude of Vatican II towards other religions was mainly due to the work of eminent theologians, like Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Jean Danielou, Karl Rahner and others. Congar had changed the preoccupation from Church-centeredness to the primacy of grace in the formation of the People of God. De Lubac had established that nature and grace are not two realities but only two ways of talking about one and the same reality. The deep implications of this attitude for a proper evaluation of other religions became obvious. Karl Rahner was the first theologian to acknowledge the legitimacy of these religions and recognize their due place in God's salvific plan for mankind. His theology of grace and theological anthropology form the basis for this attitude, though his coinage of "anonymous Christians" is unpleasant to the ears of some of us. It smacks still of triumphalism. Rahner has been called an anonymous Buddhist. It has been pointed out that similar ideas had been expressed by Saivites and Vaishnavites centuries ago.

The schema underwent two revisions. Before it became the Dogmatic Constitution, Paul VI had issued his encyclical letter *Ecclesiam Suam*, in August, 1964, on the eve of the third session. *Ecclesiam Suam* is still ecclesiocentric, but in the third section it explored a new subject. It outlined Paul VI's view of *colloquium salutis* and how

this dialogue of salvation should be pursued with men of good will, adherents of other religions and Christian brethren in other ecclesial communities. The Pope was also preoccupied with the problem of atheism and what possibilities there were for dialogue with men who live in atheistic cultures. He suggested that in addition to matters of mutual concern, basic human issues may be taken up in the *colloquia salutis*.

Vatican II was not preoccupied with the possibility for other faiths to attain salvation — that had been taken for granted for sometime, though with various tortuous theological speculations to explain or explain away the un-Christian pseudo-axiom “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.” But the Council was concerned with the problem of the place or role of other religions in the history of salvation, as it slowly emerged from the new understanding of the nature of the Church itself.

When the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions was taken up for discussion, several Fathers complained that it gave barely two lines to two-thirds of the world, and wanted it to be expanded to take in all religions. Bishop de Veiga Coutinho said that there was only one plan of salvation for the whole of mankind and all religions of the world are included in this plan of salvation. He wanted the Council to institute a Secretariat for Non-Christians, which could in collaboration with the Secretariat for Christian Unity revise and enlarge the Declaration. Between the second and the third sessions of the Council Pope Paul VI set up the Secretariat for Non-Christians, headed by Cardinal Marella, who had sufficient experience of Japan.

Two sets of problems were transferred to this new Secretariat: first, the theological study of the role of religions in the economy of salvation, and the distinct responsibility of the Church in its relation to these religions; second, to encourage further study of these religions with a view to bringing about among missionaries and Christian lay people a dialogistic understanding of the partners in the *colloquia salutis*. These two are naturally connected, since preparations for dialogue imply problems of the theology of religions. These studies, of course, could be conducted ably only in the local Churches, which are the places of the living encounter of these religions. The Roman Secretariat could at best collate the results and findings of these regional studies.

The theological implications of the discussions of the Council on the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy — which was the first document to be promulgated by the Council — threw light on and showed the direction which the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and its corollaries, like the Declaration on Non-Christians (*Nostra Aetate*), would take.

*Nostra Aetate*, No. 1, begins with: "All people form a single community, have a single origin... One also is their final goal, God... His saving providence ... and his saving design extend to all men." According to Cardinal Bea, who introduced this document to the Council, these words could be branded in letters of fire on every international organization.

*Nostra Aetate*, no. 2, could be called a humble resolution of the Church for future relationships. The Council had only cleared the air for further uninhibited theologizing on the Religions of the World, without attempting itself to offer any theology of religions. *Nostra Aetate* was accepted in principle and the next day *Lumen Gentium* was promulgated, November 21, 1964, and Pope Paul VI could go on pilgrimage to the land of the *rishis* to demonstrate his genuine concern for interreligious dialogue, and to proclaim from the Altar in the Oval, Bombay, the ancient Santipat:

Asato mâ sat gamaya,  
Tamaso mâ iyotir gamaya,  
Mrtyor mâ amrtum gamaya,  
Om Santih Santih Santih.

From the unreal lead me to the real;  
From darkness lead me to light;  
From death lead me to immortality.

But before the Eucharistic Congress opened, the International Theological Seminar was held in Bombay, in November, 1964. There Piet Fransen exposed his thesis of Fundamental Option. J. Masson dealt with the salvation of the nations. R. Panikkar's thesis on the Unknown Christ of Hinduism was just coming off the press. Hans Küng developed his theory of the Ways of Salvation. The report of this seminar evoked a negative reaction in some quarters. Jean Danielou, whose *Holy Pagans of the Old Testament, Advent*, and other such works, had encouraged a dialogical theology of religions, rejected the findings of the Seminar openly, especially that about the ordinary and extraordinary ways of salvation. But the very next year a book came from his hand, which appeared in English two years later, wherein he says:

That which finds expression in the diversity of religions is a quality of human nature. Religious activity is a constitutive part of man. Religious experience is a constitutive element of this world ... the great religions of history are expressions of the religious drive in mankind. Though they are many, yet they are one. All are

expressions of the same level of experience. Even so it is of their nature to differ from one another. Each expresses the religious genius of a people and there is nothing more characteristic of a people than its religion. From this point of view the old tag "*cujus regio ejus religio*" is perfectly true. The religion of a people is so much part of its heritage, that a man could no more betray his religion than betray his race. And indeed it is absurd to change a religion when that religion is in the form in which the religious genius of a people finds expression. Religions are part of the richness of creation and one of its most remarkable aspects. How could Christianity destroy them when its mission is not to destroy but to fulfil, when it comes to save all that has been created.

The Western way of being Christian is conditioned by the religious genius of the West. We have a duty to remain faithful to that genius; but we have no business to be foisting it upon others.\*

Swami Upadhyaya Brahmabandab — and for that matter Keshab Chunder Sen and so many such Indian thinkers — what have they said more radical than this?

And the Bombay Theological Seminar in 1964 only added to this attitude the new perspective which Vatican II had already made orthodox. Vatican II helped Catholic theology of religions to overtake and outstrip Protestant theology.

The New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in 1961, shifted its focus from the anthropological view of common humanity to the salvation history in the face of secularization today. Dialogue was dealt with within the framework of communication as a useful means of evangelization. But it added that dialogue was a necessary and enriching style of life in a religiously pluralistic milieu. It referred further study of these topics to local centers. *Ecclesiam Suam* also seemed to view *colloquium salutis* as part of evangelization. But the Council gave several indications and impulses to make dialogue recognized as good in itself and for itself as a manifestation of lived Christianity.

In 1967 the Kandy Consultation on Christians in Dialogue with Men of Other Faiths invited for the first time Roman Catholic scholars to participate. The Kandy statement declared dialogue as an authentic style of living in pluralistic milieux, which transcends mere coexistence. It also

\* Jean Danielou, *Prayer as a Political Problem*, A Compass Book, 83-87.

hoped that dialogue will help expose secular man to authentic experiences of relationship to the transcendental.

This may be said to have helped the Uppsala Assembly of 1968 to go further than the New Delhi Assembly and declare that Christ speaks in this dialogue revealing "himself to those who do not know him and correcting the limited and distorted knowledge of those who do."

Roman Catholic India spent about two years in preparation for the All India Seminar on the Church in India Today, which came off in May, 1969, and was described as the Indian Pentecost. (It was preceded by 14 Regional Seminars, 51 Diocesan Seminars, 9 National Consultations, 19 Seminary Seminars and a large number of parish and other seminars, organized by special groups to study the theme of the All India Seminar, in which 60 bishops and 626 participants took part.) It did not go further than the Theological Seminar of 1964 but explicated several aspects of the questions that faced the Church in India.

The Seminar confessed that "Indian Christianity will become mature only if it enters into dialogue with the Religions of India." The Church gathered there asked forgiveness of the Lord and her non-Christian brothers for her past mistakes, affirmed that the era of polemics and mutual condemnation was over and a new era of courtesy, kindness and co-operation had dawned. The Workshop on Dialogue declared that open confession of Christ may result as a consequence of dialogue but this is not to be contrived at in dialogue. A radical change of attitude was asked for in each and every member of the Church towards non-Christian religions. The Seminar therefore stated: "In order to bring about a positive attitude towards non-Christian religions as demanded by our Faith and affirmed by Vatican II, we recommend that a theology of dialogue in the Indian context, based on salvation history and embracing all positive values of non-Christian religions, be worked out." (Cf. the titles of research books and Seminar papers since this recommendation was made, in appendix 2).

The International Theological Seminar, Nagpur, 1971, was organized by those who felt that the previous seminars in India were perhaps treading theologically dangerous ground. The Seminar proved: *Filii tui, India, formulabunt theologiam tuam* — thy sons and thy adopted sons. J. Masson held to his position (with Danielou) that non-Christians are saved in their religions but not through their religions (cf. *Documenta Missionalia-5*, p.134). Congar said the expression "anonymous Christians" was not a happy one. He also thought it wrong to use the name "People of God" to include all men. But he explained

the capacity which Christianity holds from Christ and from the Holy Spirit of assuming the plentitude of man who has not ceased and does not cease to discover and develop values. This is the very *program of Catholicity* which is *at the heart of the motivations* of missionary actions or of ecumenism. "This affirmation of mine," Congar added, "which was contested in 1937 is now universally admitted." W. Kasper said that if one takes seriously the will of God that all men should be saved, then one can certainly speak of an implicit and anonymous Christianity (K. Rahner). Then it is not presumptuous to characterize Christ as the Unknown of Hinduism (R. Panikkar). In his book *De Pace Fidei* Nicholas of Cusa had most ingeniously and courageously set forth this vision. There is in the diversity of ideas and rites only one religion.

The Seminar declared among other things: "We know that man is a social being and that he lives in built-in traditional environments, most of which are older than Christianity. It is these traditions that initiate him into the knowledge of the ultimate goal and meaning of life. Therefore the religious traditions of the world can be regarded as helping him towards the attainment of his salvation. Since men who are saved attain salvation in the context of their religious traditions, the different sacred scriptures and rites of the religious traditions of the world can be in various degrees expressions of a divine manifestation and can be conducive to salvation" (no. 16, Declaration of the Seminar). This is indeed a great theological advance and a worthy Indian contribution to the theology of the Universal Church. The older subtle distinction that non-Christians are saved in their religions but not through their religions becomes irrelevant. They are saved in and through their religions. The atmosphere has been cleared for honest, sincere, fraternal dialogue. This discovery of the simple truth cannot be nullified by a practical problem: "Then why should the Church spend so much of her resources for evangelization?" The mandate to evangelize remains; the dialectical pseudotheological background for this mandate has disappeared. A more reasonable theological motivation must be formulated, perhaps in the line pointed out by Congar. That is the challenge facing us today.

This challenge was taken up by the All India Consultation on Evangelization, Patna, 1973. The Nagpur Seminar had said that "God-experience is the core of Hinduism . . . the lack of God-experience is seen as a major obstacle to evangelization in India" (nos. 43-44, Nagpur Declaration). The first four recommendations of the Patna Consultation deal with contemplation. The need to integrate values of Indian religious traditions into the Christian contemplative tradition is recommended (no. 11. Declaration of the Patna Consultation).

## Concluding Questions

The Patna Consultation asked the challenging question: Whether the Church in India is an adult local Church to fulfill its responsibilities without looking up for direction at every turn? The Communication from the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (C.B.C.I.) to the Synod of Bishops in Rome, 1974, seems to meet this question. The Declaration on Evangelization by the C.B.C.I., Calcutta, January, 1974, declares: "No. 10. The Indian Church has grown in consciousness of her identity and responsibility." And "no. 14: The Church in India realizes her responsibility which cannot be shifted on to other shoulders." "No. 9: It is also aware that the local Church is not merely a branch of the Universal Church but the true realization of the Church of Christ in a given locality." "This means the Church in India must realize its genuine Indian identity and rid herself of the slur of being foreign which clings to her ... by adjusting herself to the conditions prevailing in the country and developing an indigenous theology. Such a theology will be one of the primary tasks of the local Church, for it reflects on the implications of and the response to the Word of God within a particular tradition."

Nos. 14 and 15 further clarify this point: "These relations of giving and taking must be characterized by loyalty to the Holy See, yet free from overdependence of any form or conformism for its own sake, both of which ill benefit an adult Church." "Hence doctrinal statements, directions for Christian life, liturgical laws, etc., must be accepted with a clear responsible understanding of their implications for the Indian Church." And No. 31: "The fact of religious pluralism in India will demand from the Church a greater appreciation of the pluralism within herself. The Church must unambiguously present herself as a worshipping community in which both personal and community prayer is expressed in forms of traditional Indian spirituality. Liturgical legislation should therefore be such as to give full scope towards forming such a praying and God-conscious community."

The then-president of the C.B.C.I. made his statement at the General Assembly of the 1974 Synod, on October 1, on behalf of the Indian Episcopal Conference, which we give as Appendix 1 to this paper.

The FABC, following the example of Irenaeus and the other saintly Fathers of the Church, ought to deal with the curial structures with due reverence and deference, but with the firm consciousness of its own identity and responsibility.

At the FABC Assembly at Barrackpore, Calcutta, 1978, Archbishop D. S. Lourdasamy, as Papal Representative, declared that the Holy Father earnestly wished the Asian Churches to seek and discover their own identity and responsibility. May the wish and blessing of the Holy Father bear fruit through this meeting of BIRA III.

### Appendix 1

Statement by Cardinal L.T. Picachy of Calcutta at the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on October 1, 1974, the Feast of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Patroness of the Missions.

Most Holy Father and fellow Missionaries.

What I am about to say to you on behalf of the Indian Episcopal Conference illustrates some points which we in India believe to be of vital importance for the Church in our country, and possibly for Asia and the rest of the world as well. We would therefore like to submit them to your consideration, both here and in the Synod Hall, and in our discussion groups.

1. The Holy Spirit is the principle from which all evangelical activity in the Church is derived. The role of the Church should be contemplative.

The experience of the Paschal Mystery consists essentially in the acceptance of the Holy Spirit sent to us by the Risen Christ. This acceptance draws us into the Trinitarian life of communion and love, and makes us living members of the Church of Christ. This sharing of the Christian experience through words and deeds, which we call evangelization, is primarily a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, as it were, a radiation of that Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the faithful. The Spirit renders itself visible, audible, somehow even tangible, to the world and men through signs. In the task of evangelization, therefore, it is of the utmost significance that the ecclesial community should be an authentic sign of the Holy Spirit, surrendering itself to be possessed, transformed and led by the Spirit, so that the life of its members becomes irradiated by it.

This process must be constantly renewed and extended. Although by baptism and confirmation the members of the Church receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they must still surrender anew each day to its transforming power through prayer and contemplation, and through the

constant reading and hearing of the Word of God. Should it falter in these, the ecclesial community will no longer be able to manifest the life of the Holy Spirit. It seems to us very necessary, then, that the Church should be, above all things, contemplative.

## 2. Interfaith dialogue is an inseparable part of evangelization.

India has cradled and nourished many ancient creeds, which even now are a source of inspiration for the religious life of millions of their followers. We in India are daily witnesses to the religious experiences of these men, whose deep sincerity often puts us to shame. We can testify from experience to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the aspirations and undertakings of the adherents of these great religious traditions.

These traditions set great store by the genuine experience of God, of communion with the divine. They believe that for human beings self-realization consists essentially in a vital awareness of the presence of the Supreme dwelling in them. With unremitting zeal they cultivate asceticism, renunciation of worldly goods, prayer and meditation.

Thus circumstanced, the Church in India sees interfaith dialogue as a normal expression of a sharing between religious souls of their experiences. Through this dialogue, God calls on each of them, drawing them onward to a higher spirituality and a more profound commitment to him. We see interfaith dialogue, then, as something good in itself. Through mutual edification and communion men evangelize one another. This should not prevent us of course—and we want to insist on this—from proclaiming the Word revealed to us Christians in Christ Jesus with as much vigor today as in the time past. For indeed we have received a commission from the Lord, and we cannot but proclaim what we have seen and heard. The Church cannot restrict its mission to the testimony of deeds alone. It must also bear testimony to the Word; interfaith dialogue does not dispense us from proclaiming the Word. We do indeed render thanks to God that even today there are regions of India that are disposed to hear and accept the Gospel of Christ.

## 3. Betterment of the human condition is an integral part of evangelization.

Great efforts are being made today to provide our people with the means to improve the quality of human life. There are still millions of them that lack life's necessities. We are determined to rid them of hunger and sickness and ignorance and exploitation, to provide them with

clothing and a roof over their heads, to restore them their rights and self-respect, to lead them to a full development. The Church cannot remain aloof from such endeavors. It should rather assume an active role in the struggle to provide assistance to the suffering and in the task of opening the way to truly human progress and authentic liberation for all. This effort makes it incumbent upon the Church to work sincerely to bring about those changes in the social and economic structures both of Indian and the international community. At the last Synod the bishops declared that this work is an integral part of the proclamation of the Word of salvation. In our efforts we need the co-operation of our sister Churches. We are grateful for the assistance in the form of men and money, which in the past they made available to us. But in today's setting something more is expected of them. They have accepted and elaborated the principles of justice, liberation and integral human development. Now we ask that they strive to bring it about that these principles effectively change the ways of thinking and acting of their governments so that in turn the plans of action, programs and structures of international organizations, such as the United Nations, UNCTAD and UNESCO, and of multinational corporations, will be modified. Such work is indeed a form of co-operation of the utmost importance for the evangelization not only of India but of the whole of the Third World. Indeed we believe that it will be for the good of the developed nations as well. We propose that in this Synod we study and reflect on the world food problem, for this would seem to be the most urgent of all problems of our time.

4. The local Church is a concrete sign and instrument of evangelization. To enable it to evolve in accord with its nature, pluriformity is indispensable.

Evangelization leads on the one hand to the founding of the local Church, while on the other hand the local Church is the instrument which the Holy Spirit uses in the work of evangelization. The local Church is the community of the faithful in a particular place and in a concrete situation. It is brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim the Word, while it gives expression to and celebrates its togetherness in the Eucharist. As a humble community of communion and service, the local Church should be open to the world around it and fit itself into the life of those in whose midst it lives.

Now it is clear that human cultures, religions, traditions, circumstances of life, along with men's needs and expectations, differ from one place to another. Through this diversity the Spirit is manifested in different ways. Hence pluriformity in the life of the local Churches is by

all means to be encouraged and fostered. Pluriformity is likewise desirable in styles of evangelization, forms of ministry, ecclesiastical law and administration, religious life and its organization, as well as in the promotion of a truly creative liturgy. Real unity and sharing among the local Churches is not obtained through external uniformity. Rather, it is found in mutual openness and sharing in and through a plurality of forms. We would like to invite the bishops here assembled to dare to begin some profound reflection on the theology of the local Church and its relations to the universal Church. This latter, it seems to us, consists in the communion of the local Churches among themselves, in the midst of which the Roman Church and its bishops serve as center of union and bond of love.

In what concerns our co-operation with our sister Churches, we want to point out gratefully before God that India has received and still is receiving many excellent vocations for the priestly ministry, as well as for the religious life of both women and men. In times past we received the faith from other Churches; now it is God's good pleasure that we announce the faith to others. For it is a matter of record that during the past twenty years missionaries have set out from India to the various parts of the world. Today they are proclaiming the Gospel in North and South America, in Africa, Oceania, Australia, many parts of Asia, Europe, and indeed in the Eternal City itself. We pray that as they respond to their mission, they will courageously try to fit themselves into the local Churches to which they have been sent.

##### 5. Evangelization is carried on in humility.

Lest our work of evangelization be blighted from the start, we must be profoundly humble, as is clear, for many reasons.

First of all, evangelization is the work of the Holy Spirit, or, to put it in a slightly different way, it is the manifestation of the Spirit through the words and signs which he selects. We are no more than servants and instruments to radiate the Spirit.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit is not ours alone, nor is Jesus Christ found only among Christians or confined within Christian institutions. We know that the Spirit is active in the whole wide world, in human communities, in the events of history and in the hearts of men. Indeed, he is actively present within them before we go out to bring the Gospel to them.

Thirdly, those with whom we open a dialogue and to whom we want to bring the Good News are not rarely more deeply spiritual and steeped in God than we are. Often too they are endowed with greater human gifts than ourselves. Hence it follows that they respond more than we do to the Spirit and are able to manifest him in their lives better than we, becoming thus a source of edification to us.

It can happen that we are called through them to turn to God more than they through us. Always and everywhere, conversion — turning to God — starts from him and is directed to him.

Fourthly, those to whose human progress and development we want to devote ourselves are already living true Christian values, as is clear from the way in which they accept and endure indigence and misery, unjust oppression and sorrow. Since evangelization is a sharing of love and fraternal affection, it can be carried on only in a spirit of real humility, for it is service rendered to the Spirit, to the Word, to our fellowmen.

In summary, then, we propose the following five points as being of great importance to the Assembly for discussion in small groups:

1. The need for prayer and contemplation.
2. The dialogue with believers of the major religious traditions.
3. The need to stimulate a theology of the local Church.
4. The need to work for conditions that foster a truly human life, as an integral part of evangelization.
5. The need to approach the task of evangelization in humility of spirit.

## Appendix 2

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**IV. TOWARDS A CULTURE OF WHOLENESS: THE TASKS OF THE  
LOCAL CHURCHES IN COUNTRIES OR REGIONS OF MAJOR HINDU  
INFLUENCE**

by the Rev. Michael Amaladoss, S.J.

The Church in Asia, reflecting on her mission, has to take account of other major religions, like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, that are part of the Asian scene. This encounter with other religions has been the object of reflection and comment in various meetings of the Asian bishops, starting with their first meeting in Manila, in 1970, in which they resolved: "We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere, and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development." The first plenary assembly of the FABC at Taipei in 1974 spells out the evangelizing mission of the Church in terms of the inculturation of the local Church, involving a twofold dialogue with the religions and the poor. The first Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, in 1979, speaks of three forms of dialogue: the dialogue to promote mutual understanding and harmony; the dialogue of life, where people join together to promote whatever leads to unity, love, truth, justice and peace; and the dialogue of prayer and religious experience, sharing the riches of our spiritual heritages.

**Orientation to Dialogue**

It is in the context of this traditional concern that I would like to place my reflections today on the tasks of the local Churches in regions of major Hindu influence. I shall start with a few remarks that outline

the general orientation that guides my reflections. 1. Dialogue takes place not in the abstract, between ideas, beliefs and practices, but between two groups of people, often sharing the same life situation and facing the same problems — in this case, Hindus and Christians. 2. This dialogue between two groups of people, who share a common divine call to build up a new humanity, covers all dimensions of life: economic, sociopolitical, psychological, cultural and religious. 3. Religion, as the ultimate guarantor of a world view, of values and attitudes, is basic and influences and is influenced by the other dimensions. We cannot reflect adequately on interreligious dialogue without taking into account the other dimensions of human life. 4. Dialogue supposes an open attitude to receive as well as to give, to change as well as to challenge, to set out on a path of co-operation and convergence rather than confrontation, to mutual fecundation. 5. All communities are painfully aware of the continuing gap between ideals and life. However, in any serious dialogue both aspects will have to be taken into account. It is within the framework of these remarks that I would like to continue my reflection, focusing on the various dimensions of life—economic, sociopolitical, psychological, cultural and religious—successively. Some overlapping is inevitable since these dimensions are closely linked to one another. I shall present a brief synthetic look at the end.

### A Just Economic Order

One of the glaring characteristics of Asian reality is its poverty and any attempt at building up a new humanity must aim at its eradication. How do Hinduism and Christianity react to this situation? The feudal-capitalistic structures that are at the root of this poverty and oppression are supported by some element in both religions. The prevailing caste system, with its religious sanction in terms of purity—impurity, strengthens the feudal-capitalistic structure. Prevailing ideas of caste-*dharma* (social order), by assigning certain types of work to certain groups of people, perpetuate wrong notions regarding the dignity of labor and choice of work. A pursuit of *moksha* (fulfilment), without reference to the present world, consequent upon certain advaitic theories of reality and ideals of *sannyasa* (renunciation), seems to have resulted in a lack of religious interest in life in this world and has strengthened the dichotomy between religion and economics. The doctrine of *karma* (prescribed duty), rigidified into fatalism, even though self-made, may have led to passivity and resignation. Christianity too has contributed to a similar result through the privatization and ritualization of religion, the other-worldly approach to fulfilment, the onesided insistence on the will of God and institutional authority, leading to passive obedience and its easy acceptance of the caste system.

In recent years Christianity has rediscovered the social and structural dimensions of religious commitment, the presence and realization of the Kingdom already in this world, and the positive role of human effort in the building up of the new humanity. We now have a spirituality and theology of development. These perspectives, however, have not yet touched deeply and in a practical way our Churches in Asia. Similarly in Hinduism too, visionaries, like Aurobindo, and practical leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi, have discovered perspectives of material (cosmic) and human development. The cosmic concern expressed by ideas like *lokasamgraha* (world-maintenance) and practices like *panchayatna* (five offerings of food made to the gods, ancestors, guests, animals and birds and the self), the integral humanism of the holistic pursuit of the ends of life: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (physical well-being and pleasure), and *moksha* (fulfilment); the weakening of caste under the impact of the *bhakti* cults, industrialization—urbanization, and secular humanistic and democratic ideals; the relativization of *karma* in the quest for liberation — these are all signs of hope and optimism.

The Church's task in this situation is a promotion of a just economic order, through a common commitment to building up a socialistic pattern of society, fighting injustice, if necessary, but much more by encouraging every value and attitude that would give a positive role to man and his creative effort to build up a new humanity of justice and brotherhood. It will be particularly influenced by the integral humanism of Hinduism with its relativization of all human structures, while challenging the Hindus to take this life and world seriously.

### **A Community of Freedom and Fellowship**

In the sociopolitical field the social stratification represented by the caste system in regions of Hindu influence is the biggest obstacle to the emergence of a community of freedom and fellowship. Man is not respected as a person. There is no sense of equality or fraternity. In India the caste factor dominates politics too. The lower castes, and especially the outcastes, are economically powerless and politically weak and exploited. Thus feudal structures are perpetuated. Relations based on caste, and others depending on the joint family system, have produced models of authority that function more in terms of personal loyalty than of principled service. Heroes predominate over real leaders of the people. This may also have something to do with the heroic figures in the *puranas*, like Krishna, etc. When the prevailing ethos is not personal dignity and responsibility but loyalty to the group or to an individual

autocratic leader, then all sorts of communalism raise their heads, unchecked by any principle. True democracy, based on people's participation, can hardly flourish in an atmosphere like this.

One can dispute the purely religious roots of the caste system in Hinduism. There is, of course, the famous Rigvedic hymn of the Purushasukta in which we are told of the sacrifice of the primeval Man and the emergence of the different castes from different parts of his body — the Brahmins from the head, for example, and the Shudras from the feet. This story is probably more the legitimation rather than the origin of the existing social stratification. Notions of ritual impurity must have served as a sanction supportive of the system. But the Upanisadic and Vedantic reflection on the *atman*, affirming the presence of Brahman in every man, was a charter for the freedom and worth of every individual. The four margas—*jnana*, *bhakti*, *karma* and *yoga*—for realization (*sadhana*) are means of liberation from the ritual system and promoted a personal religion. The reform movements from Buddha to Gandhi have stressed the equality of man. Occasions, like the pilgrimages to Pandarpur in Maharashtra or Sabarimalai in Kerala, reaffirm the principle of equality of all men beyond caste differences. The formal acceptance of secular democracy must have strengthened these religious forces. But the caste system has withstood all these pressures. Even Christianity and Islam have meekly succumbed to it.

Probably only a social revolution promoted by economic and political upheaval can bring liberation from the shackles of caste, though a deeper philosophical reflection and a personal spiritual experience can provide a basis of meaning and motivation for such a revolution.

If the liberating spirit of Christ, in whom there is no more Jew or Greek but all are the children of the Father, succeeds in helping the Church to throw off the shackles of caste and realize in itself the values of freedom and fellowship of the Kingdom, it can serve as a catalyst in promoting a radical humanism that finds a basis in the fatherhood and transcendent lordship of God. But the experience of the Church as the People of God, at whose service are the various ministers, has not really taken hold of the Churches in Asia that continue to be largely hierarchical and pyramidal. Moreover, the Church must get rid of its defensive ghetto mentality as a minority community and become the center of a people's movement for justice and fundamental human rights. The figure of the Suffering Servant must inspire new forms of authority as serving leadership — as in the case of people like Gandhi. Puranic figures, like King Dharma of the Mahabharata, or the image of

God, who is always present to man and ready to intervene whenever *dharma* needs to be re-established, would also prove sources of inspiration.

### **An Integral Humanism**

Does Hinduism give rise to any special psychological traits? In this area it is very difficult to separate religion and culture as a way of life which mutually influence each other. An Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar, traces the "Hindu world image" to the religious ideals of *moksha* and *dharma*. The ideal of fusion (*moksha*) envisages "Man, not as a discreet presence but absorbed in his surroundings; ego, not in opposition to the id, but merged with it; individual, not separate, but existing in all his myriad connections." It is an ideal of interdependence. *Dharma* is both the principle and the vision of an organic society in which all the participating members are interdependent, their roles complementary. *Dharma* is more the spirit rather than the content of activity. This perception gives rise to a certain suppleness and tolerance towards roles and structures. "The Hindu time-sense is more psychological than historical; it has the dreamlike quality of timeless time as it exists in the human unconscious." *Karma* views man not as a "*tabula rasa*," but as some one with inbuilt limits so that "there is not that sense of urgency and struggle against the outside world, with prospects of sudden metamorphoses and great achievements." These tendencies are further strengthened as the child grows up in a joint family situation which emphasizes primary mental processes in which thinking is representational and affective, relying on visual and sensual images. In such a situation a certain narcissism, a tendency to be conformist than revolutionary, and an attitude of introversion that ignores non-personal reality, could flourish.

This could be a little onesided picture that does not take into account the influence of popular religious culture. Certainly the Epics hold up a different ideal. The Gita has been interpreted in a revolutionary sense by modern commentators. Modernization, in terms of a scientific and industrial culture, is challenging and qualifying traditional attitudes and frames of mind. It may, however, be true that an urge to revolution and to a revolutionary interpretation of tradition comes only from an oppressive situation. I think such a situation exists now in most countries in Asia. The Western attitudes that Christianity represents and often inculcates in its educational institutions do bring in a rational, historical approach to reality that can balance traditional Indian attitudes. Christianity can also play a challenging role by

becoming increasingly aware of the revolutionary message of the Gospel. The command to love the other, even unto death, is the new command of Christ. The cosmic and structural dimensions of this new law have recently been rediscovered under the impact of oppression on the one hand and Marxist theory on the other in the Christian countries of Latin America. This message will certainly acquire a humanistic depth of interiority, interdependence and complementarity under the impact of Asian reality and in particular of Hinduism. We can thus build in Asia not only a new world but also a new human community.

### A Culture of Wholeness

Wholeness and order may be said to be characteristic of Hindu culture. The concepts *eta* and *dharma* express this. *Yoga* is a practical method of achieving this. The arts express and facilitate this in various ways. The caste system is a social expression of these traits, wrong more because of its hereditary rigidity than for its thorough comprehensiveness. The four stages of life, namely *brahmacharya* (student), *grihasta* (householder), *vanaprasta* (forest-dweller) and *sannyasa* (wanderer in pursuit of fulfilment), offer a planned, progressive and holistic project of life. The four *purusarthas* (ends of human life), namely, *artha* (wealth), *kama* (pleasure), *dharma* (righteousness) and *moksha* (liberation), seek to satisfy all dimensions of human aspiration. The Samkya cosmology mapped the universe, while the yoga provided an integral, but systematic, vision of man. We see the same comprehensiveness and order in the Indian *raga* and *tala* systems, in the *mudras* (gestures) and *karanas* (postures) of *bharata-natya*, in the microcosmic profusion of a temple *gopura* (gateway). At the basis of these traits is a holistic view of reality that goes beyond, while integrating, all dualisms between God and man, man and the world, the here and the hereafter, body and soul, the sacred and the secular. It is the spirit of *advaita*, which has often been misunderstood as monistic or pantheistic. This holistic world view gives rise to an integral humanism that characterizes all the various *sadhanas* of the Hindu tradition. The concept of *dharma* attempts to recreate this wholeness, lost through the various alienations caused by *avidya* (ignorance), *anava* (egoism) and *kama* (attachment). In practice, however, contemporary economic and sociopolitical conditions have made that ideal a mere vision and its realization nearly impossible. Industrialization, urbanization and consumerism, growing in an unbalanced manner, have only strengthened all sorts of alienations.

Though a certain holistic perspective is characteristic of the biblical world view and the chasm between Yahweh and his people had been

bridged when God became man, yet in the course of its development the various dualisms of Greek rationalistic thought have taken hold of Christian culture. Christianity needs to inculturate itself into the holistic world view of Hinduism. The "Spirituality" that contemporary Indian gurus export to various parts of the world is nothing more than various ways of experiencing this wholeness and escaping the alienations in life. This perspective is probably also at the root of the Asian attitude to pluralism and its characteristic tolerance, since it perceives easily the complementarity of things and the higher totality that integrates them. Christianity can certainly rediscover this perspective in its roots both in the Bible and in the Asian culture and help in healing the various conflicts and alienations that afflict contemporary Asia and in promoting integration and wholeness.

### A Christian Advaita

Much has been written about dialogue with Hindus at the religious level, since dialogue is often interpreted only as dialogue between religions. Let me focus on some of the points, though perhaps in a new perspective.

Hinduism has been called a mystical religion, as contrasted with Christianity, which is said to be prophetic. It stresses the immanence of God and has a sense of God in all things. Its basic experience is that of *advaita* — the unity of all things in the Absolute. It is neither fusion nor dualistic separation. It has been exaggerated, even by some Indian thinkers, into monism or pantheism. Christianity stresses the transcendence and otherness of God and speaks of a web of personal relations. Encounter seems to be the basic experience in terms of love and commitment. A dialogue between Hinduism and Christianity must lead to a discovery of communion. One has spoken of a Christian *advaita* to understand the experience of Christ of his union with his Father; and the Christian participates in this experience of oneness. In God he discovers also his oneness with all beings, described by St. Paul and realized by the Spirit. Hinduism can move away from monism and discover that the unity of all being is really a communion of beings, not merely metaphysical but achieved in free participation. This experience of communion through participation can be the real goal of the new world that we are seeking to build in Asia — a communion that would respect pluralism and multiplicity, but would articulate them into a unity.

### A New Sadhana

The Hindu *sadhana* aims at experiential realization. This realization is pursued through many (*margas*) ways: *jnana* (insight), *bhakti* (love)

and *karma* (right and unattached action). There is in general a contemplative dimension to *sadhana*. The various ways meet the needs of different persons, their temperament as well as the stage of development. This is known as the principle of *adhikaratya*. This makes possible a pluralistic approach that is at the same time relevant. Christian pursuit of salvation is only slowly emerging out of the dichotomy between faith and good works of the Reformation. There is a certain importance given to sacraments which tend to remain ritualistic. Today there is a demand for commitment to liberating action. Even Christian religious are seen more as social workers and educationists than as spiritual people. The contemplative dimension of Christianity has found witness only in recent times in the Christian ashrams and in gurus like Swami Abhishik-tananda. Christianity could rediscover the contemplative dimension of its liturgy and help Christians to become contemplatives-in-action, in the words of St. Ignatius Loyola. Hinduism on the other hand can realize the social dimension and demands of the pursuit of liberation as hinted at, for example, by the Bhagavad Gita, and as rediscovered by men like Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo and Jayaprakash Narayan.

Hinduism has evolved in yoga a psychophysiological and moral way of self-discipline. Life in an ashram provides an atmosphere for such a disciplined life. What is important for us here are not the details of yogic techniques or the ashram way of life but the basic spirit behind them. Yoga takes the person as an integrated whole and promotes a healthy mind in a healthy body. All the powers of man—sensual, emotional, mental and spiritual—are called upon to collaborate in the pursuit of an integrated personality. The ashram, with its insistence upon a simple life in harmony with nature, provides an ideal background for such pursuit of integration. These perspectives are further seen in the use made of the arts—especially music and dance—in *sadhana*. Painting and sculpture serve as aids to concentration. Music and dance mediate an experience of integration. Thus in Hindu *sadhana* every technique seeks to contribute to an experience of wholeness. Though Christianity has also its methods of prayer, its preferred techniques of *sadhana* are the sacramental celebrations that express symbolically and experientially the meaning of life in community. Often, however, sacraments tend to be privatized and ritualized. Hinduism can, in dialogue with Christianity, discover the social dimensions of its *sadhana* techniques, already present in such practices as the *bhajans*, and make them relevant in life rather than alienating. Christianity on the other hand can learn to take the body and the cosmos more seriously and seek to integrate them in a total approach to experience. It could also discover and experiment with newer forms of religious life based on the ashram tradition. The traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience could be

reinterpreted in a Hindu context as the authentic pursuit of *artha, kama, dharma* from a perspective of *moksha* (Kingdom).

### **An Open Community**

The basis of Hindu identity is not law, nor a creed, nor an organization, nor other structures. It is a spirit, an orientation, a commitment, a history. Orthopraxis is more central to it than orthodoxy. There are no rigid authority structures. But there is a leadership that is charismatic. The gurus are not born or appointed; they become such in virtue of their experience. But there is a strict tradition of teaching and direction. Within certain broad parameters there is room for pluralism and tolerance. It is an open community. In contrast to this, Christianity certainly appears overinstitutionalized and too rigidly structured. Though one speaks of charism, communion and people of God, the organization remains pyramidal. Authority is perceived more as power, nowadays spiritualized, rather than as service. In the context of pluralism demanded by movements like inculturation, ecumenism and dialogue, the Church needs to become more and more an open-community structure centered on charism and communion, with the role of authority really as service. The Church in dialogue cannot be a closed community, seeking its identity in self-defensive or triumphalist structures. It has to be an open one—with open frontiers—lost among the people like leaven. It will seek its unity not in institutions but in a shared and committed faith seeking expression in sacramental celebration. Some structures of course will be necessary. But these will be structures of communion rather than organization.

### **Conclusion 1: A Threefold Task**

What then are the tasks of the local Churches in regions of major Hindu influence? This influence may be specified in terms of *advaita, dharma, ashrama, yoga, karma* and *varna*. I do not have to re-explain these terms. While there is an openness to perspectives of an integral humanism, rigid social stratification, a certain alienation from the world and individualism have made of it an empty ideal. The tasks of the Church in this context can be specified in three broad areas: evangelization, inculturation and dialogue. The Church has to proclaim by word and deed the good news of a Kingdom of freedom, fellowship and justice as a present reality transforming humanity. Through its encounter with Hindu culture and religion the Church needs to be reborn with a new identity: a new theology, a new spirituality, a new liturgy and new ways of life and organization. Dialogue must cease to be limited to a few specialists in ashrams and to the area of religion, but must embrace

all dimensions of life and every one. The focus, however, would be small groups of people working for the building up of a new humanity. These groups will be interreligious ones, unlike the basic Christian communities of Christian countries. The Church will have to work out a rationale for such groups in terms of a broad, integral and secular humanism that can find its roots in various religions, each in its specific way. The task, however, need not be limited to those basic groups, but embrace other means of community building, educational and social. Nevertheless, these need to be reoriented. Hinduism in its turn will profit by this dialogue, as it has done in the past, from Ram Mohan Roy to Gandhi.

### **Conclusion 2: Reconciliation**

I had said in the beginning that dialogue is not simply between religions, but between people. We have seen so far the various dimensions of dialogue. These were possibilities and prospects. Some of these would probably happen without planned effort. But if we are aiming at a conscious program, then the pressing question is whether a climate for such dialogue exists between the two communities. Restricting my reflections to the situation in India, the answer cannot be an unqualified yes. Growing religious fanaticism, supported by economic and social factors, have created conflicts. Rising beyond an attitude of self-defence or a search for communal self-identity, we have to promote reconciliation and a common commitment to an integral development of the community. Setting aside self-righteous triumphalism on the one hand and meek submission on the other, we must promote a climate of mature mutual acceptance leading to collaboration in a common task. Where this collaboration involves not only Christians and Hindus but also Muslims (and other religions), Christians may be called upon to play a mediating role, both because they share perspectives in various ways with the other two communities, and because they seem to have, at the moment, a keener sense for an interest in dialogue. This is not merely a religious task of reconciliation, but also a social action of community building and a political project of community organization.

Only in this way shall we all march together towards that fulness (*purnam*) that is God's gift to men in Christ (Eph 1:23).

## V. OBSTACLES TO DIALOGUE\*

by Swami Vikrant, S.D.B.

Swami Nikhilananda of the Ramakrishna order of monks has listed a number of obstacles to a fruitful Hindu—Christian dialogue. His long stay abroad has enabled him to come into close contact with Christianity. Evidently he views Christianity from the rather narrow point of view of Advaita Vadanta.

### Exclusiveness

According to Swami Nikhilananda, the exclusiveness of Christianity and other monotheistic religions is the greatest obstacle to dialogue. The Hindu believes that the ultimate reality is without names, forms and attributes. But its manifestations take various forms and names. The Rig-Veda thus expresses this thought: "*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*"; "that which is one, the sages call by various names."<sup>1</sup> The Hindu practice of reciting a thousand names of Vishnu, Siva, etc., is to express the belief that God's names are innumerable. Here thousand stands for an infinite number. And in one of the Upanishads we read: "As flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their names and forms, so a wise man, free from names and forms, attains Brahman who is greater than great." That the non-dual Spirit is worshipped under various forms is frequently reiterated by Hindu sages and philosophers. Here is an apt text: "May the leader of the universe, the remover of evil, whom the devotees of Siva worship as Siva, the Vedantists as Brahman, the Buddhists as Buddha, the followers of Nyaya philosophy, who are clever in logic, as the Divine Agent, those devoted to the Jaina doctrines as *Arhat*, the ritualists of the Mimamsa school as Karma, grant us all the desires of our hearts."<sup>2</sup>

That all religious paths lead to the same goal is emphasized in the following hymn: "Different are the paths laid down in the Vedas, in Samkhya, in Yoga, in the Saiva and Vaishnava Scriptures. Of these, some people regard the one and some another as the best. Devotees follow these diverse paths, straight or crooked, according to their different tendencies. Yet, O Lord, thou alone art the ultimate goal of all men, as the ocean is the goal of all rivers."<sup>3</sup>

\* This paper was used at the BIRA III Follow-Up Meeting, sponsored jointly by the Commission for Proclamation, Ecumenism, Dialogue and Social Communication of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. The meeting was held at the National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Center, Bangalore, July 28-30, 1983.

## The Place of Christ

Another great difficulty in dialogue with Hinduism is the Hindus' difficulty in understanding the claim for the uniqueness of Christ. For Christianity, the uniqueness of Christ is a fundamental doctrine that cannot be watered down in any way. Though Hindu mythology generally speaks of ten avatars, there is no definite limit to the number of God's manifestations. In the Gita, Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that he appears on earth from age to age (*sambhavami yuge yuge*) to protect the good, to punish the wicked, and to establish the rule of law. This belief in the multiplicity of theophanies is well expressed in a legend. Once when Arjuna was extolling the uniqueness of Krishna, the latter took the disciple to a forest and showed him a tree and asked him if he knew what tree it was. Arjuna replied that it was a blackberry tree with clusters of berries hanging from it. But coming nearer, Arjuna discovered that they were not berries at all but innumerable Krishnas hanging from the trees of the Absolute. The Buddha was also believed to have been preceded by innumerable previous Buddhas, and also followed by many Bodhisattvas. On this point Gandhi has this to say: "I do not take as literally true the text that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God ... I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Rama or Krishna."<sup>4</sup> One day while Ananda, the foremost disciple of the Buddha, was extolling the Enlightened One as greater than all the other Bodhisattvas, the Tathagata asked the disciple if he knew all the other Bodhisattvas. Then Ananda felt ashamed of his ignorance.

Swami Nikhilananda says that the innermost religious experiences of the founders of all religions are not noticed by their followers. The apparent external differences noticed in their teachings account for much of religious quarrellings.<sup>5</sup>

The harmony of religions found its most vivid expression in the experiences of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This saintly mystic practised all the *sadhanas* of the Indian tradition as well as those of Christianity and Islam, and he claimed to have had mystic experiences of Rama, Krishna, Jesus and Allah. Swami Agehananda Bharati, the severest critic of things Hindu, believes that the elite of Calcutta and some psychologists, who had dubbed Ramakrishna a mad man, were wrong and that his religious experiences were genuine, though somewhat eccentric. Such eccentricities, Bharati says, are found in mystics of all religions, times and regions.<sup>6</sup>

For Hindus in general, and for Neo-Hindus in particular, the essential inner core of all religions is the inner experience of divinity which is transconceptual, and transcends rituals, mythologies and theologies. Says the Taittiriya Upanishad: "*Yato vaco nivartante*

*aprapya manasa saha*”: “Where from words turn back, together with the mind, not having attained.” They maintain that while at the mystic or experiential level all religions are the same, inasmuch as they all experience the one ineffable spirit, at the lower level of dogma, rituals and myth, they diverge. This diversity, they believe, is due to ethnic, geographic, economic, socio-psycho-politico-cultural variations. The Hindu is not alarmed at the variations at the lower levels of religion. On the contrary, these differences are for him a symbol of the rich fecundity of the divine manifestations, symbolized in Hindu art in the rich configurations of mythical personalities that we see on the gopurams of South Indian temples, where myriads of gods, monsters, men, animals, birds and plants are seen in mutual embrace to show the richness of creation. Mircea Eliade says that myth is a better vehicle to express the infinite possibilities of creation and God’s self-manifestation than history, since myths transcend the spatiotemporal barriers. For Hindus, rituals and conceptualized doctrines are mere aids to self-realization. They have only a pragmatic value as mere spiritual aids in God-realization. Except Diogenes the Cynic, no one would use a lamp where there is bright sunshine. For Sankara and the Advaitins even the Vedas can be rejected after attaining self-realization. So too, for a Jivanmukta, or one who has attained liberation while in the embodied condition, there is no use of worship either. This is beautifully expressed in a Sanskrit sloka:

Pradhama pratima puja,  
 Japastotrani madhyama,  
 Uttamo manasi puja,  
 So’ham pujotamottama.

But for Christianity, belief in the Resurrection and the continual presence of Christ in the Church and his worship are the core of religion. Mystic vision is a free gift of God, which all are not gifted with.

### **The Universal Religion**

Swami Nikhilananda says that there is no need to search for a universal religion. It is already exists. Every genuine God-experience or self-realization, and every experience of truth, he says, is the discovery of the core of the universal religion. God need not be the inner core of this universal religion for all Hindu thinkers. In fact, of all the ancient Hindu philosophical systems, only Vedanta was theistic. The Nyaya, the Vaiseshika, the Samkhya, the Yoga and the Mimamsa were at the beginning atheistic schools of philosophy. Gandhi gives more importance to Truth than to God. Hinduism and Buddhism have no

difficulty in accommodating Communism and Marxism, since God is not the central issue in these two religions.

The doctrinal articulations (theology) and cultic expressions (worship) are not central to the universal religion of which Swami Nikhilananda speaks. But since man is a cultured being, any attempt to make a ritualistic or theological reduction of religions is bound to fail. No nation is willing to give up its culture. The Hindus accuse the missionaries for having destroyed tribal cultural values in India and elsewhere where the introduction of the Gospel went hand in glove with empire building and colonization. This charge is partially true. But it was never the official policy of the Church. The dream of a cosmic culture, whether at the political level or at the level of science and technology, is a chimera. Let us not speak of tolerance of other religions, says Swami Nikhilananda, because it connotes superiority, but let us speak of other religions with respect and positive acceptance, a *perichoresis*, or mutual interpenetration, as Fr. Panikkar would put it. In a circle with many radii, the farther we move from the center, the greater will seem the distance between one radius and another. As we move towards the center, the distance will narrow down. At the center all the radii meet. The radii represent the different religions and the center is God. The farther we move from God, the greater will seem the difference between one religion and another. The nearer we are to God, the closer we shall feel towards other religions. In God we all meet. Arnold Toynbee, a critic of Christian exclusiveness, has this to say on this head: "A Christian can believe in his own religion without having to feel it is the sole repository of truth. He can love it without having to feel that it is the sole means of salvation. He can take Buddha's words to heart without being disloyal to Christ. But he cannot harden his heart against Krishna without hardening it against Christ."<sup>7</sup>

### **Religious Truths and Western Logic**

A Semantic Reflection. The claim that there can be only one true religion is based on Aristotle's theory of the Excluded Middle, which says that "A" cannot be both "B" and "Not-B" at the same time. But Aristotle made an error: what is applicable to mathematics he applied to physics and metaphysics. It is perfectly valid that in algebra "A" cannot be both "B" and "Not-B." Not so in physics. And Max Planck challenged Aristotle's view by his famous theory of quantum physics. The nuclear physics of Werner Heisenberg and Weizsaecker had shown that the principal axiom of Aristotelian logic has become untenable. This maxim stated that there is only an "Either . . . Or." Today we know from quantum physics that matter is both corpuscular and wavelike, so

that both are different aspects of the same reality. Heisenberg held that the universe is both void and fulness.

Here also lies the clue to the understanding of the Hindu zero and the Mahayana *Nirvana* or *Sunyata*. Either ... Or belongs to the rational order of the mind. If it is not applicable even to physics, much less is it applicable to the realm of the spirit, which is transconceptual. Religious truths are totally different from mathematical truths. Hence, the dialectical theology of Karl Barth is illogical, to say the least. In religion truths are not opposed to each other as numbers are opposed to each other in mathematics. Here the true logic is: "This as well as that." Here polarity and not opposition or contradiction is the rule. Jagdish Chandra Bose had demonstrated the untenability of this principle of mathematics in the realm of botany, where it is incorrect to divide objects into organic and inorganic. Even in mathematics, Brouwer denies the unrestricted application of Aristotle's rule. That is why the Hindu philosophers brought the principle of *samvada* into the realm of religious truths. *Samvada* hold that one part of a pair of opposites cannot be exclusively taken into account. Such statements should be balanced by the simultaneous acknowledgement of its counterstatement. Truth can be gathered only by *samavda*, i.e., the gathering of conclusions from different aspects.<sup>8</sup> In the West Nicholas of Cusa had hit on the same concept in his celebrated distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*. The former keeps opposites distinct under the law of contradiction, while the latter sees that the opposites are reconcilable.

The Indian logical theory of *samvada* has immense theological possibilities. It does not look upon various religions as opposed to one another. The so-called fulfilment theory of Farquhar and others is based on Aristotle's theory of Excluded Middle: Christianity is the only true religion; all others, being false, find their fulfilment in Christianity. In the same way for Karl Barth, the Christian revelation is the abrogation of all other faiths.<sup>9</sup> The soldiers of Charlemagne used to say: "Christians are right, pagans are wrong."

Valuation in the West used to be selective and not collective, as it is in India. The West works by elimination and not by accumulation. The Western mind is confused and frightened by too many equally valid possibilities existing side by side. The Indian mind on the other hand rejoices in the dynamic changes and divergent possibilities as a congenial expression of divine productivity. The Sanskrit verbal root is a fine paradigm of theological and religious pluralism. This word is capable of infinite expansion by the addition of prefixes and suffixes. Western

scholars were not all willing to accept the three-valued logic of Sankara's followers in philosophical usage. But when the German mathematician Brouwer modified the classical two-values' Boolean logic by adding one more truth-value, many recognized it as a vindication of the Indian three-value logic. The unity of all unities and of all pluralities is metalogical; it stands above the logic of human reason.

Zaehner sees a contradiction between the monotheism of the semitic religions and the so-called polytheism of Hinduism. But in reality both are logically false, inasmuch as numbers, the measuring unit of quantity, do not apply to the realm of the immaterial spirit. If nuclear physics rejects the possibility of applying numbers to matter that is convertible to energy, much less is it applicable to theology. So *one* God is as bad as *many* gods! That is why Sankara is careful not to use the term *one* of Brahman; he uses the negative concept — Not-one, thus improving upon the theory of Plotinus who called the Supreme Reality by the term "One."

Every genuine religious experience must be true. We do not have any criterion to make a value judgement on the veracity of another man's innermost religious experience, which by its very nature is incommunicable. Ultimate truths are unintelligible but not inaccessible.<sup>10</sup> The Scholastic attempted to make reality conform to logical structures. It is methodological error, as has been pointed out by Wittgenstein, who holds that language should conform to the structure of reality. The Western approach to religion is logical, while the Hindu approach is aesthetic. The *rishis* usually made use of poetry to communicate their intuitions of the sacred. The Indian tradition has been to catechize people by means of temple art, architecture, music, dance and drama. In the earlier days of the Vienna circle, philosophers, like Schlick and others, held that primitive sentences, also called protocol sentences, that directly report experiences, are incommunicable.

### Myth and History

A great obstacle to interfaith dialogue in India is the belief that since Christianity is an historical religion, and Hindus have a mythological religion with no known founder, their religion is all false, with meaningless fables and legends. Thus Siva, Vishnu, etc., are all rejected as having no truth-value in them. But for Hindus these are carriers of values, which they are not prepared to throw away for the sake of dialogue. Here we are not to make the historical Christ confront the mythical Siva or Vishnu. The mythology of Siva Purana, etc., has a purpose which we must try to understand in the dialogue with the

Hindus. For the Muslims and the Christians the Siva Linga is an abomination. But for the Saivites it is the best symbol to experience the formless God.

True, myth is not history. But history too is not religion at its highest level. The religious experience of man must transcend space and time. When Christians condemn the myths of Hinduism, they probably have in mind St. Paul's warning to Timothy: "Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths."<sup>11</sup> It was a wrong understanding of myths that made the plea of Symmachus, the last champion of pagan Rome, fall on the deaf ears of Emperor Gratian, to spare the pagan statue of Victory set up in the Senate House. It was broken under pressure from Bishop Ambrose. So too Christian conquerors, under the inspiration of missionaries, had destroyed beautiful temples all over the world. In this respect, the Muslims were not the only offenders of culture. That is the reason why the historian Toynbee takes side with Symmachus.

Till recently, myth was considered to be a primitive mode of thought, especially in the 'Mythical' school of Bauer and Gunkel, which identified myth with polytheism. But thanks to the studies of Mircea Eliade and Cassirer, today myth has been vindicated as a genuine thought pattern. It is surprising that even the Oxford Dictionary has retained the old pejorative meaning of myth. Even such a great Scripture scholar as Fr. Benoit, O.P., believes that "myth introduces error and fiction into the very essence of religious speculations about the divinity."<sup>12</sup>

The Bible itself contains mythical elements, and apocalyptic is certainly not history. In this context C. H. Dodd says: "These first and last things can be spoken of only in symbols. They lie, obviously, outside the realm of time and space to which all factual statements refer. They are not events as the historian knows events but realities of a supra-historical order; in referring to them, the Biblical writers make free use of mythology."<sup>13</sup>

Christian speculative theology, freely making use of Greek conceptual frameworks, has nearly succeeded in converting Christianity into a philosophy—the very thing St. Paul feared. This rationalistic theology is in no way superior to the Hindu or Buddhistic mythology of religion. On the contrary, the myth is a better paradigm to express the inexpressible. Says Van der Leeuw: "Doctrine can never completely discard the mythical, if it wishes to avoid falling into the level of a mere philosophical thesis."<sup>14</sup>

Millar Burrow has summarized the new view of myth: "It implies not falsehood but truth; not primitive, naive misunderstanding but an insight more profound than scientific description and logical analysis can ever achieve. The language of myth, in this sense, is consciously inadequate, being simply the nearest we can come to a formulation of what we can see very darkly."<sup>15</sup> Mythology is a way of thinking and imagining about the divine, rather than a thinking and imagining about a number of gods . . . Myth is a way of thinking independently of a polytheistic setting."<sup>16</sup>

So it is high time that we stop the centuries-old controversy about monotheism versus polytheism. According to the thought of Pseudo-Dionysius, whose work had been commented upon by St. Thomas Aquinas with approval, God transcends the antinomy of the one—many.<sup>17</sup> Today sociologists speak of myth as equivalent to mystery. Thus Andrew Greeley has written the book *The Jesus Myth*. We cannot look at a powerful light straight. So too we cannot look at myth. Like light, myth too is invisible. Myth is transparent and brilliant like light. We do not question myth.

According to Aristotle myth is also wisdom. *Logos* is a category that is assimilated to *mythos*, and we have *mythologos*. The hermeneutic or interpretation of myth is *logoa*. Myth is the horizon over against which any hermeneutic is possible. *Mythologumenon*, a third cognate, is the mythical story or narration. It is the form or garment in which the myth happens to be expressed. Fr. Panikkar says that myth is that on which we cannot put our finger without dispelling it. It is something that we cannot manipulate. Thinking has a corrosive power, says Panikkar. Myth, God, person, etc., cannot be objects of thought. If we think out God, he vanishes; if we think out a person, he escapes; if we think out religions, they are destroyed.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Taittiriya Upanishad*, II.4.
2. Cf. Swami Nikhilananda, *Hinduism*, Madras, Ramakrishna Math, 1982, pp. 175-176.
3. *Ibid*, p.176.
4. *Harijan*, 6-3-1937.
5. Nikhilananda, *op. cit.*, p.177.
6. Swami Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Centre*, Delhi, Vikas, 1977, p. 78.
7. Nikhilananda, *op. cit.*, p.187.
8. Betty Heimann, *Facets of Indian Thought*, p. 56.
9. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Chicago University Press, Vol.I, part 2.
10. Cf. L. Shestov, *Anton Tchekkon and other Essays*, Dublin, 1916.
11. I Tim 4:7.

12. Benoit, *La Prophétie*, 1947.
13. C. H. Dodd, *The Bible Today*, p.112.
14. Van der Leeuw, *Religion: Its Essence and Manifestation*, London, p.444.
15. Millar Burrow, *An Outline of Biblical Theology*, Philadelphia, 1946, pp.115-16.
16. Cf. Davis Henton, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* (1956), No.88.
17. Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, P.G., III, 1048 A.

## VI. THE FINAL STATEMENT OF BIRA III

### Preamble

The Third Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA III), sponsored by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), met at the Sacred Heart Seminary, Madras, India, November 15-20, 1982. It was organized by the Commission for Proclamation, Ecumenism, Dialogue and Social Communication of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. Delegates from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, together with resource persons and observers, met, prayed, and reflected together over the urgency, problems and prospects of dialogue between Hindus and Christians in Asia, since dialogue is an integral dimension of the Church's life and mission to build up a new humanity in Christ.

### The Mission of the Church

God, the Father of all, has called all to share in his life and love through his Son Jesus Christ. The risen Christ and his Spirit are active in the world making this love a present and growing reality, making all things new. This same love urges us on to dialogue with people of other religions, because we have, especially since the Second Vatican Council, an increasing awareness of the positive role of other religions in God's plan of salvation.

The Church, as the Sacrament of union with God and of the unity of all humankind, has the mission to promote in various ways the fulfillment which is God's will and gift for all persons in Christ. Dialogue is an integral part of this mission. As God's pilgrim people, the Church shares the longings and desires of all to come closer to the Father, while, as God's eschatological people, it announces Jesus Christ and his Good News to all and calls them to radical conversion and commitment to God in total self-surrender and to belong to the community of Jesus in his Church.

## **The Meaning of Dialogue**

Dialogue and proclamation are complementary. Sincere and authentic dialogue does not have for its objective the conversion of the other. For conversion depends solely on God's internal call and the person's free decision (cf. *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3 and 4).

Dialogue promotes mutual understanding and enrichment through common prayer, sharing of experience and reflection. In this way we deepen not only our common realization of the Truth, but also our common commitment to assure a religious dimension to peoples' quest for a fuller life of peace in freedom, fellowship and justice. Dialogue also facilitates the incarnation of the Good News in the various cultures, creating new ways of life, action, worship and reflection, so as to help the growth of the local Churches and to realize the catholicity and fullness of the mystery of Christ.

Dialogue demands an attitude of openness to the mystery of God's saving action in history, of respect for the others, of humility because we have failed to respond adequately to the Spirit, and of fearlessness because the Spirit is leading us.

Since the religions, as the Church, are at the service of the world, interreligious dialogue cannot be confined to the religious sphere but must embrace all dimensions of life: economic, sociopolitical, cultural and religious. It is in their common commitment to the fuller life of the human community that they discover their complementarity and the urgency and relevance of dialogue at all levels, socioeconomic and intellectual, as well as spiritual, among the common people in daily life, as among scholars and people with deep religious experience.

## **The Asian Situation**

Such dialogue has become urgent in many Asian countries, where, amidst conditions of oppressive poverty and increasing social conflicts, there is a quest for an integral liberation. The pluralism of religions and cultures, while demanding collaboration among the peoples of various religions in the common task of community building, especially in the face of secularizing forces, has also become a source of increasing division and tension. The majorities are becoming assertive, the minorities defensive, and everyone is searching for self-identity in various spheres — including religion — in an atmosphere of an amorphous global village. A process of reconciliation may even be necessary before authentic dialogue can take place. The quest for God, characteristic of

the people of Asia, provides a positive context for interreligious dialogue.

It is in this context that we have reflected on the phenomenon of dialogue between Hindus and Christians in Asia. The atmosphere would be different in countries or regions where the Hindus are dominant, like India and Bali, and in countries where they share a minority status with the Christians, like Malaysia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

### **Hinduism and Christianity**

Some experience of sharings and discussions, of common prayer and "live-ins," and even of common action, give us hope of very positive results in Hindu—Christian dialogue.

The cosmic concern expressed by ideas, like *lokasamgraha* (world-maintenance), and practices, like *panchayajna* (five-fold food offerings to the gods, ancestors, other living beings, guests and the self), and the integral humanism of the *purushartas* (ends of human life), namely: *dharma* (righteousness), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (physical well being) and *moksha* (fulfilment), can create a positive atmosphere for the common struggle for a just economic order and counteract the restrictive effects of caste, which strengthens feudalism; of *karma*, leading to passivity and resignation; and of certain theories of reality that look upon the world as *maya* (illusion). Christianity can stress the social and structural dimensions of religious commitment and encourage every value and attitude that would give a positive role to man and his creative effort in history to build up a new humanity of justice and brotherhood, while questioning in itself the tendency to privatize and ritualize religion, and its easy acceptance of the evils of the caste system.

The Vedantic reflection on the *atman* (self), affirming the presence of *Brahman* (Absolute) in every person, is a charter for the freedom and worth of every individual, which is further strengthened by reform movements from Buddha to Gandhi. But it has not succeeded in freeing people from rigid social stratifications. If the liberating Spirit of Christ helps the Church in realizing in itself the values of freedom and fellowship, it can serve in Asia as a catalyst in promoting a radical humanism that finds a basis in the fatherhood and the transcendent lordship of God.

The Hindu traditions of life and growth, especially in a joint family, stress the ideal of interdependence and solidarity. This can lead to conformism, introversion and a lack of openness and concern for the

intercommunity. Popular religious culture, however, especially in the *Epics*, seems to hold a different, more positive ideal. Christ's new command to love the other even unto death, while promoting an urge to radical transformation of society in the context of oppression, is capable of combining and fostering together the values of the dignity of the human person, interdependence and solidarity, and active concern for building up of the new human society.

Wholeness and order may be said to characterize Hindu culture, especially in the various arts, in the *raga* (melody) and *tala* (rhythm), in the *karanas* (postures) and *mudras* (gestures) of dance, and in the microcosmic profusion of temple architecture. This integral humanism goes beyond all dualisms of body and soul, sacred and secular, person and world. The concept of *dharma* seeks to recreate this wholeness, tarnished by the various alienations caused by *avidya* (ignorance), *anava* (egoism) and *kama* (attachment). Contemporary sociocultural and economic realities have strengthened these alienations. Christianity can promote this culture of wholeness found both in its revealed message and in Asian culture, and thus help in healing the various alienations and conflicts that afflict contemporary Asia.

Hinduism has a sense of God in all things. Its basic experience is that of the *advaita*, which is the unity of all things in the Absolute. While the Christian tradition also has the dimension of interiority and of God's immanent presence in all things created, yet what stands out more prominently in the Christian experience is a personal encounter with God in terms of love and commitment. A dialogue will lead to deepening and fostering together the values of interiority, silence, love and communion.

The Hindu *sadhana* (spiritual practice) aims at experimental realization through various *margas* (ways): *jnana* (insight), *bhakti* (love), *karma* (right action) and *yoga* (psychophysical discipline), which meets the needs and temperaments of different persons (*adhikaratva*). This makes possible a pluralistic approach to spiritual realization. Its most marked characteristic, however, is awareness of the Absolute and contemplation. Christianity combines both the values of contemplation and action, even if both have been differently emphasized at different times and in different contexts. Today it stresses commitment to liberating action. Its contact with Hinduism can help it to integrate various methods of prayer and *sadhana*. The *ashram* tradition can provide inspiration for new forms of Christian life. Hinduism in its turn will discover the social dimension of *sadhana* and community dimension of *moksha*.

## Recommendations

To promote dialogue among Hindus and Christians we make the following recommendations to our fellow bishops and their collaborators in Asia, calling on the bishops in a special way to provide encouraging leadership.

1. The people at all levels must be prepared for dialogue through appropriate means of instruction and training: in families, in basic ecclesial communities, parishes, schools, seminaries and religious formation houses, each one according to his/her role in the community. This preparation also includes the encouragement of a spirit of creative initiative, and the promotion of a habit of prayer.

2. Existing activities of dialogue must be encouraged and promoted on a wider scale and even at popular levels. Common celebration of certain festivals, like *Divali* (festival of lights) and *Pongal* (harvest festival), prayer, common reading of scriptures, sharing of spiritual experiences, reflection and discussion, and "live-ins" are some of such activities.

3. Common action for the promotion of integral human values, like freedom, equality, fellowship and justice, leading to peace and for the eradication of social evils, like caste, communalism, corruption and the exploitation of the weak, can be encouraged and mutually supported. Christians should also be encouraged to join, both as persons and as institutions, existing movements for the building up of a fuller humanity, life in community, or even initiate such action leading to a common consciousness for the promotion of fundamental human values and the defence of rights.

4. The varied task of inculturation, as inseparable from dialogue in life, spirituality, worship and reflection, must be taken up earnestly.

5. Collaboration with the other Churches, as we have already started doing, is not only welcome, but is to be encouraged. This would also make dialogue more effective through a common witness to the Good News and bring the Churches closer together.

## Conclusion

Dialogue is a crucial challenge to the Churches in Asia in their growing commitment to the building up of the Kingdom of God. This

challenge is fraught with risks arising out of confusing sociopolitical tensions, besides other causes. However, with the confidence that the Spirit is with us and helps us in our weakness (Rom 8:26), we commit ourselves to this task of dialogue in order to unite the whole universe in Christ, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).

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