EDITED BY HERBERT JAI SINGH

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
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Inter-Religious Dialogue

Edited by
HERBERT JAI SINGH

THE CHRISTIAN INSTITUTE FOR
THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND SOCIETY
BANGALORE
1967
Preface

Inter-Religious Dialogue is the third book in the Devanandan Memorial series that the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society has been publishing, the first two being I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes (1963) and Preparation for Dialogue (1964). Dr. Devanandan was seriously concerned about the meaning of Christian presence in the midst of the religiously pluralistic society in India. In pursuance of this interest he had, as Director of the CISRS, organized dialogues on significant themes between Christian and Hindu scholars.

The mid-twentieth century has presented a decisive challenge to world religions. They must either relate themselves relevantly to the profound personal and social concerns of modern man or resign themselves to exist indifferently at the periphery of human concerns. Whereas much religion today continues to remain conservative and traditional, there is at the same time, at least among the serious thinkers, a sense of urgency to interpret faith so that it would help men in dealing with the problems of contemporary living. Hence the centre of interest in contemporary religious discussions has shifted from pure polemics to the constructive obligations of relevance to the actual life of man. Religions, at their best today, are concerned less with the refutation of one another (although this still goes on); they are concerned rather with giving faith, direction and courage to men caught in the turbulent revolutions of our day. For this purpose old customs as well as fundamental religious and social presuppositions are being re-examined in the light of the new circumstances.
New nations, in their struggle for more just and humane social orders, search for dynamic, cultural and religious foundations that would provide freedom and incentive for growth and development. The question whether old religious dogmas and values are sufficient foundations whereon the edifices of modern societies can be built is being asked and debated. Ancient customs and ceremonies, age-old ways of thinking and living, must meet the acid tests of modernity. There is persistent questioning whether social stratifications, sanctioned by religion, and inherited from a pre-technological society, help or hinder the growth of the new national communities of the future. These are concerns not of any one religion but of thinking men in all religions. Common search for new cultural foundations often brings together adherents of different religions into fruitful and constructive dialogues. In their search for these new cultural foundations, men do not confine themselves to their own religions alone but are willing to explore other traditions also. This openness to other religions creates the situation for dialogue.

This same situation challenges the Christian Church, as it does every religion, to consider and formulate a theology of inter-religious dialogue on the basis of the fundamentals of its own faith. There does not yet obtain among Christian theologians a consensus on the nature, structure and goal of inter-religious dialogue. This is clear from the essays included in this volume. But it is necessary to pursue the lead given by Paul Devanandan and continue this corporate discussion.

The men who have contributed to this volume have all been involved in the situations of dialogue in the religiously pluralistic societies of Asia. These men, what-
ever the value of their contributions, speak from situations of actual involvement.

As editor I owe special debts of gratitude to Mr. M. M. Thomas for valuable suggestions and encouragement in the planning of this symposium, and to Mr. T. K. Thomas and Mrs. G. Mulyil for proof-reading and corrections in language. Apart from minor editorial alterations the responsibility for the essays is of the authors' themselves.

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The Significance of the Thought of Paul D. Devanandan for a Theology of Dialogue

By M. M. Thomas

Introduction

This paper deals primarily with the thought of Dr. Paul D. Devanandan in so far as it is significant to the subject of this volume, the theology of dialogue.

To understand the thought of any man, it is necessary to set it within the framework of the main events of his life, and also see it in relation to the dynamic process of its formation and development under influences and challenges of life-situations. Every thought has its relation to life and is a response to its situations; and it is this history which determines its nature and meaning. Such a study of the thought of Devanandan is beyond the scope of this paper. It must await detailed research at depth and must await abler hands. It may, however, be appropriate to give a brief biographical introduction and also to indicate the main influences which contributed to shape his thinking.

Dr. Paul D. Devanandan was born on July 8, 1901, in Madras, of Christian parents. His father was an ordained minister of the Church and, as an academic, his life was externally uneventful. Devanandan had his
early education in Madras and Trichinopoly and his undergraduate education at the Nizam College, Hyderabad. For some time he taught in Jaffna, Ceylon. After this he procured his Master’s degree from the University of Madras. He went to the United States as secretary of Mr. K. T. Paul, the nationalist Christian leader. He stayed on in the United States and secured his B.D. from the Pacific School of Religion, California, and Ph.D. in Philosophy of Religion from Yale University. Returning home, he joined the faculty of the United Theological College in Bangalore and held the chair of the Department of Philosophy and History of Religions, for seventeen years. Later in life, he was ordained to the ministry.

Devanandan received several academic honours. He was invited to be the William Paton Lecturer at Selly Oak College, Birmingham. He also went to the Union Theological Seminary, New York as Henry Luce Visiting Professor and to the Cambridge University as Teap Lecturer. He was also honoured with doctorates by his own schools, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, Yale University and later by the University of Serampore.

On leaving the United Theological College, Bangalore, he worked for some time in the YMCA of India, mainly as the Director of the Department of Literature. In 1956, the National Christian Council of India invited him to form and direct a Christian Centre for the study of Hinduism and for the training of Christians in the religious environment of modern India. He was already associated with the Christian Institute for the Study of Society as its Chairman, and he combined his new Centre with the CISS and founded the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. From 1957 to 1962 he was the
Director of the Institute (CISRS). He died of heart-attack on August 10, 1962.

In the development of his thinking on the Gospel, Religion and Society in India, there were several influences. We may note the following:

First, the influence of home-training, especially of his mother. Devanandan used to reminisce about her. She made a good pastoral team with her husband. She had "the remarkable ability to listen quietly to other people's troubles and to keep what they had confided locked in her own heart". In a diary, which he kept while he was in the United States in 1946, he recalls an incident which happened when he was nine years old. On January 21, he wrote:

My mind goes back to an evening in January 1910. It is in a small room in a little house we lived for a while in Salem. Father is away in the Punjab with the National Missionary Society. I am down with smallpox. Poor mother is distracted. There is little help for her except what T. D. Moses next door can give, and Vedamuthu, our servant boy...It is time for evening prayers. Mother makes me read from Mark 8.14-28. She probably thinks of all the many illnesses, some quite serious, she had to tend me through. "Only son", "the spirit teareth", "oftentimes"—there are tears in her voice when she prays 'Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief'. Oh the prayers of my mother!

It was a family which gathered regularly for Bible reading, prayer and singing. His mother read the Bible
in Tamil. It is reported that she sometimes read the Bible in Telugu and Urdu, also. The whole family loved music and often gathered around the organ to sing English hymns and Tamil lyrics. All through his life, Devanandan loved his Tamil Bible and his Tamil lyrics. The study of Scriptures emphasised in his home left a deep impression on him. Even with his high theological sophistication which he developed later in life, there was in him an abiding strain of piety and sacramental devotion which he acquired from his early days.

Secondly, the impact of the personality of K. T. Paul who was both an Indian nationalist and a deeply committed Christian. When the tide of the movement for the struggle for national freedom in India was rising, K. T. Paul was one of the leaders who sought to bring the Church in India to recognise the obligation and necessity for Christians to sympathise with and to participate in the programme of Indian nationalism. Late in his career, when Devanandan wrote his book *The Christian Concern in Hinduism*, he dedicated it to K. T. Paul, "in gratitude and affection". Devanandan's association with the thought and work of Mr. Paul was long. And as Dr. Samartha, who followed Devanandan in the position of teacher in the History of Religions at the U.T. College, Bangalore, says:

From K. T. Paul, Devanandan must have learned at least two lessons; first, that it is possible for a Christian to be a responsible nationalist without surrendering his cherished convictions; and second, that Christians while acknowledging their membership in the world-wide body of Christ, must also courageously take their part in all nation-building activities. Devanandan never forgot what he learned from K. T. Paul.
Over and over again in his writings and in his speeches he tried to give form and content to these convictions.\(^1\)

Thirdly, the tragedy in his domestic life. We shall not go into its details or into the circumstances which led to it. Devanandan was deeply involved and it shook him to the foundations. He went through a profound spiritual experience which made him consider afresh the meaning of personal relationships and the enduring basis for human life in the Gospel of divine forgiveness. Dr. D. T. Niles, speaking at the opening of the Devanandan House at Bangalore in 1964, spoke about this. He said:

Paul Devanandan came to the staff of the United Theological College in the final year of my study in the College. He was then speaking of Christianity in terms of its moral and philosophical values. Later when he came to Ceylon, he was speaking of Divine Forgiveness and Justification by Faith as the core of the Gospel. I asked him what happened. He said, “Niles, I have been through hell...” He had been through an experience wherein he saw that man had no standing ground other than the forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ and the justification it provided.\(^2\)

It was indeed more than forgiveness of God, or rather forgiveness realised as the experience of being supported by God throughout a life lived in the shadow of a tragedy.


\(^2\) Based on notes taken from Niles speech.
that could not be forgotten. Moreover, it was a tragedy that did not give him the choice of going under himself, because it left him with a responsibility so great (three children) that he had to seek God’s grace and live.

Fourthly, the bombshell of Hendrik Kraemer’s *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. Devanandan had come back to India from the United States of America with a vague philosophy of religion and a liberal theological approach to the relation between Christianity and other religions. This was shattered by Kraemer and the Tambaram Conference. And Devanandan accepted the insights of Biblical realism, which brought about a renewal of his theology, and a recovery of faith in the fundamentals of the Christian *kerygma* in a fresh way. But Biblical realism of Kraemer left him dissatisfied because of its negative approach to other living religions and religious cultures. Ever since then, he had been in revolt against Kraemer, searching for the post-Kraemer approach to the relation between Christianity and other religions. He was keen on working out a theology of the relation between Christianity and other religions which went beyond both Hocking and Kraemer in the world scene, and beyond Chenchiah and Kraemer in India, towards a new theology of religion, especially of Asian religions in their modern renaissance phase.

Devanandan did not have the time to work out his post-Kraemer theology, let alone systematise it in any way.

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3 Nalini Devdas comments: “I do think that people like my father who went from liberalism to a serious involvement in Kraemer’s position, carried with them something indefinable (an attitude, an approach, a concern for man as man!).”

4 M. M. Thomas, quoted in *I Will Lift up Mine Eyes*, p. 6.
Theology of Dialogue

manner. But in the three books *Christian Concern in Hinduism, I Will Lift up Mine Eyes* and *Preparation for Dialogue* which are collections of some of his writings, published by the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, and in his many articles published in foreign and Indian journals, there are elements of it. In this paper an attempt is made to define some aspects of his thought which have significance in building a theology of inter-faith dialogue.

The Gospel of the New Creation

What is the core of the Gospel? Throughout his writings, there is a constant reiteration that the core of the Gospel is the good news of new creation in Jesus Christ. This idea is so crucial to Devanandan’s whole system of theology that it is necessary to see the exact forms in which he has expressed it. “The good news we proclaim,” he writes, “following in the wake of the Apostles, is the good news of this new creation. That was the burden of the Apostles’ preaching, and that is the Christian message still.”

First, the new creation in Jesus Christ has personal, social, and cosmic dimensions. It means a new person—“In me a new creation is wrought into being because He died and rose again. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new”.

It means a new humanity—“His purpose is to remake the world so that in it the sovereignty of His righteous will may be acknowledged in

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5 *I Will Lift up Mine Eyes*, p. 64.
every sphere of life”.

“... to testify that with the coming of Jesus Christ a new humanity is not only in the making, but that it has been brought into being.”

It means also the recreation of the total cosmos. Biblical faith repeatedly affirms that the work of Christ is of cosmic significance in that the redemption wrought in Him has affected the entire creative process (Col. 1:16-20). ... This total transformation of everything that God has made is the substance of peace, the wholeness which is the work of God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.” He continues to explain the social and cosmic aspects of Christ’s redemption thus: “At the threshold of this century, we talked of evangelism in terms of a social Gospel. Though we erred in our understanding of its true nature, we have come to admit that God’s redemptive work must radically affect human relations in society. Perhaps as we reach the middle of this century, we are coming to realise that the total sweep of the Good News envelops God’s entire creation. The ultimate end is a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation. How utterly impossible can it be for any fragment of mankind to be changed or even for all humanity to be transformed, unless the grossly material and purely animal content of world life is also transformed! Is that not why the fact of the Risen Lord forms the core of the Gospel we proclaim? It was so from the beginning of the apostolic ministry.”

Secondly, this new creation is a reality in the present, while its consummation is in the future. Devanandan writes: “The New Testament says two things concerning

7 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 15.
8 Ibid., p. 128.
9 P. D. Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism (Bangalore: CISRS, 1961), pp. 118-120.
newness. One is that the Old Testament promises of the new have been fulfilled in Christ. In Him the new creation has been achieved... The other is that the New Testament still looks forward to a completion of the promises manifested in Christ and the Kingdom of God which He proclaimed... In this Ephesian passage also, when we are told of Christ Jesus making in Himself one new man, there is, at the same time, the declaration of a fact accomplished and the assurance of a hope to be ultimately realised. It all concerns man, people living in the storm and stress of all the complexities of the world of rapid changes. With the coming of Christ and the coming of the new age, the new creation has begun!... So that in the present we live in the extension of the Incarnation and in the anticipation of the Second Coming,”10 between the Resurrection and the Second Coming. But the emphasis is on the eschatological framework for understanding the present human and historical situation. Says Devanandan: “It is not a proper understanding of the eschatological nature of the life and existence of the Church to see it as suspended between a ‘has been done’ and a ‘not yet’, to think of its present life’s significance as arising solely from a mission to proclaim the reconciliation achieved, while awaiting the End.”11 It is the reality of new creation in the “present now” which is crucial. Devanandan speaks of the “contemporary Christ”12 and his present creative and redemptive acts (the salvation history) as the real history underlying the happenings of contemporary life and world events. He says: “The present reality of the creative work of God, even in all the perplexing confusion of

10 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, pp. 136-37.
11 Ibid., p. 154.
12 Ibid., p. 67.
contemporary events, distinguishes the Christian faith from other faiths. This fact is what we proclaim in the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Thirdly, we have the earnest of the new creation in Jesus Christ within the Church which by faith acknowledges Him. But we have it also without the Church in the life of all men, the whole humanity and the entire creation. Devanandan says: "The new creation as a present reality within the fellowship of the Church is the basis of our continuing ministry of conversion." "The life of the Church is eschatological in the sense that it partakes in the End here and now. It is not merely that the Church waits for the End, or works towards the End. The Church is even now the sphere of the new creation, in a very real sense heralding the Kingdom." He also asserts that "all men now share in the new creation in Christ... A new humanity is now in the making, in which all are being reconciled to God, one to another, and each to his own self". It is not only that Christ's mission or "the redemptive purpose in the Incarnation is all-inclusive", but also that "objective redemption" implies "the whole creation in all its being, is already redeemed by the work of Christ, that the Gospel is primarily the good news of this new order of being, calling men to accept what they already are". Therefore, any easy distinction between the believer and unbeliever, between the Christian world and the non-Christian world tends to break down, especially

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}} I \text{ Will Lift up Mine Eyes, pp. 155.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}} \text{Ibid., p. 159.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{15}} \text{Ibid., p. 113.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{16}} \text{Ibid., p. 114.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{17}} \text{Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, p. 108.}\]
because “the traffic across the borders has become heavy”. Dr. S. J. Samartha says that Devanandan believed that “God is at work everywhere among men of all faiths and among men of no faith, guiding their life and thought, creating a new humanity”. Therefore salvation history is not to be identified with Church history; it should be defined rather as secular history “being controlled by the purposive will of God”. At this point, the Church and the Christians are called to discern the work of Christ in secular history renewing and recreating the world and bringing it to its final end; that is, “to discover how God in His mercy redeems and judges the world of contemporary events so that all that is of God may be comprehended.”

New Creation as Process Today

The eschatological reality of the new creation breaking into secular history in the Crucified and Risen Jesus and directing it towards the final End, provided the framework for Devanandan’s theology of history. In this approach Devanandan further spelt out his understanding of the new creation, in its relation to the historical process and the contemporary historical situation. We may mention three aspects of his thought in this connection.

First, while the new creation is primarily to be defined in terms of the decisive events of the Resurrection of Jesus and His Second Coming, it should also be seen as manifesting itself in a creative process within human

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18 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 118.
19 Ibid., p. 9.
20 Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, p. 120.
21 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 11.
history for the renewal and transformation of man, human history and cosmos and as giving the whole creation and humanity a new dynamic meaning and direction here and now. Devanandan says that it is a mistake to consider the new creation as “an accomplished fact” resulting in “a finished product”. “This,” he adds, “does not mean that anything made by God is of its nature imperfect. What it does mean is that creation is a process, a creative process which is purposively designed. It has a beginning, but it is directed towards an end. It leads up to the achievement of the ultimate wholeness of the product. This understanding in the nature of God’s creative work is central to our faith.”22 This process has continuity, but not the continuity of a “self-contained process”, but of a “continuous act”.23 Here the new creation in Christ is not merely something that touches human history from without as a tangent touches a circle, but becomes a process taking hold of the process of human history from within and gives it shape and direction. And it makes it possible for faith to look for the signs of God’s new creation in Christ not only in the transformed lives of individuals but also in the struggles and purposes of men to renew structures of society, culture and religion and to transform earth and heaven in the name of the dignity and destiny of man.

The emphasis is on new creation in Christ which is not of the world, being active in the world process and for the world process at all times and at the present time. Devanandan says: “We do know in the here and now, that out of the agony on the cross is released saving power by which the world is being recreated from century to century.”

“What we call a particular circumstance in history is constituted, in the main, of three elements. It is the outcome of the impersonal working of nature’s laws; added to it are factors created by human decisions; but beneath it all, ruling and over-ranging the ongoing process of history, is the redemptive will of God. There is an abiding value in every passing human condition that is God’s secret. It is secret, because it concerns His ultimate design. And yet, at any moment in history, though many things happen, what is of real and lasting value is this secret intention of God that is shaping the entire process of history towards the final end which God has in view. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. The dynamic presence of the supernatural is cleansing, healing, redeeming at all points in human history. Only in realising that presence does man’s life at any time gain meaning and significance.”

Devanandan speaks of Christian confession concerning Christ, as according “only with the conception of human life and of history which is undergirded by the prevenient grace of God”.

Secondly, not only the ultimate end but also the pattern of God’s action for judgment and redemption in contemporary situations are in some measure revealed to faith. It is a secret of God, no doubt. The ultimate meaning of history or the pattern of meaning for any period of history is never fully translated from faith into sight. But faith is given discernment and insight into the working of God in the historical process, though they are partial in character.

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24 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 17.
25 Ibid., pp. 21–22.
26 Ibid., p. 40.
Devanandan accepts the concept of God as the Wholly Other, but with radical qualifications. He says: "God is wholly other, in every way different from the nature of things we men are used to. The realm of God's true being is on another plane than what we call the natural. Seeking to know God from the behaviour of the universe tends to identify God with the substance of this everyday world. We need to remind ourselves that God and world-experience are essentially contradictory. He is other-than-the-world, other-than-I. That is why at the heart of all theology there will always be an element of unfathomable mystery." But he immediately asserts that he cannot just be Wholly Other. "Even a human father longs for the confidence and co-operation of his son as he grows to maturity and gains in wisdom. That analogy may be misleading but it implies much that is true of God's relationship with His children. He cannot be satisfied with being the Wholly Other, the Unknowable Unknown, from everlasting to everlasting, the eternal Brahman. Not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Therefore the mystery of His ways are "not hidden from the insight of those to whom God chooses to reveal them, that seeing they may perceive, and hearing they may understand". So while there is faith that trusts and rests assured, there is also the understanding that expects God to let us into His secrets; that we may work with and for Him”. This is the basis of prophecy and service.

Thirdly, Devanandan spoke of the new creation or humanity in Christ as relevant to the human aspirations.

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27 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, pp. 15-16.
28 Ibid., p. 20.
29 Ibid., pp. 20-21.
for renewal and for a genuine humanism, and as their fulfilment; but he gave a new dimension of meaning to the categories of Relevance and Fulfilment. He said, fulfilment should not be confused "with the idea of progressive realisation. That would be to regard the present as in some sense resulting from the past on the one hand, and on the other hand, to consider the present as leading on to the future. That is the human understanding of secular history. From this point of view, the future is conditioned by the present. Fulfilment in this case is fulfilment of events, fulfilment of human endeavour. But from the standpoint of holy history (i.e., the theological understanding of history), it is the present that is conditioned by the future, the final end".\textsuperscript{30} He explains it elsewhere as follows: "Because the promise of the Kingdom is totally assured, the end is in reality a present fact! In salvation-history, to the discerning eye of faith, the eternal future is being fulfilled in contemporary present. It is in this sense our Lord declared that He has come not to destroy but to fulfil."\textsuperscript{31} Similarly the Gospel is relevant to the human aspiration and spiritual strivings which it has created. It is in this sense that Devanandan said: "The task of faith is to bring home to the mind of man in every age the thrusting relevance of the Gospel, not only as true for all times but as true for the time."\textsuperscript{32}

This approach takes serious account of sin and rejects the idea that the New Creation is inherent or immanent in the fallen old Creation. But through the forgiveness and reconciling power of God in Jesus Christ, the process

\textsuperscript{30} I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{31} Devanandan, Preparation for Dialogue, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{32} I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 38.
of Creation is held within the judgment and fulfilment of the process of the new creation, inaugurated in the Cross and Resurrection of Christ and moving forward to its consummation. In fact, it is through the sign of the new creation that the world of nature and history is seen and acknowledged as originally created by God and declared good.

Interpretation of Religion

Within a theological framework which has been very inadequately pictured above, Devanandan sought to interpret the meaning and end of religion in human life and history. The question is, what is the relation between the religions of mankind to the new creation in Jesus Christ? There are several points here which need explication.

Devanandan sees both direct relation as well as parallelism between law and religion, and works out the relation between religion and Christ in the same manner as the relation between law and grace is worked out in New Testament and classical Christian theology. At least that was the direction in which his mind seemed to be set in some of his expositions. This is clear at three points.

Religion as Law

(1) Religion like law has an ambiguous or dialectical character. "Man is blessed and cursed in a way which makes religion both a beatitude and danger to him."33

(2) Religion as part of the law is fulfilled and abrogated in Christ. Therefore, in the new life in Christ, men are

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33 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 36.
released from the claims of religion. Speaking on the text Eph. 2:13–14, Devanandan asks, "Does this mean that our faith transcends the claims of religion, of all religions? This would not be because they are false but because they are futile; for with the coming of Christ God's redemptive power has entered into human history in a way that the whole of humanity has been lifted up to a loftier plane of being."34

(3) He couples it with its corollary that the new humanity in Christ destroys the middle walls of partition created among men by religion, as it did the division between Jew and Gentile created by law. Devanandan himself knew that it was a daring idea, but he ventured into it. He says: "The Word of the Cross needs to be preached today on the conviction that because Christ rose again, what man calls religion—the reign of the law—is of the earth earthly, of the old things to pass away. This is a daring thought, and it may well be fraught with dangerous heresy, but Christians of this generation may give heed to it. As we enter a new era in world history, we need to question ourselves whether we witness to a Gospel that perpetuates his very enmity which God in Christ had destroyed or do we proclaim the word of reconciliation?"35

This interpretation of the relation between religion and Christ does not do away with religions and religious divisions (as it does not do away with law) except as men are caught up through faith in the new humanity in Jesus Christ. Does this not necessitate absolutising the distinction between Christianity and other religions? Devanandan's answer is that it does not. He makes a distinction

34 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 124.
between faith, religion and culture in every system of religion including Christianity. And man's apprehension of the ultimate reality is at the level of faith in the inner core of the self-transcendence of human selfhood; and it is at this level that conversion to Christ, or faith in Christ has meaning. At this level "it is inevitable that an element of exclusivism" is "characteristic of the experience of men of different faiths". But every apprehension of faith has its expression (comprehension, to use Baron von Hugel's words which Devanandan himself employs) in religion (i.e. creed and cultus) and culture, which are integral aspects of man's faith. "Every historical religion is characterised by a creed, a cultus and a culture." Thus every religion has an inner circle of credal and doctrinal formulations about God, man and the world; there is an outer circle of religious practices and rites; and the outermost circle represents the ethos, the distinctive outlook on life, and the material and non-material values, the social institutions and arts which embody them, all of which are nourished by the creed and the cultus and the faith behind them. "These concentric circles of creed, cultus and culture, all together comprise the total area of the outreach and influence of any religion." They are the means by which faith is renewed and relates itself to life. Therefore they are very important. Even so, they cannot be considered as identical with faith itself and should not be absolutised. Faith transcends religion and culture. This is true in the Christian religion as well as in other religions. No doubt, religion and culture share at some points the exclusiveness inherent in the faith from which they have arisen. But it

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38 Ibid., p. 12.
diminishes gradually as one moves from faith to creed, to cultus and to culture. They belong to the relativities of faith. Today, creeds, cultus and cultures from different religions are interacting on one another and interpenetrating each other and are relativised more than ever before. Therefore, differences in religion and culture may exist in the unity of the same faith and need not make a response of faith to Christ impossible across the frontiers of creed, cultus and culture. Devanandan says: “Any easy distinction which we set up between the believer and the unbeliever quite frequently breaks down. For the believer is always conscious in the very depth of his being of the strange persistence of unbelief... The real distinction between the believer and the unbeliever is not always brought out by claim of diverse doctrines, as though credal content accounted for all the difference in their faith. True, we may not minimise the doctrine. But the insidious dangers in forgetting that doctrines are also, in a sense, symbolic. They stand for a reality which they do not always fully represent, nor totally exhaust. Therefore, to reduce the distinction between a believer and an unbeliever to the rigid pattern of a creed or the externals of a ritual act is to fall into the same error which persisted in distinguishing Jew from Gentile in the early Church.”

For the same reason, a unity or similarity at the level of creed, cultus or culture does not necessarily mean a common commitment of faith. He pleads for a “frank endeavour to understand in so far as that is possible, exactly where and how we differ from one another, although we may use the same religious terms such as grace, forgiveness, sin, incarnation and so forth”.

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40 Devanandan, Preparation for Dialogue, p. 141.
This raises the question of the Christian meaning of the resurgence and restatement of all religions which is going on in the modern world, partly because of the meeting of living Faiths on the plane of religion and culture and partly because of the struggle in all religions and cultures for fuller human life through greater mastery of nature, recognition of fundamental dignity of man and deeper inter-personal relations in social institutions and development of world community. No doubt, many of the rapid changes are taking place in the beliefs, religious practices, and cultures of the people. What do they imply for the self-understanding, self-transcendence and commitment at the core of men's faith? Does the resurgence of ancient religions and their restatement today under the impact of Christianity, as well as of ideas of secular humanism informed by the Gospel of Christ indicate a work of Christ to destroy the middle wall of partition between religions and communication of or grappling with the new humanity in Christ at the level of faith? To this Devanandan's answers are tentative and are in the form of questions, but they indicate a positive note. Speaking of Christ's reconciling work between Jew and Gentile, Devanandan asks: "Does that mean that with Christ the neat boundaries of the religion of mankind have been broken down? In what we call the resurgence of faith in the non-Christian world, perhaps we do not sufficiently reckon with this new state of affairs where the traffic across the borders has become heavy." And he goes on to show that in the resurgence, there are signs of decisions of faith in relation to Christ, both by response and rejection: "How much of what is called restatement of non-Christian beliefs and practices is restatement to make them relevant to modern life? How much of it is restatement, in fact, in the light of non-Christian understanding of the Gospel? Why is it that modern
Hindu leaders, for instance, do not restate their beliefs in terms of modern Buddhism or Islam; but in terms of what they think is the Christian Gospel? Is the modern man’s rejection of Christ—at any rate in Asia—because Christianity is an alien religion which stands for a foreign culture? Or is it because he finds that in a very real sense the middle wall of partition is breaking down and he wants to put it up again? We may not expect men of non-Christian renascent faith to openly acknowledge that the ferment in their religious thinking and the new emphasis they place on values which we regard as distinctively Christian are both due to the influence of the Gospel. But to those who see human history with the eye of faith, it is apparent that the fact of Christ has made an obvious difference, and that it continues to make a difference in the living and thinking of men of all faiths. He hath made both one, and hath broken down the wall of partition.”

Elsewhere, Devanandan gives a description of renascent Hinduism engaged in the task of integrating the values of Western science and humanism on its own theological foundations and concludes: “One cannot resist the impulse of faith that believes in a God who is also the lord of history, and in a creative Spirit who is ever at work in the world of man, redeeming it even in its present involvements and directing its course to the ultimate fulfilment of His purpose, that in all religious revival God is somehow at work. If that is indeed the faith of the Christian, it is well that Christians everywhere give serious thought to the resurgence of Hinduism today, and reassess the nature of their evangelistic responsibility.”

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41 I Will Lift up Mine Eyes, p. 118.
42 Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, p. 82.
We do not know for certain whether Devanandan considered non-Christian religions in their traditional forms as realms not only of law, but also of the grace of God. Or whether he believed that the religious strivings and faith of men contained a progressive realisation of God. There are some indications here and there in his writings which lend themselves to the interpretation that he did not deny the reality of grace and revelation of God in them. "Fulfilment here," he says, "would mean that all sincere human strivings to reach out to God will indeed find favour with Him. The history of religion is based on this hope. There may well be a more or less progressive development in the history of man's understanding about God. It can be traced back to the primitive past, discerned in the living present, and perfected at the end in the future". But he adds, that is not the fulfilment, Christian faith is concerned about; it is concerned with fulfilment as the transforming presence of the End (the Kingdom) in the present. "If the whole creation is being directed by the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ towards the final 'hope of glory', a total transformation of present existence, is fulfilment of the end,...it consists in the ultimate future being realised (and so fulfilled) in the temporal present." He goes on to ask "If the true reading of salvation history is in terms of Eternity flowing into Time, the 'coming' of the Eternal Kingdom of God in the Temporal order of man, how do we restate the distinctiveness of the Gospel in the context of the religions of the world"? And he frankly accepts that "we have no ready answer", and that it would be impossible to "agree on any one answer".

44 Ibid., p. 177.
Devanandan's own preoccupation in his theology is much more with religions in their renascent phase than in their traditional forms. Of course, he was a good student of classical Hinduism, and thought that an understanding of religion in its classical form was necessary to understand contemporary resurgence of religion. In his maturer theological writings, however, he is engaged in a Christian interpretation of renascent religion. He sees in the new concern for the truly human and the ferment it creates in the traditional religions the presence and fulfilment of the new humanity in Christ. It is important to note that the emphasis throughout his theology of religion is not on the religiousness of man as religiousness, but religiousness in its relation to man's striving for his humanity whether expressed in religious or secular forms; and it is set in the context of the new humanity in Christ. It is from this point of view that contemporary movements for the renewal in religions become important for his theology. His question is about the "real significance of the newness in contemporary Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam". And he asks: "Can Christian faith discern in such renewal the inner working of the Spirit of God, guiding men of other faiths than ourselves, as well as men of no faith, into a new understanding of God's ways with the world of men today? If all new creation can only be of God where else could these 'new aspects of other beliefs in the thinking and living of people have sprung from'?" Elsewhere he says, "There can be sociological and psychological explanations for this phenomenon of the renascence of other religions. But if religious faith is to be regarded also in terms of response, it would be difficult for the Christian to deny that these deep, inner strivings of the human spirit are in

Devanandan, Preparation for Dialogue, p. 177.
response to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit. At best we can only confess our inability to understand God's ways with us men; at worst, we must blame ourselves for our blindness in refusing to believe that God is equally concerned with the redemption of people other than us, people who may not wholly agree with our understanding of God's being and His purpose for the world of His making."\(^{46}\)

A New Anthropology

It is clear that Devanandan's theology of the relation between Christianity and other religions\(^{47}\) arises out of his conviction that the framework of a common vision of the

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46 Devanandan, *Preparation for Dialogue*, p. 188.

47 This may be the best place to give in a footnote a long comment on this essay by Devanandan's daughter Nalini Devdas. It deals with the evolution of Devanandan's theology of renascent Hinduism and adds a great deal to what is said here in this section. She writes as follows:

You have not taken serious note of the *Concept of Maya* (note especially the last chapter). I do think that my father's concern in modern Hinduism is the concern of one who has taken seriously the principles of classical Hinduism. His studies in the key concept of classical Hinduism—the concept of *maya*—had convinced him that it is not possible to simply expand the old concepts in order to accommodate the new concerns. Hinduism cannot really get away from the concept of *maya*, and this *maya* prevents a whole-hearted world acceptance, concern for the individual personality in all its humanness. See the concluding chapter of the *Concept of Maya*. "The question is, then, whether it will be possible for Hinduism out of itself unaided to produce from its founts of religious theory an articulate, reasoned system, an adequate creed as a basis of belief, which will provide the needed intellectual justification and spiritual drive for this new Hindu
essential humanness of men and the unity of mankind which has brought them together and set them common tasks in contemporary history is in a special sense the impact of the reality of the process of new creation in Jesus Christ. He sees the presence and activity of God's new creation in the modern religious resurgence, because it indicates a new way of life."

Se the answer: "In any case, it is apparent that in a real sense the days of Hindu orthodoxy, as we have known it so long, are numbered. The present is a time of renaissance, a rebirth, the coming into being of a new creation, the 'dynamic rejuvenation' of Hinduism. It is the impact of modern thought and ideals, so very different from those of ancient India, which are transforming Hinduism from within outwards, setting us free and enlightening our minds to true values. The immediate task is to throw oneself heart and soul into the programme of the reconstruction of religious practice, changing the Hindu way of life, the transformation of Hindu society. The time is come when thoughtful Indians (he does'nt say Hindus) should realize the inadequacy of Upanishadic assumptions to furnish the living inspiration and the theological theory which modern India must needs possess if she is to succeed in her attempts to remodel Hindu life and society. Nothing less than the complete transformation of religious theory is the logical conclusion towards which the entire process of the changes now prevalent in Hindu religious practice is leading." These are the last words of the book. Now, I think that two things happened since the writing of the thesis, through his work as a teacher. Firstly, he studied more carefully the philosophy of the Gita and re-read the attempts made to re-interpret tradition from within. I suppose he meant by the Christian Concern in Hinduism the deliberate self-emptying by which a Christian is willing to stay with the Hindu in this task of re-interpretation—to think Hinduism with the Hindu. Am I wrong in thinking this is what he meant? Only one who has studied deeply the classical tradition can begin to understand this travail of rethinking. This is why dialogue for him meant explaining our 'ultimate words' (grace, love, hope: words which he says we use differently to each other). Then, secondly, I do think, he himself began to realise the challenge of the concept of maya. For the Christian too, this world is not ultimate. Non-attachment has meaning for a
the awakening of ancient religions to new dimensions of human existence, namely personality and history, which have direct and indirect relation to the Biblical faith in God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in His redeeming movement to renew man and creation. "We may not forget that among men of faith who are adherents of renascent religions as well as those who profess no faith at all, there exists a common universe of discourse based on spontaneous reactions to the totality of life. We are all involved in a common social crisis tied together by a community of interests; our common humanity serves as a common denominator; and on the frontiers of renascent faiths, doctrinal barriers no longer foreclose commerce.

Christian too. So we are led to the unwritten book!

I think this attitude to dialogue—this willingness to ponder over (meditate, if you do not object to the word) the 'ultimate words' of another faith, words like *maya* is one of the most important that father learnt and taught at least a few of his students.

The challenge of *maya* was linked in father's mind with the Christian's faith that everything is given back to the Christian as a sacrament. In itself the world is *maya* (the theistic Hindus interpret *maya* as that which lures man away from his total commitment to God). It cannot give ultimate satisfaction. In Christ, the world is redeemed and given back to man as a sacrament. Please remember that the early piety of my father, which you are quite right in saying that he held on to till the end was Bible, prayer and sacrament. I do not know what the Liberal theology of Yale did to this faith-built-around-the-sacrament. I do not remember my father taking the sacrament so seriously when I was small. But you know how it was during the last years. I do think that he believed 'sacrament' is one of the 'ultimate words' Christians must 'explain' in the inter-faith dialogue.

Perhaps I have misunderstood. Or perhaps I cannot see because of my own deep concern with Hinduism, but I think these ideas were important to my father. I was deeply moved by the sections on *New Creation* and *Anthropology* in your article. You are so right. This anthropology was the ground for the inter-faith dialogue as father saw it.
The outburst of newness of life in the resurgent non-Christian religions is due to increasing traffic across the border. For one thing, many Christian truths, abstracted from their original context, are found as unspoken presuppositions in what we may call the conceptual framework of non-Christian religious practice.\(^8\)

From this view, secular humanism is of special significance in Devanandan’s understanding of the work of Christ in contemporary religious movements. In fact, he sees contemporary secularism playing a role as Christ incognito in awakening the ancient religions to the dimension of responsible personal and interpersonal existence in the world. Therefore he eschews altogether the idea of a common front of religions against secularism. Speaking of the functions of the Christian evangelist in India, he says, it is “not so much to counter forces of secularism and irreligion but to help Hindus in city and village, at all levels of culture, to redefine the very nature of what is called religion”.49

It means Devanandan sees the dynamic of Christ and His new creation in the renascent religions not in their “classical theology” but in their dominant new “anthropology”. Says Devanandan: “In other words, the determinative doctrine in the evaluation of the Hindu outlook on life is no longer derived from its classical theology, but is being built upon a new anthropology. This anthropology is perhaps still in the making. Nevertheless, the primary question that is of dominant concern to the modern Hindu thinker is the nature and destiny of man—what is man and

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\(^8\) Devanandan, Preparation for Dialogue, pp. 190-91.

\(^49\) Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, p. 91.
In the new concern for personality, history and community, the other religions are being brought into the orbit of the process of the new creation in contemporary history; and in coming to terms with the new humanism, the classical doctrines and underlying faiths of other religions are compelled to open themselves to (or close themselves more firmly to) Jesus Christ in a new way.

This context calls for a change of emphasis in “Christian thought concerning evangelism”—from exclusive attention on man’s quest for God-realisation to his quest for fuller humanity. This, Devanandan sees, is most necessary in any development of a post-Kraemer theology of mission. To quote: “It has been recently pointed out by Dr. Van Leeuwen of Holland that, following Dr. Hendrik Kraemer’s book and the post-Tambaram developments in Christian thought concerning evangelism, attention has been focused almost exclusively on the relation of the Biblical view of revelation of God in Christ and the human quest for God-realisation. Revelation as from God has been stressed at the expense of revelation to and for the world of men. The act of God’s redemption in Christ Jesus is to seek and find this lost world of men. The theological approach has tended to overlook the underlying anthropological concern. Perhaps the time has come now for us to focus attention on the human aspect in God’s redemptive act—on man as he really is, the creature for whose sake Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead. The burden of our message to the non-Christian world would then relate, in this generation certainly, to the Christian view of man and his destiny”.

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50 Devanandan, *Christian Concern in Hinduism*, p. 112.
Process of Reconception Redefined

Devanandan sees "three simple possibilities" in interreligious relation. "One is to annihilate differences by insisting that all men accept the dogma that every religion leads to the same goal and that there are no differences that matter where religious faith is concerned. The second is to attempt to reconcile differences by setting them in the larger framework of an evolving world religion. The third is to frankly admit that there are differences which we should all be willing to accept and give all men of faith full freedom for religious expression."\(^{53}\) His own approach, he explains, is the third. He accepts the plurality of religions in the body-politic of every national society and in the world society. But where will this recognition of religious plurality and their meeting with each other lead to?

Devanandan discerns a "process of reconception" of every historical religion in the light of other religions, on the lines advocated by Hocking in his *Coming World Civilization*. That is, a common culture or civilization with a plurality of religions redefining themselves in the light of each other. Devanandan says, "By process of reconception, every religion should reconceive its own essence so as somehow to include as a new element in its own essence the essence of other religions. In this way we do not commit ourselves to an enduring plurality of religions or to an amalgamation of religions."\(^{54}\) Since the word "essence" is used it is not clear what this reconception involves for Christianity and other religions in his thought, at the levels of faith, creed, cultus and culture,

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and how it squares with his total theology. We may suppose, what he has in mind are the following:

First, a movement towards a composite culture inspired by a common humanity with openness towards different faiths and their different contributions to the common pool. The worldwide process of secularisation, technological advance and social revolution is dissolving religious cultures; and cultural reintegration has to be in the direction of a common national or even world culture. Devanandan points out that cultural unity which we are talking about in India today is "unity based on common nationality, and not on common faith ... a common culture into which not only the various elements of the diverse, historic patterns of culture in our country can be integrated, but also a culture in which can be constituted both ‘old’ traditional values and ‘new’ revolutionary gains of modern technology and social advance".\(^{55}\) With both Eastern and Western cultures in disintegration, the process of reintegration, "it is realised, is not a parochial concern alone: it is a common task which has reference to a world culture, with possible local variations".\(^{56}\)

Secondly, a more radical interpenetration at the level of religious creed and cultus, each religion absorbing what is of value in the other's religious beliefs and practices, not syncretically, but integrating them on the basis of the fundamental core of each faith, and within the context of the struggle for a common culture. This means for Christianity, a process of indigenisation whereby the creed and cultus of other religions in whose midst Christians are


placed reinterpreted in the light of the fundamental core of the Christian faith and integrated into the style of living and communication of the Christian religion. This would be to bring into Christianity as much of the symbolism of indigenous religions, not in their traditional forms but radically changed to be the vehicle of the Christian faith and to be consistent with the ecumenism of world Christianity and the humanism of the emerging world culture. What is required is “adventuring in faith to courageously experimenting with forms, symbols and institutions which are familiar to the people, and which would convey Christian truth and experience more effectively to them. Only then can they (the younger Churches) grow in understanding the Gospel and make their witness of faith meaningful and relevant to their countrymen”. We should expect a similar process in reverse on the part of the other religions, based on the fundamentals of their own faith.

Thirdly, the common culture and the interpenetration of religions should pave the way for a meeting of men of different religions at the level of the core of their faiths, whether through propagation or dialogue. And we should expect conversion of persons and groups of persons from one faith to another to occur as a result of this meeting. With the growth of common culture and social institutions, and with interpenetration of styles of religious thought and life, such conversion from one faith to another need not mean change from one culture to another or from one social or ethnic communal group to another.


genuine religious conversion, he may feel impelled to move out from one fellowship to another because of an inner constraint that the new commitment involves such a step".\(^{59}\)

What is the ultimate meaning of plurality of religions? We have already seen how Devanandan does not commit himself to "an enduring plurality of religions". Nor has he committed himself to the opposite. He asks the question whether a plurality of religions at some level would be part of the End itself: "Will religions as religions and nations, as nations, continue characteristically separate in the fulness of time when God would gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him?" His answer is "True, we believe in the final gathering up of all that is of this world and of the next in the resurrection-life... In that new heaven and new earth we will not be able to distinguish the New from the Old. It is not for us to indicate what will be preserved and in what manner. For we cannot tell how God will bring His purpose for mankind and His world to a conclusion. But in so far as we identify ourselves with the will of God as revealed in Christ, we can be certain that we shall be working along the line of that purpose, and not against it".\(^{60}\)

Inter-Faith Collaboration and Dialogue

It remains now for us to speak of Devanandan’s ideas of inter-faith collaboration and dialogue with men of other faiths and of no faith.

Christian collaboration with men of other faiths in the common struggle for nation-building, \textit{i.e.}, for a new


\(^{60}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 192.
society expressing men's new sense of freedom, justice and community, and for the cultural foundations to undergird it, is the essential context and provides the primary content, of any inter-faith dialogue. Speaking to Indian Christians, Devanandan asks them to "take the initiative by establishing identity in cultural interests and social concerns (with fellow-Indians of other faiths) in what may be called the secular context of our national life". He calls them to efforts "in this matter of helping evolve a secular society in India in which the common endeavour of men of all faiths would be the achievement of true community-being based on considerations of social justice, personal values and human rights". Here the emphases are on "our common humanity" and "a secular framework" within which men of all religions and no religion can work together to enrich the common life. The secular framework requires the recognition of religious freedom as a fundamental right of the human person, and of religious plurality in the body-politic. At the same time, it puts on "this generation in India" the two-fold task of "redeeming all religions, from the other-worldly preoccupation of pietism on the one hand, and self-centred introversion of communalism on the other". At this point adherents of all faiths are obliged to enter into a dialogue with each other on the way in which each faith sees the meaning of the common humanity and the secularity which express it, and on the place and function of religion and religions in the process of building a common culture. In this conversation, Christians must bring their Gospel of the common life. He says: "There is some such thing as the Gospel of the common life, of the possibility of deliverance for man in society from bondage to certain forms of evil that man has brought upon himself by him-

61 Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, p. v.
self, and from which he can and should release himself by common endeavour. To be sure, ‘it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the Kingdom’. We do not bring it ourselves. We have the blessed assurance of the ‘hope of glory’ for all mankind in Jesus Christ. But it is no less true that the earnest of that expectation is the here and now, in spite of the fact that all flesh is still corrupted by sin and subject to ‘principalities and powers’. In this expectation we join forces with those of other faiths in waging war against all poverty, disease and oppression of all sorts. In such endeavour we are in fact fulfilling God’s purpose and plan for us in the here and now. Our witness of service is indeed within this sin-bound world of sin, conscious of ourselves as also still tainted by the solidarity of human sinfulness in which we too share.”

Thus the Christian basis of common humanity is human solidarity in sin and in the grace of Jesus Christ and His kingdom which is both here and hereafter. It is this that we contribute to the dialogue, not in the abstract but as together we seek to define the goals and means of a common human society and culture, and work together to achieve it.

There are movements of social renewal of great originality and creativeness in other religions in their renaissance phase. Devanandan mentions the significance of the movement of Sarvodaya as an illustration. Similarly, “from the days of Gopal Krishna Gokhale down to the present times and Jawaharlal Nehru, progressive social thinking has been more or less the monopoly of secularists.”

Inter-faith dialogue in the context of partnership in social thought and action means acknowledging and sharing in

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62 Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, pp. ix-x.
63 Ibid., pp. 66-67.
64 Ibid., p. 91.
the creativeness and progressiveness of renascent religions and secularism. But it should also mean on the part of the Christian partner, an effort to throw the light of Jesus Christ and the new humanity of His creation on these creative and progressive movements, to enable their social philosophies to become increasingly an expression of realistic humanism. "Anthropology" is always integrally related to "theology" and theological dialogue has its significance to the development of a sound secular social philosophy for common social action. Devanandan writes, "Is there not a Christian responsibility to seek ways and means of so communicating the Gospel that it may help Sarvodaya enrich the concepts into which it is endeavouring to put new meaning content? The Sarvodaya understanding of man and of society as the network of human relations stands to gain by taking into account the Christian view of the human person and of community, where true personal relationship is made possible because the Person is also involved in it. The 'change of heart' which Sarvodaya interprets within classical Hindu terms of self-realisation, of oneness with the Brahman can well be charged with dynamic and revolutionary content if it becomes familiar with what Christians really mean by 'conversion' as the coming into being of the New Man in Christ. Similarly, the ultimate end towards which the Sarvodaya programme of service is directed can become meaningful in the light of the Christian's assured hope of the 'new heaven and the new earth' as the End of the entire creative and redemptive process of God."

In the partnership in social action "the concern is human welfare as an immediate goal with no reference to

65 Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, p. 68.
66 Ibid.
the ultimate destiny of man". But it does not mean that human welfare has no relation to man’s ultimate destiny. Questions as to what motivates our service, and how we define what is good for our neighbour cannot be avoided by those in the partnership. Here there is need for mutual understanding at spiritual depth, which can come only through dialogue about the foundations of human dignity and welfare in each other’s faith.

There is also need for inter-faith dialogue directly on each other’s faith. Devanandan asks whether a certain exclusiveness at this level need “prevent a dialogue in which there is a frank endeavour to understand in as far as that is possible, exactly where and how we differ from one another”. He thinks not. Elsewhere he says: “The Christian apologetic for our times in India is best set forth not so much in defence of the Christian position as in explanation of the difference between the Christian and Hindu understanding of religious fundamentals.” There are many misunderstandings between religions which have to be removed, about their differences in approach to religious freedom, propagation of religion, religious conversion, common worship, inter-religious fellowship and several other aspects of religious attitude and practice affecting the common life. Beyond this, however, there is need for dialogue for understanding the creed, cultus and ethics and ethos as well as the fundamental core of faith of each other’s religion. The formal Hindu-Christian colloquia which Devanandan arranged himself or took part in, were

67 Devanandan, Christian Concern in Hinduism, p. 43.
68 Ibid., pp. 134–35.
69 Devanandan, Preparation for Dialogue, p. 141.
70 Ibid., p. 128.
for the purpose of better understanding of each other’s faith and its total system of doctrine and life.

Also adherents of different faiths should have an opportunity to understand each other at the level of their piety and style of religious living as religious persons, encountering religious truth and experiencing its livingness in the certainties and doubts, successes and failures, and hopes and fears of responsible human existence in the world.

Inter-faith dialogue, however, should not be conceived only in meetings of formal colloquia. There is no doubt place for some formal dialogues, but only in so far as these help in the promotion of informal dialogues among persons of different religious persuasions in the context of their daily life and work. And what is most basic to all dialogues both formal and informal is a community of mutual confidence in each other’s personal integrity in the face of ultimate truth.

“We need to know much more than we do now of the living faiths of other men, and even more, of faiths whereby we ourselves live” Devanandan says; and he adds, “Somebody has said, the Christian community is at the moment theologically unequipped for living in the twentieth century, with its pluralistic mankind. That is so”.71

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CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION ON INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Preparation for Dialogue

By Herbert Jai Singh

It is late evening in the monsoon season. The sky is overcast. Flashes of lightning pierce the darknees and reveal the hidden things of night. It was one of these flashes that brought into focus the figure of the Buddhist sadhu, sitting in serene contemplation on a stone bench, right in the heart of our campus.

An European Buddhist sadhu, sitting in yogic meditation on the campus of an Indian Christian Theological College—there can be no better introduction to the theme of Dialogue. What made him don the saffron robe? Why did he leave the Christian faith and turn his back on the secular civilization? The very fact that he is here on the College campus seems to point to his urge to communicate. And, in his desire to communicate, is he not already in dialogue with us?

Indeed we live today in a perpetual situation of dialogue. Man of diverse religions and cultures are being thrown together today as never before in the history of man. The isolation of man from man is breaking down under the impact of modern forces. In an earlier age it was possible for cultures and religions to develop in comparative insulation. Christendom was an isolated unit in itself and Islam built its own culture in defiance of other civilizations. Despite the rude invasion of Muslim culture, Hinduism found ways of withdrawing into itself so as to perpetuate its own way of life. Buddhism, banished from India, dug itself
deeply in the countries of South-East Asia and the Far East. Each religious culture built a world of its own, self-sufficient and indifferent to other religions.

This isolation is no more possible today. Modern means of travel and communication are bringing the self-sufficient communities of the past into the larger community of the future. People travel, on business and for fun. Tourism is big business today, and there is a constant mingling of people of different races, nationalities and cultures. Besides travel, there are other sources of information about one another such as books and magazines, cinema and television. In spite of the inevitable distortions and cheapening, there can be little doubt that men and women are constantly conversing across national, cultural and religious boundaries. This is by no means dialogue, but it has given rise to a situation which favours and promotes dialogue.

Challenged by modern developments, theologians and philosophers of the different religions of the world are exerting their minds to reinterpret the tenets and symbolisms of their religions so as to bring meaning and life to man. In this renovating process different religionists are offering to us the ancient treasures of their faith in new vessels. The recurring general themes of their religious renaissance, be it Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist, are strikingly similar. They are all claiming universality of relevance, scientific rationality and personal and social salvific qualities for daily living. They claim to bring peace and love to a world perpetually living under the shadow of thermo-nuclear war. They promise mental peace to modern man whose nerves are perpetually on edge. In every faith there is a growing interest in the life of this world. Without abandoning hope of a world beyond death, the renewal of religions expresses
itself primarily in good works geared to the redemption of all forms of life here and now. Hence, under the influence of religious aspiration, there has been a new heightening of social consciousness. Humanitarian institutions are no longer the monopoly of Christian missions. Hospitals for men and animals, orphanages and hostels for the abandoned and the homeless, rescue homes for widows and socially persecuted women, schools, colleges and theological seminaries for the instruction of the young—all these witness to an important aspect of the religious revivalism of our day.

Old customs that hurt and hinder social life are being vigorously attacked. Hindus write against polygamy and child-marriage. The law of *karma* is challenged and untouchability is proscribed. In the world of Islam, women are being encouraged by liberal authors to claim their just rights. *Jihad* is directed as much against evil social customs as against the enemies of Islam.

It is in this atmosphere of a certain comprehensive confidence that the stage is set for interreligious dialogue. When men are on the defensive they are only apologetic; they cannot enter freely into dialogue. The self-confidence that has come about by the renaissance of faiths opens the minds of men and makes them responsive to the truths of other religions, to come to terms with them in their own philosophical and social context.

The fact of the renaissance of cultural religions itself has been one of the motivating factors in initiating dialogue. Hindu renaissance, until recently, has been primarily addressed to the claims of Christianity. The Brahmo Samaj was born, at least in part, out of the conversations of its
founder, Ram Mohan Roy, with Christian missionaries in Serampore. Keshab Chander Sen's total ministry in the Brahmo Samaj may be interpreted as an inner dialogue between Hinduism and Christian faith. The Arya Samaj, a revival movement in Hinduism under the leadership of Dayanand Sarasvati, was a result of dissatisfaction with Hinduism, but the dissatisfaction was engendered by the Christian criticism of the gods, social practices and Scriptures of Hinduism. Arya Samaj became a challenge to Christianity, and Dayanand involved many Christian missionaries in dialogue with Vedic Hinduism. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's books are written in the context of the attacks of Christians on Hindu thought and practice. While on the one hand he is a mediator between Eastern and Western spiritual values, on the other he champions the cause of Hinduism against the dogmatism and exclusiveness of Western Christianity. Radhakrishnan's thought is born in an atmosphere of dialogue. The hospitality and inclusiveness of Hinduism are set over against the feelings of superiority and exclusiveness in traditional Christianity. He invites all men out of their religious isolation to participate in the thrilling adventure of seeking a universal religion, a sanatana dharma, a religion of the spirit at work in all the diverse spiritual aspirations of man. Mahatma Gandhi has the same spirit behind his theological utterances. He engages Christians in dialogue on many themes—all religions are true; conversion to Christianity leads to alienation from one's national culture; the right method of religious propagation is by example and not by oral preaching; Jesus Christ is a great teacher and should be placed in line with other prophets and avatars, and so on. In his early years, while working in South Africa, Gandhiji often came in contact with Christians who tried to impress upon him the supposed "superiority" of Christianity over Hinduism. This attitude
hurt him deeply. In later years when he became well known there was a constant stream of Christian visitors to his Ashram many of whom tried to convince him of the exclusive excellence of Christian faith as a way of bringing spiritual and material health to India. Gandhiji, while admitting the greatness of the Christian faith, always witnessed that he found final and sufficient peace and inspiration in the Bhagavadgita and in Hinduism.

The same context of dialogue exists in other countries wherever old faiths are being reinterpreted and revived. There is willingness for conversation and an openness to spiritual and religious truth born out of self-confidence. It is true that some situations might be more conducive to dialogue than others, but it cannot be denied that there is greater openness everywhere today than was the case a few decades ago.

Another factor facilitating dialogue is the increase in our knowledge of the religions of mankind. With the growth of interest in the study of religions, an unending stream of religious literature has poured out from the publishing houses of the world. What used to be of interest to specialists in the history and science of religions is increasingly captivating the minds of the general public. Since the publication of Hasting's Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics and the editing of The Sacred Books of the East by Max Muller, the book market has been flooded with "religious" literature. With the increasing availability of translations of the Scriptures of different religions and authoritative commentaries on them, the religious lore of the world has become accessible to anyone interested in religion. Besides general books on the religions of mankind, there is considerable literature available on different aspects of each religion. The climate of renaissance has inspired the
adherents to encourage the production of religious literature. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Bombay which brings out inexpensive books on different aspects of Hinduism and Indian culture is not perhaps typical, but such publication centres are found in every country where old ethnic religions are being revived. The result of all this is that men can talk more knowledgeably about religion today than ever before.

The tremendous thrust of scientific knowledge today gives an altogether new perspective for understanding religion. Religious cosmological and eschatological myths are losing their credibility in the context of space science which has widened the horizons of man's knowledge about the universe. The most significant impact of modern science on religious dialogue is to be found in the revolution it has created in the way of getting at truth. It is the scientific epistemology that is creating an altogether new climate for discussion of religious matters. This makes it possible for men of different religions to come together for dialogue because there is in the making today a more commonly intelligible language of discourse. The scientific way of pursuing truth also works against dogmatism and absolutising of particular beliefs and practices. It relativises all past truths, and frees the minds of men to continually press forward to yet undiscovered mysteries pertaining to human life and the world that surrounds it. Where truth is considered as a static body of doctrine and custom, there can be little room for dialogue. It is only when a certain degree of tentativeness of approach is accepted that men can engage in genuine dialogue in pursuit of new truth or towards new understanding of old truths. The scientific atmosphere of our day puts all discovered truth to the risk of rejection or modification by new knowledge. It leaves no lacunae
in human enquiry. The sacred must submit to rationality as much as the profane. Men are unwilling to accept the authority of ancient tradition or of "infallible" religious organisations.

In other words, the process of desacralization creates a situation in which religious realities sanctified by centuries of devotion are allowed to be critically evaluated and examined. The scientific temper is pressing upon us the continuous nature of the universe. The time-worn division of the world into the terrestrial and the supernatural is breaking down and sensible men, religious or otherwise, prefer to talk about that which is within the purview of intelligible discussion and leave out the supernatural. Revealed truth that refers beyond this space-time world must show its relevance to the mundane world if it is to invite attention. As the aura of the sacred is lifted from religious objects, customs and leadership, to that extent free discussion is facilitated. With the gradual emancipation of religious sensibilities from the oppressive hold of metaphysics and tradition, men find a new freedom to talk about things that were once taboo. As long as men were enslaved to sacred books, sacred custom and sacred hierarchies of religious leadership, discussion was restricted to very narrow limits. The process of desacralization has lifted the heavy weight of these burdens and left men free to talk about realities which pave the way for the future advancement of man. Desacralization turns the eyes of man to the world, to time and history, and the realities of history are often more manageable for purposes of dialogue than the supra-mundane things of an ethereal world. And as the realities of history can be seen by our eyes and held by our hands, we find it more rewarding and intelligible to talk about them. It is time well spent. Thus desacralization
directs attention away from supra-mundane realities to the pressing needs of this world. This does not mean any indifference to religion. It attempts to bring religious discussion as it really relates to man in meaningful terms. The sacred is brought into the secular—or interpreted in understandable secular terms. This way men are enabled to talk to particular intelligible points rather than across one another about matters beyond the ken of human knowledge. One has to admit here that there are experiences—call them what you may—sacred, nouminous, religious, supernatural—which can hardly be communicated through words. Language, at best, can only point to these. These are better grasped through poetry, music, dance, painting and such other media. Here interreligious dialogue must adopt forms of expression that would communicate at the level of that particular experience—creative silence, corporate meditation, music and art.

Furthermore, in recent years, theological attention in different cultures is shifting towards man. The driving motive of the effort of the newly independent nations of Asia and Africa is the welfare of man. Increasingly the good of man tends to be the touchstone of national policies and theories. This priority of man over everything else permeates different areas of thinking. Religious thought and interpretation are no exception to this. When intellectuals of different faiths discuss religions, they often assume the good of man as the final criterion of truth. This emphasis on man changes the whole context of dialogue. Men are naturally drawn into discussion, not so much as Hindus, Christians and Muslims, but as men engaged in the common struggle of humanity for food, dignity, and justice—as men involved in a common destiny of bearing the burdens and responsibilities of contemporary living. This clears
PREPARATION FOR DIALOGUE

the air for dialogue. Even when men of different faiths are faithful followers of their respective religions they find for themselves common concerns uniting them in concerted thinking and planning. Each brings to such discussions his own particular stance often related to his faith. Common problems of living together, of neighbourhood, city and State, provide the starting point for discussions which frequently involve reevaluation of basic religious, philosophical and cultural presuppositions. It is the discussion of actual concrete problems that brings into focus underlying fundamental traditional beliefs.

The political philosophy of the Indian State today is described as “secularism”. In other national societies the tenets of secularism were developed in opposition to the supposed irrational and other-worldly outlook of religion. Western secular humanism has its source in opposition to the religious spirit. This is only partly true in India. Secularism in India is to be understood more as an opposition to fanatical communalism among followers of different religions than as an atheistic philosophical position. Indian secularism is not opposed to religion as such; in fact it is one of the strongest safeguards against the threat of communal violence among rival religious communities. It tempers religious passions and points to a way of life in a religiously pluralistic society. This secular mood has increasingly commended itself to those in India who would lay the foundations of the Indian nation on stable grounds. Secularism creates the atmosphere in which the different religious communities of India can breathe freely. It tends to be an accommodating context rather than an ideology with definite tenets. It would be wrong to seek the roots of modern Indian secularism in the nastika philosophies of ancient India such as the Charvaka or the Lokayata. These
INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

systems of philosophy were definitely ranged against the philosophical orthodoxies of Hinduism. Contemporary Indian political secularism, as so far understood, does not actively take up issue with different religions as such.

As the secular mood takes hold of the minds of the Indian people it gives the kind of emotional detachment which facilitates dialogue on religious issues. It provides the sort of intellectual atmosphere wherein men of diverse religious persuasions and cultural backgrounds can discuss together matters of common concern, be these related to particular concrete problems of local community or nation, or matters of purely intellectual nature about religion and culture.

We live today in a situation of perpetual dialogue. In everyday life situations and the diverse encounters of men dialogue goes on. As men and women meet to work out problems of community living in their neighbourhoods they cannot help being drawn into discussions about the deeper presuppositions of their religion and culture. As folks gather together for the little funs of communal life on festivals, in religious melas, at wedding parties, reflecting men cannot help turning their thoughts to the meaning of these occasions in the rapidly changing social context of life today. Intelligent women gossip about old ways of cooking, eating, social mixing and arranging marriages. (In the Hindu context practically every household function has a religious meaning). In factories and offices, concerned men discuss the causes of inertia, of truancy and work aptitudes, and often find explanations in the sanctions of traditional religion. Collection for funds in the factories for the celebration of religious festivals would often spark off heated discussions among workers.
Besides this pervasive situation of interreligious encounters, there have been experiments, especially among theologians and philosophers, of carefully planned colloquiums, in which men of different religions have participated and discussed particular themes of common interest. By way of illustration we might mention two such “structured” dialogues. One was planned under the leadership of P. D. Devanandan, who was then the Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, in 1960.¹ The colloquium was held in Nagpur on the theme of “Hindu and Christian Views of Man”. About twenty Hindu and Christian scholars participated in the dialogue for full four days. Most of the participants had some previous knowledge of Hinduism and Christianity largely based on book reading and casual contacts with the members of the other faith. Knowledge of one another’s viewpoint, however, in actual personal encounter, was quite a different experience from information gathered from books. For one thing, the Christians were impressed by the wide diversity in religious points of view of the Hindus and with the naturalness by which these differences were accepted by them. Comparatively, the Christians showed a greater degree of unanimity of approach in their ideas and expression. Although the theme of the conference was “Man”, the discussions that followed the reading of papers almost always involved other aspects of the two faiths. Throughout there was free and open discussion and neither group tried to minimize the sharp differences that divided them, but all this in the context of warm personal fellowship. At the end of the four days the feelings of the participants were

¹ We specially mention this colloquium as this book is a memorial volume to P. D. Devanandan who was a source of inspiration to many younger men in this venture of inter-religious dialogue.
summarized by Prof. Atreya of Benares Hindu University when he said:

It is for the first time in my life that I have attended such a Seminar where thinkers of the two religions have come together and discussed issues so cordially. The need of the time is understanding. We are different individuals (in spite of my Advaitic Philosophy!). Therefore we need fellowship and mutual understanding. We should take only the liberties which we are prepared to give to others.\(^2\)

Since then other colloquiums have been arranged by the Christian Institute as well as by other sponsors.\(^3\) A novel experiment was made by the Friends World Service Committee in the summer of 1967 in Ootacamund, South India. This was also a gathering of Hindus and Christians—about fifteen in all. Unlike the colloquium at Nagpur, where the emphasis was on ideas, the accent here was on religious experience. There was sufficient time given for periods of silent corporate meditation, with freedom, in the manner of the Quakers, for sharing of insights. This was an altogether fresh venture in which people of widely differing religious inclinations could come together for worship. There were two sets of talks each day, in which


\(^3\) Special mention needs be made of a dialogue between Muslims and Christians held at Nagpur, in October 1965 on the theme, “Faith and Works”. This was sponsored jointly by the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies, New Delhi, and the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, Jabalpur. The papers were published in the 1966 issues of *The Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* (P.O. Box 134, Lucknow-1, Uttar Pradesh, India).
Christians and Hindus took turns alternately. Participants were not required to write erudite papers beforehand. The talks were spontaneous, narrating and explaining the "inner journey" of the participant. Each took this occasion as an opportunity to remember and to articulate in understandable terms how he came to a life of faith and what it meant to him in his relation to God and man. Following each talk there was a lively discussion on the meaning of spiritual experience and especially how it related to a life of responsibility in the world. The question to which the discussion returned again and again was: Is religion a purely personal matter, a concern isolated from the world or should spiritual interiority be somehow related to the dharma of everyday social living?

The above are only two illustrations of what we might increasingly expect in interreligious relationship. While, however, the possibility and the need for dialogue are becoming increasingly pervasive today, there is little attention being given to the preparation for dialogue. The author knows of two Christian groups which have been keenly interested in the preparation for dialogue with the Hindus. Under the inspiration of Dr. J. A. Cuttat, former Swiss Ambassador to India, a group of Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars met several times to understand the meaning of "spiritual interiority" in Christianity and Hinduism. The presupposition of the group was that it was not so much at the level of ideas as of experience that a fruitful dialogue could be carried on between Christians and Hindus. Another group meets at the Ashram at Jyotiniketan, Kareli (U.P.), where a text from the Upanishads is taken for meditation followed by an articulate sharing by participants of the hidden Christ revealed therein. They come together for a common life of identification with village Hindu community to understand more deeply the kind of cultural milieu which perhaps gave the inspiration for the utterances of the Upanishads in an earlier age. The two groups often meet together, and work in close co-operation with each other.
who are often taking the initiative in proposing dialogue with men of other faiths realize their own limitations for this venture. For decades the Christian community has lived in comparative isolation from other religious communities in India. By their exclusiveness and by their vain talk about the supposed "superiority" of their religion, they have often alienated themselves from their neighbours of other faiths. Considering themselves as God's chosen people, they have often looked down upon the religion and culture of others. This has earned for themselves, and rightly so, the suspicion of and a certain isolation from other communities. The need for understanding and mutual trust presses upon us today with urgency. Preparation, emotional and intellectual, is a pre-requisite for any dialogue. Christians, in particular, need to go through a cathartic experience, a *kenosis* of mind and heart. It is hoped that the thinking reflected in this book will be a contribution in this exciting venture of preparing for the dialogic situation that is already upon us.
The Meaning of Dialogue

By RICHARD W. TAYLOR

Dialogue, having become a vogue word both in the ecumenical movement and in the field of the study of religions, has so many meanings that for many it has ceased to have much real meaning. Yet I am inclined to think that within these contexts there are at least four different meanings of dialogue. These four meanings are not altogether exclusive of each other. So, a particular act of dialogue may have aspects of several of these meanings.

1. Socratic Dialogue

This is a dialectic of open, mutual, questioning about something. Such a dialogue is known to expose fresh understandings of the topic at hand. In the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society we have often had the experience during group consultations of the mutual stimulation of thinking which takes place. It takes us beyond where we feel we would have got as individuals thinking alone. This, I would suggest, is a result of the socratic aspect of these dialogues.

Probably this socratic dialogue is all that Christians are asking for when they insist on the importance of listening to what those of other faiths are really saying. Probably when Pope Paul in his first encyclical, Ecclesiam Suam, says: "For our part, we are ready to enter into discussion on these common ideals, and will not fail to take
the initiative where our offer of discussion in genuine, mutual respect, would be well received\textsuperscript{1}, he intends a kind of socratic dialogue\textsuperscript{1}.

2. Buberian Dialogue

This is dialogue in the I-Thou relationship. An awareness of its possibilities was sharpened for our generation by Martin Buber who, building upon the existentialists and Judaism, made it the very centre of his philosophical theology\textsuperscript{2}. The characteristics of this dialogue are mutuality, directness, presentness, intensity and ineffability\textsuperscript{3}. It involves an experimental element and is seen as the most really human of all relationships. It contains a kind of believing-in-love, a concerned openness, in which human authenticity is experienced. It may be seen as taking a biblical view of man, the man whom I face, really seriously\textsuperscript{4}.

3. Discursive Dialogue

In the Western tradition this is the dominant strain. It involves abstraction and analysis through the use of


\textsuperscript{2} Buber's core work is found in \textit{Die Schriften über das dialógische Prinzip} (Heidelberg: Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1954). The translation of the most important part of this is \textit{Between Man and Man} (London: Kegan Paul, 1947).


common sets of categories or symbols. No doubt this kind of dialogue may lead to an enhanced understanding of each other’s theoretical positions.

4. Pedagogic Dialogue

This is preconstructed dialogue which is fed to students and disciples in order to train and educate them. At its best this style of dialogue may lead to insights more efficiently and more personally than more abstract presentations might do. Plato’s dialogues are very much of this sort—although the dialogues they describe (record) were largely socratic. Much Eastern teaching has also taken this form. It is common in the Buddhist tradition (as written dialogue between teacher and seeker) and also in the Hindu and Christian traditions.

I venture to suggest that when we speak of dialogue so positively as we do these days we mean the buberian and socratic kinds of dialogue but that it really is the discursive kind of dialogue that we usually plan and achieve both with other churchmen and with men of other faiths and of no faith. This may be a crippling situation because while there may be no doubt that discursive dialogue has an important contribution to make to our understanding, it must be clearly said that discursive dialogue is often almost the exact opposite of buberian dialogue. This is because there is an important sense in which intellectualizing in terms of categories becomes a putting up of thought processes as a screen between man and man whereas the

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5 I am grateful to Dr. Klaus Laemmel, consultant psychiatrist to the Missionary Orientation Centre, Stony Point, who has helped me to clarify the nature of this opposition.
major facet of buberian dialogue is that it seeks to explicate a relation of loving openness between man and man.

In the past most of what might pass as dialogue between living religions has been of the discursive sort that was so often called the comparative study of religion. This tended to raise the screen between man and man precisely at the most personal point, that of faith, which tended to be ignored or objectified. This is not to oppose the intellectual study of religions. Such a study, well and soundly done, has much to contribute to the background, and perhaps to the depth, of dialogue. But it is not itself dialogue—and real dialogue will turn rotten if the two are confused.®

In recent ecumenical discussion one finds the terms encounter and dialogue, and sometimes confrontation, used rather interchangeably. Yet there seem to be important shades of difference in the meaning of these terms. Discursive dialogue is confrontation (and perhaps encounter) at its best. But perhaps the socratic and buberian dialogues are dialogue at its best. Perhaps in some sense, indeed, these two types comprise the only real dialogues possible. And even some socratic dialogues may shade off toward discursive dialogues where their dialectical component stresses I-It (where the It is He or She) rather than the dialogical I-Thou.

This real dialogue in its radical or buberian form involves a venturesome unfolding to each other in authenticity. It may be either spoken or silent—and seems usually partly both. “One must make the contribution of one’s spirit without abbreviation and distortion: everything

® I confess to thinking that even the systematic phenomenological study of religions is finally predominantly discursive.
depends here upon the legitimacy of what one has to say. Not holding back is the opposite of letting oneself go, for true speech involves thought as to the why in which one brings to words what one has in mind... The essential element of genuine dialogue... is 'seeing the other' or 'experiencing the other side'. “ ‘Experiencing the other side' means to feel an event from the side of the person one meets as well as from one’s own side. It is an inclusiveness which realizes the other person in the actuality of his being, but it is not to be identified with 'empathy', which means transposing oneself into the dynamic structure of an object.”

Perhaps we ought to be very clear about the negative evaluation which must be placed upon empathy in this situation—just because it has been so highly touted by some missionary statesmen. Empathy is a becoming, or more often a trying to become emotionally him (the other) and so it is to objectify him rather than really being yourself toward him.

In his conversation and lectures Dr. P. D. Devanandan more than once suggested that we could not have real dialogue with Hindus unless we entered into their understanding of and feeling for Hinduism so far as to find their Hinduism really tempting for us. I suppose that at least part of what he meant is this ‘experiencing the other side' in such a dialogic situation.

“Experiencing the other side is the essence of all genuine love. The ‘eros' of monologue is a display or enjoyment of subjective feelings. The eros of dialogue, on the other hand, means the turning of the lover to the beloved ‘in his otherness, his independence, his self-reality', and ‘with

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Friedman, op. cit., p. 87.

Ibid., p. 88.
of God to the descendants of Noah we should expect this. I suppose that dialogue might, and ought, also to take place between the congregation (the koinonia) and other groups, religious and social—rather than merely between man and man, or within especially gathered temporary groups and consultations....

In such congregational-group dialogue an important feature might be the de-alienation of the Christian community. Buberian dialogue between man and man tends to overcome their alienation. But in the East, and not only in the East, the Christian community is usually encapsulated and culturally and politically alienated. I venture that an aspect of congregation-dialogue would be de-alienation in these areas.

By its very nature the dialogic-relationship is in some way spontaneous (unlaboured). Because of this we must beware of setting up overly restraining frameworks for it, of trying to do it by rote, of trying to have dialogue "by the numbers" as it were. If grace is involved we must exercise even greater care in this regard, because oversimple routinization is certainly one of the banes of grace —allowing it to go rotten.

As we face men and groups from other religions in the religious sphere questions may be raised about the relationship of religions implied by the dialogic relationship. Prof. Macquarrie has raised such questions of Tillich and others. Does real dialogue in this sphere necessarily imply the real pluralism of religions? Objectively I suppose that it does in that religious imperialism certainly must die for dialogue to live. And there certainly is Truth in all of the major world religions, at least. Yet even in the
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8 Ibid., p. 88.
all the power of intention' of his own heart. He does not assimilate into his own soul what lives and faces him, but he vows it faithfully to himself and himself to it.”

I suppose that the dialogic-relationship may be an analogy for the faith-relationship to God. Both of the terms of such an analogy may be related to a love-relationship between humans. This has been done above for the dialogic-relationship. Gogarten describes the faith-relationship in a similar way: “As the one who is nothing, he (the lover) who knows most deeply of himself, knows that he receives his being from the loved one.”

We used to think that dialogue found its base in what some would call natural religion, in the philosophical or the theological assumption that others, at least in the realm of religions, were concerned about the same questions we were concerned about and that we were at least a bit ahead of them because we had revelation while they were limited to the resources of reason, or that we had a better revelation—but that we could suspend our advantage and really talk as equals in this realm of natural reasonable knowledge. I grant that, in spite of the desirability of a high degree of secularization of Christianity, Christianity is almost certainly a religion in the common sense of this term. But I think that this misses much of the point of real dialogue—although at some stages some kind of a bracketing (and holding back) of some of our own views (epoché) may be required by the dialogic situation. I would venture that actually the content of the dialogue will increasingly be about secular matters, be the dialogue with men of secular faiths, such as

9 Friedman, op. cit., p. 88.
I am increasingly of the mind that real dialogue has some foundation in grace. Sometimes there seems to me to be a kind of grace in the dialogic situation itself, in being enabled really to meet another which involves the kind of mutuality where I not only eagerly share his burden (concern, hope) but also willingly share my burden (concern, guilt). I guess that this is a part of what is meant by the “apostolate of human contact”.

Tillich once said that “A dialogue done in ‘listening love’ can be a tool of providence and a channel of the divine Spirit”. This highlights another facet of grace in dialogue. This is that God may speak to us through the other. No doubt we know that this is so within the Christian koinonia. He does speak to us through those special others. Probably He also speaks to us through others, especially in the dialogic situation, other religionists and others of secular faith and no faith. It is a common place that He may speak judgement to us through secular faiths. Some feel sure that they have heard him speak of reality and of undreamed meanings in the Gospel through other faiths and other individuals. Perhaps if we take really seriously the promises

11 I found the draft of a paper by John B. Cobb, Jr. on “Christianity as a Religion” suggestive at this point.

12 My debt to Charles Williams in this formulation will be clear to many.


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By its very nature the dialogic-relationship is in some way spontaneous (unlaboured). Because of this we must beware of setting up overly restraining frameworks for it, of trying to do it by rote, of trying to have dialogue "by the numbers" as it were. If grace is involved we must exercise even greater care in this regard, because oversimple routinization is certainly one of the banes of grace—allowing it to go rotten.

As we face men and groups from other religions in the religious sphere questions may be raised about the relationship of religions implied by the dialogic relationship. Prof. Macquarrie has raised such questions of Tillich and others. Does real dialogue in this sphere necessarily imply the real pluralism of religions? Objectively I suppose that it does in that religious imperialism certainly must die for dialogue to live. And there certainly is Truth in all of the major world religions, at least. Yet even in the
realm of objectivity I would suppose that Yinger's fourth type of inter-religious contact is about what this approach to dialogue implies: "Religions share many things in common; they change and grow. But in terms of their values and their effects they can nevertheless be differentiated. Sympathetic and informed value choices among religions are still needed." His other types are:

"1. The religions of others are wrong. I must oppose them or try to convert them to my way.

"2. Religions, although different, are to be understood as efforts to struggle with perplexing human problems—they are equally good.

"3. Since the various claims to absolute validity are mutually exclusive and self-contradictory, religions are shown to be in error—they are equally false."

In the realm of faith, however, and this is surely the pre-eminent realm for religions, I am not so sure. I am inclined to believe that the grace that saves to true humanness (a humanness which may be facilitated and exposed in real dialogue) is most surely available in Christ and His Church. But we may have to change our conceptions of Him and of His Church considerably as we experience dialogue in the religious sphere.

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17 This is one reason why the C.I.S.R.S. following the lead of Dr. Jai Singh is so much concerned with Indian Christology.
Increasingly our dialogue must be not so much with religions as with the world. Here too, no doubt, as Altizer among others points out, it must be a mutual encounter: "faith cannot speak to the world unless it is prepared to be affected by the world with which it speaks."\(^\text{18}\) Usually this will not be a church-world dialogue, but a dialogue of men of various faiths on the pressing social issues, and toward their solution. Such dialogue will be timely (*kairotic*)—as all real dialogue probably must be. It will provide an opportunity to "gossip the gospel"—as believers will often *want* to do, to speak some relevant word, in dialogic situations. I must insist that in this dialoguing-in-world situation the church-congregation has a great responsibility for providing a kind of a community-of-support for those of its members who are involved in such dialogue. They will be there *as* the Church, in some sense. They will need the support in interest, concern, guidance, community—community-in-Christ, community-in-grace—which only the congregation-koinonia can give to them.

We are inclined these days to speak in terms of Christian Presence. Perhaps Christian Presence is precisely being available for real dialogue. Here it is the quality and depth of possible relationship, rather than mere proximity, which is of crucial importance.

One special thing which Christians bring into any dialogue is an awareness of the possibility of what Tillich has called *correlation*. In part this means that God answers questions in revelation. In faith we may assume that this possibility continues.

The Biblical Bases of Dialogue

By Mathew P. John

When we use the word 'dialogue' we normally think of conversation between people. The word has come to have a great vogue in recent times, in interreligious discussions. For some the usefulness of the word lies in that it puts into the background the proselytising interest of the parties concerned. Some prefer it because it has the implication of openness of mind and objectivity that ought to characterise our intellectual quest in this scientific age.

In this paper we are concerned to argue that dialogue may have a deeper meaning for the Christian, arising out of the Biblical revelation. Dialogue is not to be understood as replacing the proclamation of faith, but perhaps as a necessary human relationship, logically prior to any real attempt at communication of the Gospel. Beyond this, dialogue has an even more fundamental significance for man.

One of the most important and distinctive aspects of the teaching of the Bible is its doctrine of creation, and especially the concept of creation of man 'in the image of God'. This phrase occurs only a few times in the Bible, but its significance in the Biblical understanding of the "nature and destiny" of man is not to be judged by the frequency of its occurrence.\(^1\)

The terms 'image' and 'likeness' have been interpreted in various ways in the past, but more recently there seems to be an increasing consensus that 'the image of God in man is to be understood as primarily a relation which is of the order of communion or fellowship'. For purposes of our discussion we may say that man exists in dialogue with God.

It is only man that is created in the image of God according to the Bible. This is what gives him his unique meaning. It is in this 'image' that his humanity consists. God calls man into being, and it is man's response to that call that makes him human.

Dr. J. K. S. Reid has discussed the question whether the relational interpretation of the image excludes the substantial, and has suggested that they can be held together. There is a formal justification for the argument that a relation necessarily implies the correlates that are related by it; but in understanding the relation of man and God we cannot consider them correlates of equal status because man is a created being, standing in a relation of responsive dependence to the Creator. And this relation belongs to the very essence of his being and it is impossible to conceive him apart from this relation.

The word 'dialogue' has not been traditionally used to understand and express the divine-human relationship.

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3 J. K. S. Reid, Our Life in Christ (London: S.C.M. Press, 1963), p. 38, cf. also the quotations given by Reid, especially Jean Cadier: "Man is a being in relation. He does not exist by himself in an egoistic isolation. He exists only by God and for God."
4 See Gen. 9: 5-6.
5 Reid, op. cit., p. 38.
Yet this seems to be eminently suitable to bring out the continuing, dynamic, creative character of the divine image in man. The creation of man is not an act of the remote past; it is continuing. Man is not a finished product, perfected and sent out from the Maker's hands with no abiding bond except the legend 'manufactured by...'. The relationship between the Creator and the creature is not petrified and lifeless, but by its very nature, living and life-giving. The image of God in man is seen in his capacity to respond to God. It is in responding that he becomes a man. His responsibility (or ability to respond) is not one factor of his nature or being among others, but his very being itself. His responses are called forth by the self-disclosure of God. For such a relationship, 'dialogue' is an apt name.

This brief discussion of the relational meaning of the image of God in man is not extraneous to our understanding of dialogue in the human realm. It is because dialogue—a divine-human dialogue—lies at the core of human existence that dialogue between human beings becomes crucial.

Divine-human dialogue is, in the order of being, prior to human dialogue, but the latter is first in our experience, or in the order of knowing. Dialogue between human beings is on the one hand a reflection and effect of the other dialogue, and on the other, the means through which that other dialogue is revealed and experienced. If the divine-human dialogue is seen as basic to and constitutive of the human being in a theological sense, the human dialogue within society can be shown to be basic to and constitutive of the human being from a psychological and sociological perspective. A child receives the language, culture and attitudes of the human community within which it is born. Without a community
to form the background and environment for the development of a child it would not develop the characteristics that distinguish a human being from animals.\(^6\)

Interreligious dialogue must be placed within the context of human dialogue in general, and human dialogue seen in the light of the divine-human dialogue. Any other view of human relationships would fall short of the insights given to us in the Biblical revelation of the nature and meaning of human existence.

We live in a society of many religions. Not only is there a plurality of religions, but many of them are awakened and aggressive. Their leaders are articulate and anxious to proclaim and prove the superiority of their own faiths. A Christian, placed in this situation, cannot be blind and deaf to the sights and voices around him. He believes in \textit{one} God, and therefore must be concerned about the unity of mankind. He believes in \textit{one} Lord and Saviour and therefore must see all men as affected by the redemptive work of the cross. He believes in the presence and activity of the Spirit of God in the world and therefore must seek to discover the signs of His presence all around him. He is set in the world as a witness to the grace and power of God, manifested in the incarnation, the cross and the resurrection, and therefore must seek to bear witness to what he has ‘seen and heard’.

When he meets men who faithfully and devoutly follow a religion other than his own, he can assume one (or a combi-

nation of some) of the following attitudes. He may stand within his own ‘theological circle’ and say that the attitudes and propositions of other faiths are unintelligible (“they do not use my terms”) or irrelevant (“they do not answer my questions”) or false (“they do not agree with my assumptions”). It must be confessed that a great deal of discussion between the protagonists of different religions has been on the basis of these attitudes on both sides. In a former generation, religious leaders were engaged in public ‘disputes’, where each one tried to establish his faith as the true one, and that of his opponent as false. When ideas, practices or concepts of another religion appeared to be uncomfortably similar to those of one’s own, the drastic remedy was to attribute these to Satan’s successful attempt at misleading people. The wrongness of this attitude is not to be proved by recourse to some proof text or another. About the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews it can be argued that the author was thinking of the Hebrew Prophets and not of Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam. The Johannine statement about ‘the light that lightens every man’ can be countered by the next verse which says that ‘the world knew him not’. Our attitude to other men—seeing them as religious men following other religions—must be based on fundamental insights of the Bible mentioned earlier and not on stray texts. The attitude of mere opposition is wrong because it denies the universal sovereignty and grace of God. It goes back to an implied polytheism wherein other gods and religions may exist outside the influence of our God.

A second possible attitude is that of selective acceptance. Here the various components of another religion are com-

7 Jn. 1: 9.
pared to parallel elements in ours, and judged. Those which are compatible with our own religion are accepted and the others rejected. Something of this goes on in all cultural assimilation. A good deal of what is known as indigenization is really this kind of selective acceptance. There are pragmatic values in this approach, but the difficulty here is that the other religion is not viewed as a whole in which its various elements have a combined value and function which are lost when they are abstracted from the whole.

Another approach is that of dialogue. Here the other religion is not rejected in its entirety; nor is it accepted. It is met in dialogue; or more accurately, a neighbour, a fellow man who is an adherent of that religion, is met in dialogue. In that meeting there is neither complete acceptance nor complete rejection of the other religion, but an acceptance of the other person, a willingness to listen as well as to talk and an implied hope, that in and through conversation, realities which our words can only hint at may be apprehended.\(^8\)

The Christian approach in the past has tended to be with the missionary interest understood narrowly: ‘Come, accept my Saviour, join my Church’, and there is some justification in saying that people of other religions were viewed primarily as possible converts. A reaction against this is seen in some expressions of the famous report of the Laymen’s Enquiry Commission, and in the attitude of many Christians who appear satisfied with an indirect influence that Christianity may exert on others. We have yet to

enter into and grow in the way of dialogue. So far this has been the way only of a select few.⁹

In today’s secular and pluralistic society our **neighbours** are men of other faiths. We are bound to them by ties of common interests, common professions, and common culture. They are given to us, as we are given to them, as **neighbours**. Our neighbourly responsibility arises from the command to love and this is inseparable from the quest to know. While religions may be viewed as mutually exclusive systems making the adherent of one incapable of knowing or appreciating another, men are the same in all places. As J. M. De’Chanet has put it, “Men in all places are one, and ... to live according to the spirit ... they have to get over the same obstacles, face the same difficulties, and avoid the same snares.”¹⁰

This is our starting point in any real dialogue. We do not try to see the other person primarily as a member of another religion who should be won over, but as a fellow man, one of ‘like passions’ as we are. He has, ultimately, the same needs and problems, the same temptations and dangers. The knowledge of the fact that he is a brother ‘for whom Christ died’ gives an added responsibility and depth to the Christian’s interest in and concern for the other. The attitude that is produced by this knowledge can be quite other than the attitude of ‘soul-collection’.

Our way of life is increasingly losing the wholeness and unity that life in a rural community has. There, home and


work, religion and social life, are not isolated one from another. In today’s fragmented life, it is possible, often necessary to carry on the different aspects of our life in relative isolation. Our home life is not the concern of our business associates. Even our religion can be a private matter not exposed to the eyes of our weekday companions. In these circumstances it is possible to confine our conversations, by mutual agreement, usually tacit, to limited areas of life. It is possible in superficial conversation, and in personal relationships of a shallow kind, to be silent about one’s religion. But in a relationship that is deep, in a conversation that is really profound, it is well-nigh impossible to avoid questions of ultimate concern.

Dialogue involving religious questions may be seen as occurring in two types of situations, or in a combination of them. In one type we may think of chosen individuals of different religions meeting in conference to discuss with openness of mind, and willingness to hear and give criticism. Here men of all faiths must be willing ‘to give reason for the hope that is in them.’ This dialogue will be primarily on the level of words and concepts.

The other type of dialogue takes place when men of different religions have been able, over relatively long periods of time, to maintain and develop a relation of mutual respect and friendship, where there is the possibility of a communion and exchange of experiences that go beyond and behind words. It is at this level that we can really ‘break’ the barrier of words, and open one theological circle and enter into another. When St. Paul speaks of

11 1 Peter 3: 15.
being ‘all things to all men’ he seems to be calling us to enter into relationships of depth. This certainly was seen by him as a prerequisite for winning some.

Real dialogue, of either type, has certain prior assumptions. Respect for the other, willingness to learn and change when necessary, are basic necessities. The suggestion that the Christian should be willing to change may cause some criticism, but it may be that we go a step further in grasping ‘the breadth and length and height and depth’ of the divine love in Christ by confronting Him in the brother for whom He died.

Such dialogue, again, involves some affirmative judgment about the reality of the religion of the neighbour. To judge religions other than ours impartially is a very difficult task, but there seems to be no reason which compels a Christian to consign all other religions to the realm of the illusory.\(^{12}\)

For some, this attitude may appear as a denial of the central affirmations of Christian faith such as ‘I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved.’ (John 10:9) or ‘There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’ (Acts 4:12). Instead, when truly understood, it will become a facet of the on-going process of ‘making every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:5). A concern for ‘perishing souls’ motivated some of the missionaries. While we must respect their devotion and enthusiasm, it is not possible to accept their theological position. As Prof. Pittenger has pointed out,

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“it is beneath the level of Christian faith to speak of our commending Christianity to others on the ground that without accepting that faith they are doomed to perish everlastingly.” He goes on to argue that Christians should think of themselves not as being the ‘saved’, but rather as fellow workers with God, attempting with the aid of the grace of God “to bring to all men everywhere the life with him, through Christ, which he has been pleased, through no merit of our own, to permit us to enjoy”.

Our task as witnesses is fundamental to our being Christians. Our concern is to help men to know about Christ and to know Christ. In a recent inaugural lecture Dr. Kenneth Cragg has put this concern with a poignance that only one with true insight into the work of God in Christ, and a deep love for his fellow-men could feel: “We must venture mediating relationships with existing faiths at every point of their assurance and perplexity, grounding ourselves upon a common human existence and our confidence in the translatability of the Christian meanings into their wistfulness and their convictions. We must know and feel the ‘wound of absence’ the church suffers in the self-exemption of the Jewry from the race-transcending Messiah-ship in Jesus. We must continue to care for the Islamic disallowance—often for deeply relevant reasons—of our misunderstood beliefs about God manifest in the flesh and Jesus crucified. We must continue to care in and with the Hindu refusal to take the name of any God in vain, and the Buddhist refuge from the paradox of desire. All these it will be seen—and many more—are religious and theological

cares from which we are not going to be reprieved by historical developments in themselves.”

Discussions on dialogue in groups including conservative Christians often produce the question, ‘What is the purpose of dialogue?’ The question is often asked from a very real and praiseworthy concern for evangelism. It is perhaps possible to answer with a counter question, ‘Was the Good Samaritan interested in making the wounded man a convert?’ but this does not really solve our problem. On the one hand we have to be true to our function as witnesses. On the other, we must affirm our unity with all men in all things human, including other religions. Perhaps these two aspects are not as far apart as they may appear. ‘Identification’ was a great word at one stage in missionary theology, and in identification these two aspects come close to each other. St. Paul tried, in obedience to the inescapable obligation that was laid on him (1 Cor. 9: 16) to be ‘all things to all men’ in his concern for all that he ‘might by all means save some’ (1 Cor. 9: 22). Instead of two persons standing in separate universes of discourse, as it were, and shouting at each other what the other cannot understand, we have to seek to rediscover our unity in common humanity. This seems to be part of what Dr. Cragg means when he says: “A way has to be found to turn the flank of our self-consciously antithetical situations, to melt and bend rigidities and relate hope to wistfulness and meaning to recognition, to seek in such a way that others find. The relevance of Christ is not grasped by assertion, but only by discovery.”

Dialogue, for a Christian, is not a substitute for evangelism; much less is it a mere means or method leading

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15 Ibid.
to evangelism. It is not an escape sought in an age, when effective evangelism appears to be difficult, to quieten the conscience.

Dialogue is a way in which we express our humanity. Conversation is essential to our human existence. In the doctrine of the two Adams, St. Paul affirms the unity of all mankind (Romans 5:4; 1 Cor. 15:22). Dialogue, to begin with, expresses our unity in the first Adam. But it need not, indeed should not, end there.

Conversations, personal relationships, dialogue, these may be of very different depths, and varying degrees of influence on the parties involved. It is certainly possible to talk with another person on any matter without really meeting that person in any significant sense, but in meetings that are significant, where men share their ultimate concerns and loyalties, one’s religious assumptions are confronted and challenged by those of another. The use of the term dialogue suggests that we meet with mutual respect and openness to learn. The result of the confrontation is not predictable. Those who believe in a God who is living and active must hold that His spirit is present in these situations, and therefore enters into dialogue in expectation and hope, not solely or primarily for enlightenment (or conversion) of the other, but as much or even more, for enlightenment and enrichment for himself as he enters more deeply into the ‘unsearchable riches’ that are in Christ.

Our unity is not only in the first Adam, but also in the Second. While our unity in the first Adam is clearly visible, our unity in the Second is known only by faith. But there is no doubt that for the biblical writers the second unity is as real as the first. ‘As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive’ (1 Cor. 15:22).
Christ comes not as a stranger to this world. He comes into his own. It is not a loss of faith in the power of the Gospel to save, nor a loss of the sense that the world stands in need of the Gospel, that makes us enter into dialogue at the deepest possible levels with our brothers of other faiths, but much rather the faith in the victory of Christ Himself. It is a richer vision of Christ that impels us in this direction, a vision represented in St. Paul’s words in the Epistle to the Colossians: ‘He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, in him all things hold together...’ (Colossians 1:15-20).

The world has reached in our times a stage of evolution at which it is impossible for men to remain shut up in the little world of their own family, tribe, and nation. Whether they like it or not they are obliged to look beyond all walls and frontiers, and to become aware of other expressions of humanity, and of human personality, as being as authentic and valuable as their own. They have to recognise that complementarity is the law of nature at every level of creation, as well as in all situations and conditions in which man happens to be. From the atom to the most complex living cell, it is by combination, through the coming together of individual energies that everything developed on earth and matter was made ready to receive the spark of life and, later on, the spark of intelligence. The same has been true of civilizations. It is through creative contact that cultures have been enriched.

The same holds good in the sphere of religion.

Undoubtedly Christians firmly believe in the uniqueness of the divine revelation of which by grace they have been constituted trustees in this world. Yet it was inherent to a real incarnation that the Word of God take flesh in a particular nature, in an individual body and soul, in a given race and nation. The choice of such time, place, birth,
depended, of course, completely on divine free-will. And this choice of divine Providence involved the destiny of the whole of mankind. However, by making choice of one human preparation amongst others towards the fulfilment of His eternal design, God did not want to discard and keep out of His salvific plan the diverse spiritual and religious preparations through which men and races were groping towards Him.

Creation is one. Mankind is one. There can be only one summit. If Christ is the Lord as we believe, it cannot be that each thing does not tend actually towards Him. It cannot be that each thing has not been directed by the Father towards the completion of the divine pleroma.

In order to prevent a lethal syncretism which would have resulted in the dilution of Israelitic religion within the surrounding Canaanite cults, the Lord sent the Prophets to stress the separation of the chosen people, sometimes in terms quite revolting to Christian sensitivity. Yet Israel received much from neighbouring cults and religious traditions, from Egypt, Sumeria and later on, from Persia and Greece. That too was not without the workings of Providence. The miracle of Israel was precisely that the inspired scribes were able to integrate all the positive religious contributions of those nations into their sacred books, without at the same time losing anything of their own privileged revelation; that was due to their powerful experience of Yahweh the Unique, the Saint of Israel.

The same happened in Christian experience in the apostolic times. Christians, most of them coming from a Hellenistic background, could not reflect their specific Christian experience of redemption, resurrection and divine filiation except in categories which were familiar to their minds. Had not Paul and John given the lead in this matter?
In olden times, each human group identified itself with the whole of mankind or at least with the uppermost expression of mankind; others were regarded with contempt or even disgust: barbarians, goim, mlecchas... The Bible itself retains much of that stance in its pages. Alas, can we say that such an antiquated idea has disappeared completely from our midst even in the Western, so-called modern world?

The Church indeed transcends time and place. Yet the Church cannot become manifest except in Christian individuals and Christian institutions, in particular human civilisations and cultures. She is indeed the ferment which transforms those civilisations and cultures; but while spreading into the whole dough she is always in danger of identifying herself so much with the dough that at times she seems even to lose her distinctive character. The identification of Christianity with one particular culture in which it developed during its first two millennia prevented Christians from hearing the call of the Prophets and the New Testament, to universality.

The early missionaries from the West, despite their devotion and self-sacrifice, carried a prejudice against non-Christian faiths. Now, at long last, things are beginning to change, and a new awareness is pervading the whole world, on the socio-political plane as well as on the religious one. The recent Council held in the Vatican by the Roman Catholic Church is a most encouraging example of it. It has called officially for a real and sincere dialogue in agape with all men, religious or otherwise, asking first that Christians should recognise their common call in Christ beyond all their historical and dogmatic divergences.
This long introduction was necessary, to indicate the context of the dialogue which Christians are now called upon to hold here in India, specially with the Hindus, and the manner of it.

As long as the haughty and scornful attitude towards all non-western values mentioned above was prevalent, it could not be possible, of course, even to think of a dialogue in the spirit of the Vatican Council. That would have had no meaning at all.

Missionaries came here to preach the Christian religion, as they did in all other parts of the world, as soon as explorers, soldiers and merchants opened the way. They propagated their religion in all sorts of ways. We do not want to condemn or judge anybody, but a careful examination of what was done till recently is necessary to understand properly the attitude of the Hindu when we propose dialogue with him. No missionary had any doubt that all the non-baptised were destined to the fire of hell without any discrimination. Everything Hindu was simply looked down upon. Hindu ideas were disparaged and their incomparable religious literature was suspect. In a Tamil translation of *Life of Saints*, the *paganus imperator*, Diocletian became a ‘Tamilar rajah’. Of course nobody thought that many of the Christian liturgies and concepts are simply reminiscences of the old paganism, Greco-Roman as well as Celtico-German and our ideas of God have roots in the pre-Israelite Semitic world.

In the measure in which such an attitude is still prevalent in many minds, in spite of the theological revolution of our times—and for Roman Catholics, in spite of the clear direc-
tives of the Council—a dialogue with Hindus could be at best a "one-way traffic". Even when the Christian agrees to listen politely to the Hindu, it will not be at all with a view to learning anything from this meeting, but only to find occasion to point out to the Hindu the falsity of his tenets, and to demand from him a complete intellectual as well as religious surrender.

Yet a real dialogue is a two-way traffic. If one has to give, one has to receive also. The Christian man is humble, if he is not merely a face-Christian; and a humble man is always ready to receive and to learn. He does not consider himself superior to anyone; he knows too well in which kind of mud-vessel, as St. Paul says, he keeps and carries with him the treasure entrusted to him. He knows that, in order to teach him, God may make use of any instrument. Has he not read the story of the she-ass of Balaam in the book of Numbers? Did not Caiphas, the iniquitous judge par-excellence, himself prophesy, according to St. John? How much more can God speak through sincere and devoted men of other faiths? No Christian can forget that the Spirit is at work everywhere in His own mysterious way. It is precisely this universal presence of the Spirit and of Christ which is the very foundation for such a dialogue. A Christian who, at least practically, does not accept such biblical truth, disqualifies himself immediately for dialogue.

In the intra-Christian ecumenical dialogue today, great stress is put on the necessity of meeting on an equal footing. That was difficult for many to accept, yet it is an elementary condition of a worthwhile dialogue. Who would like to be simply summoned to the bar to hear himself condemned without discussion or to be accepted as a minor partner in a meeting of grown-up people? Equality among partners in a dialogue is the first prerequisite of a dialogue.
The dialogue is an exchange. It is not a matter of finding crevices in the arguments of the other. It aims first at making each interlocutor acquainted exactly with the position and the convictions of the other. It implies that each one does his best to explain himself to the other and to understand the other, moulded as each one is by his own particular upbringing and temperament. In a dialogue, each tries to discover and to follow the lode (vein) which goes back to the most evident principles which give the arguments their validity or at least their personal convincing force.

Once confidence and understanding have been established, it is then important to discover the point of difference and to see, both in oneself and in the other, which kind of forces, conscious and unconscious, psychological and social, are responsible for the cleavage. Each one will then realise what makes his own position unacceptable to the other. By confronting loyally, in truth and beyond all assumed external and mental attitudes, each interlocutor will understand how much of the mental and verbal expression of the truth he holds is conditioned by his formation—the hay and stubble of which St. Paul speaks in the first epistle to Corinthians\(^1\) and which has to pass through fire. It is only after such purifying of all interlocutors that a real and useful confrontation and discussion of the respective tenets can take place.

Dialogue is possible only between people for whom religion is something personal, something which is held by them at the very centre of their being, much deeper than any kind of pure intellectual or sentimental adherence founded

\(^1\) 3: 12f.
more generally in fact on the impulses and the obscure working of the subliminal psyche. In the case of people for whom religion—be it Hinduism, Christianity, Islam or Buddhism—is simply a set of tenets or practices which have to be blindly adhered to, dialogue is really impossible.

We do not mean, of course, that one has to go first through a thorough personal intellectual enquiry of the tenets and practices of one's religious tradition, nor even to pass through the room of the psycho-analyst in order to check the sincerity of his faith. On the other hand, it does not imply that all scriptures and traditions are to be finally judged in the light of personal experience. Both these conclusions would be wrong. Man is not a pure intellectual essence, and his essential relation with the whole universe in space as well as in time is more and more brought into light by science and depth psychology. Faith cannot materialise and express itself except in a concrete human being, and religions cannot exist but in concrete human groups. Yet, while acknowledging and accepting it, man must always be careful not to identify his deep and free personality with narrow loyalty to any religious group. And faith is adult only when man has reached in himself that central place of himself, independent, responsible and free.

An adult faith is based on a real experience of God both in His presence in the depth of the soul and of His presence in the core of all things. We do not speak here, however, of a 'felt' experience, of a so-called sentiment of the divine Presence. We rather refer to what some call an 'ontic' experience, something which springs from the centre of the being and transforms all activities of man, even if he is not directly aware of it. We speak of a faith which is not a social habit received blindly from the environment, which
is not a simple projection or compensation of a subconscious, which is not considered as something possessed by oneself. We do not possess God, nor faith, nor grace. It is rather God, faith, and grace which possess us. The adult faith is not an intellectual attitude which looks down on all tenets, practices and possessions of others. It is an attitude of deep humility which does not dare to judge anyone, because it is then realised that God and truth, are beyond any expression. He does not reject the expression a priori though, because he knows that, since the Word of God was made flesh, His message has to pass through human thoughts and words. He knows too that even the innermost experience which, of course, transcends thought and feeling, has to become words and sentiment as it begins to pervade the whole man. But knowing that the expression is necessary he knows too that all expressions are unsatisfactory. He is then always ready to recognise eventual limitations of each one of the particular expressions of the divine mystery.

Will not then the conclusion be that the most essential qualification for a fruitful interreligious dialogue is not so much an acute mind, as a contemplative disposition of the soul. Acuteness of mind will be necessary too, but provided it puts itself at the disposal of the Spirit and does not let itself be drawn into the discussion for the sake of discussion. We take the word ‘contemplation’ in its strict sense which means to be in tune with the Spirit inside, a general disposition to prayer, a looking within or on high (what is finally the same), the referring of oneself always to the Source of all activities, judgements, decisions—to the Source which is the Father.

However external and crude the manifestations of religion in India have been yet from Vedic times onwards, there has been here an uninterrupted tradition of mystical
experience, much beyond the level of name and form. To look for the essential truth of Hinduism merely in its popular manifestations, will be as dishonest as to refuse to see in Christianity anything but pilgrimages and popular devotions, if not superstitions. While the biblical religions—including even Islam to some extent claim to stand on a revelation given once for all, Hinduism presents itself as a continual awakening of souls to the truth. All nāma-rūpa from Vedic hymns and rituals to the more recent forms of worship and piety, have as their only aim the personal awakening within every individual. That is moksha.

If the faith of a Christian remains at the nāma-rūpa level we must say definitely that such a Christian is radically disqualified for a real religious dialogue with the Hindu, because on the one hand he will be utterly unable to understand what the Hindu will tell him, and on the other, he will completely mislead the Hindu in his attempt to understand Christianity.

III

We now have to see how a Christian is able to dialogise with a Hindu with such openness of mind, without being at the same time disloyal to his own conviction of the unique character of the biblical revelation.

The essential mental attitude which must underlie dialogue refers to what Husserl calls *Epoche*. It is a putting 'aside', 'putting within brackets', 'putting off circuit', without images, a temporary suspension of the consideration of our own tenets, convictions and opinions. *Epoche* should not be confused with the radical doubt of Descartes. In the Husserlian *epoche* the suspension of judgement does not
imply suspicion of the validity of all religious tenet or belief. It is rather a kind of pedagogy to which the philosopher is invited to submit himself in order to discover his own conscience in its radical state. Further, when the aim is reached, everything which had been put aside in the process of dialogue will be recovered, but this time, in its true relation with the centre of the conscience, and at long last, man will come to a real and authentic experience of himself and the other.

_Epōche_ in interfaith dialogue means caution that one’s convictions and mental categories (philosophical or others) do not interfere with his listening to his interlocutor. He has to be a pure transparence, a pure receptivity, so that he can understand the point of view of the other, to convey his own point of view as far as possible in the very categories of the other. That requires a severe ascēse.

A complete _epōche_, of course, can rarely be achieved. We are too much dependent, all of us, on our own categories, rooted in individual psyche, education, etc. We should be even unable to think without them. The _epōche_ recommended here is rather an ideal, a forward point, a tension towards something, which will underlie the whole dialogue on either side.

In matters where pure concepts are involved, for instance of logic or algebra, it is easier to postpone judgement. But there are matters which simply imply to be or not to be; when eternity and salvation are at stake, who can really remain indifferent? Our religious tenets are not simply in our intellect. They penetrate into, or rather spring from, the very centre of our being; they permeate everything in us, up to the most elementary pulsations or deep archetypes of our psychic life.
**Epóche** will be even more difficult for a Hindu. Here indeed philosophy is not mere consideration of essences as in Greek tradition. Philosophy is a matter of life; philosophy is essentially oriented towards *moksha*, salvation. It is not rooted in a mere desire to know, but in a longing for *saving* knowledge. It aims at reaching or discovering the Reality which is behind all appearances, all *nāma-rūpa*, because thus only, and not in a mere speculative way, can we escape *samsāra*. Therefore it is even more difficult for a Hindu than for an European Christian not to feel personally engaged in every moment, in every thought of his mind, in every judgement, in every discussion, in quest of salvation.

**Epóche** might be easier for a Christian, for his faith is not just a personal experience but unites not only with the faith and experience of all other Christians of all times—what is common to all believers—but with the spiritual experience of Jesus himself, the Godman. A real faith is never at stake, because it is never in the Christian alone that lies his salvation, but his hope is in Christ, with whom he is united by the spirit.

When faith is threatened because of *epoche*, it is because such faith is still too much on the sociological or psychological level. When faith is built on the solid rock of the centre of the soul, then nothing ever will be able to separate a man from Christ—"Neither death, nor life, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature".²

Once this principle of *epoche* is accepted, we must adhere to it all along the dialogue. There are at times

² *Rom.* 8: 38.
discussions or books which, at the very beginning, stress wonderfully the need for *epoche*, but alas, forget it as quickly. They propose to bring into focus the similarities and resemblances between Christianity and other religions, but they select arbitrarily and, in the process, introduce distortions. It is rather like a photographer who would dictate to the client the angles under which he wants to take him, according to his own views and intentions.

Another common mistake is to discuss the parts apart from the whole. The Hindu will be stopped at each item he presents and this particular item will be immediately confronted with the Christian or rather Christian theologians' view of it. This happens especially when sin, ascetic methods or personality of God are discussed. That is simply unfair and even unscientific. It is the whole systems in their basic principles and their underlying categories which have to be confronted. Only then will the particular aspects or tenets appear in their true light, quite different often from the appearance they receive from a foreign lighting. We do not want to say of course that we should never discuss the real value of Hindu tenets—and reciprocally—but we want to emphasise the need for entire fairness and a scientific approach to the whole problem.

It happens often that in such dialogues, no one is really prepared to practise *epoche* or to listen really to the interlocutor. Each one then thinks it is his duty to present his own dogmas in the most appealing way, so that he can convince the other of the superiority or, at least, of the truth of his own religion.

Such dialogues are practically parallel monologues—like alas! most confrontation between men at all levels.
So few are really eager to learn from others. Could not the Christian at least remember that Jesus was 'humble and meek'?

Of course even polite complementary monologues are better than sheer hostility or ignorance. Yet no honest man can be satisfied by anything short of the dialogue at the level of the soul and of the deep experience of God.

IV

No dialogue indeed is possible if people do not speak the same tongue, and do not understand each other's language.

It is not enough that I understand in my own religious and cultural context the language spoken by my interlocutor. I must be able to understand it in the very definite context, mental and social, of the man who dialogises with me.

That presupposes a long and humble contact with the social and religious environment of my interlocutor, chiefly when I am the one who wants to initiate the dialogue. That presupposes too, on my part, a real effort of integration within it, a real endeavour to find my place in it—the very contrary of looking at it like an outsider and of simply getting some idea of it without engaging in it my deeper self.

My welcome (accueil) to the thought of my interlocutor cannot remain—if it is true—on the mere level of the eidos. It is myself, not my intellect alone, which I must put en état d'accueil, in a state of welcoming. It is my whole being which has to be in expectation for something to receive. That does not mean, of course, that one should be a weather-cock turning with each new wind of doctrine, but the man
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strongly fixed in the centre of his faith can really receive all winds without any danger of losing his own equi-
librium.

In this respect the most important preparation for the external dialogue of which we speak will probably be a deep acquaintance with the sacred books and spiritual texts of the other's tradition. That could rightly be called an internal dialogue, a dialogue by the mind and by the heart—an anticipation of the dialogue with living representatives of that spiritual tradition.

A deep personal contact with the scriptures of India is a must for everybody who wants to dialogue with Hindus. We do not refer here to a scholarly knowledge, which will always remain the lot of some specialists, but to something on the lines of an acquaintance which each educated Christian should have with the Bible, for instance. That will imply a general introduction, philological, philosophical and historical, and the guiding principles of exegesis. Then—and this is most important—each one will have to enter by himself into a contemplative meditation of the texts and a listening to the Spirit through them.

The sacred texts we are referring to will be first, in an all-India context, the major Upanishads and the Bhagavad-gita, and also of course the Epics, which are the receptacle of the whole religious symbolism of India. Then, according to places it will include the main mystical texts of each literature. In Tamilnad, for instance, it would be unforgivable not to have a first-hand contact with Tiruvaliuvvar and Manikkavasagar at least.

Some may object that, in our times, many Hindus have very little knowledge of their own scriptures. That is true.
Yet the contents of those books have been transmitted by an incessant tradition. It is from these sources that came all the ideas, mental attitudes, symbolism and folklore which built the soul of India. It is even now a wonder to see how, even in so-called unorthodox families, through the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata chiefly, the souls of children have been moulded into a deep Hindu pattern.

Then when Christians approach the sacred books of the Hindu scriptures, they must do it with the same attitude of respect and receptivity which we have stressed already concerning the external dialogue. The man who would despise a priori the scriptures of India, and the mystical songs transmitted through the ages, and constantly renewed, will simply prove the narrowness of his vision, as that dear Frenchman who declared bluntly one day to a professor of theology that, according to him, all that was not the village Hinduism of his flock was a mere invention and contraption of European scholars.

There are, of course portions, in the Hindu scriptures thoroughly boring such as passages in the Brahmanas, which even the modern Hindu finds utterly uninteresting. Yet, let us be frank, who has not been bored at times when reading Saint Augustine, not to speak of others? Who has not felt terribly uneasy about many pages of the Old Testament. As in the case of the Bible, the shell of the Upanishads has to be broken, to obtain the nut. Those who have decided humbly to listen to the teachings of the great sages, and have put themselves through the disciplines of Hindu asceticism, of solitude and silence, will surely testify that they have been overwhelmingly rewarded.
Should it be repeated here that the *epoche* is as much needed when reading the scripture or listening to the *rshis*, as when dialogising? Therefore let us never be too much in a hurry to decide that this is wrong, that is right. Let us never forget our own conditioning, the ore with which the precious metal is mixed already in our minds. Now when reading the scriptures or religious lyrics of India our first preoccupation should not be to try to find at every line a possible Christian interpretation, or, to the contrary, to be anxious to refute immediately everything from a Christian point of view.

It is deeper that we have to delve. It is the very sense intended by the *rshis* and the sages that we should be anxious to discover. Our exegesis should be here analogical to the exegesis of the Old Testament. There we have first to uncover what exactly the Prophets and the scribes intended to say. Only on that firm basis, and with the help of the further evangelical revelation, are we able to build an authentic Christian interpretation and development, the *sensus plenior*, the ‘fuller meaning’ as the biblicists call it now. Similarly, it is only on the basis of the actual meaning intended by the *rshis* that we can soar to higher planes and let Christian revealed truths shine with a new splendour in the light of Vedic intuitions.

In every philosophical or religious system, there is a fundamental experience or intuition which governs everything else and from which everything evolves. This intuition expresses itself in various ways: the *nāma-rūpa*, names and forms, referred to above. Yet while all forms refer to it, no form really comprehends it or expresses it adequately. The very function even of those *nāma-rūpa* is to help the people according to their limited possibilities, to share in this essential experience.
The aim of the Christian in the course of the dialogue must be to reach for the central intuition of Hinduism—to use the word of the Upanishads, "that knowledge through which everything else is known". It is that intuition of the mystical India which he will be anxious to incorporate in the treasures of the Church and to make it shine as the most precious gem in the diadem of the Bride of the Lamb.

However, while dialogising with Hindus or simply meeting them even very intimately on the spiritual, contemplative level, no Christian is allowed to forget the command of Christ to preach His name among all nations, to make all His disciples and to baptize them so that all men become the sharers of the fulness of the Holy Spirit. Dialogue is an exchange, a double-way traffic as explained from the beginning. We may expect the Hindu interlocutor to be as eager as his Christian brother to get some fruits of the dialogue and the encounter.

Hinduism indeed is not a closed monad. All along the centuries it remained open to new or renewing spiritual experiences. Even Buddhism did not disappear from India without leaving indelible traces in the worship as well in the thought of religious India. In our present times, Christ has become a loved and worshipped figure for many in our country. Yet Hindus do not accept Christ as presented by the Church. They accept with joy His message of love and interiority but refuse to endorse the uniqueness of the Incarnation, and its corollary, the uniqueness of the Church.

We touch here on the most crucial difficulty in dialogue, which is difficult to overcome, even when Christians and Hindus participate in the dialogue in genuine love.
They cannot concede the claim of Christianity to possess absolute truth. In the course of a dialogue a Hindu, after having cornered his Christian friend to make him affirm unequivocally his belief in the uniqueness of Christ, concluded in a sorrowful way: "It is clear now that you have never really loved any Hindu in your life!"

It is here that the Christian must show the most humble and real love and comprehension and follow the way of the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah: "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench". It is not his work to judge or condemn a priori or to accuse the other of insincerity. He must remember that Jesus did not come to condemn but to save. Judgment belongs to the last day.

Christians must first try to understand. The Hindu attitude has a history behind it. If missionary methods have much improved and if the connections between Christian preachers and worldly foreign powers are, to a great extent, things of the past, that past cannot be wiped off. After the visit of the Pope to Bombay, the Organiser, a weekly which reflects the opinion of a large number of Hindus, wrote quite bluntly that the words of the Pope in Bombay and the actual Christian approach to Hinduism as a whole, were simply a new and more cunning trick devised to destroy Hinduism since it was realised by the Church's authorities that the old ways were no longer paying.

We should never forget that it is we Christians who are taking the initiative in proposing the dialogue with the

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3 Isaiah 42: 2-3.
4 Mt. 13: 39.
Hindu. He did not call us. He is quite confident that the artisans of Hindu renewal will spring up from Hinduism itself, as was the case in the past with a Sankara, a Tulsidas, a Tukkaram, a Ramakrishna and so many others. Hinduism has everything necessary within itself and has no need to disappear into Christianity in order to save itself. In fact, it is Christianity which must learn from Hinduism. In the first place, Christianity has to learn a true universalism and catholicity which, it claims, belong to it, but never shows in practice. Then secondly, it must grow beyond the namā-rūpa level in which it seems to remain hopelessly entangled.

As vital and personal values are at stake in any philosophical discussion and as there is constant suspicion of proselytism behind the most appealing facades, the Hindu will rarely present himself first for the dialogue.

It has been said paradoxically that Hindus will begin to think of becoming Christians the day on which Christians give up trying to convert them.

There is some truth in fact in that statement, however unpalatable it may appear to many. And one can rightly wonder what would happen if Christians would stop attacking Hinduism on the namā-rūpa plane, or preaching wildly to uneducated masses the fire of hell or the horrors of the last judgement, and, instead content themselves with living amongst them a true evangelical and spiritual Christianity and simply presenting their tenets and faith in dialogues of the kind we suggest here!

We had better abstain from more comments, since we know all too well the principles involved and cannot be unaware of the command of Christ and the examples
of the Apostles. Perhaps we are paying now too dearly for evangelistic practices of the past—practices too worldly and hardly Christian. And that explains the dilemma in which we find ourselves just now.

VI

A very important principle has to be recalled to memory now. It is not with a view to establishing the eventual supremacy either of Christianity or of Hinduism on the intellectual or social level that the dialogue should take place. It is for the sake of souls. Only souls count finally indeed, and the personal salvation of each individual man. All religious minded people of the world cannot but realize the secularist trend of the present stage of human evolution. Techniques have given such an impetus to the betterment of material life that men are engaged in the building of the terrestrial city with an intensity never known before. At the same time, as education is spreading widely with the help of new media of communication, the common man is able to become acquainted almost immediately with all the new discoveries or new ways of thought. On the contrary, however, the religions of mankind remain couched in primitive mythology. Myths as such cannot be altogether dismissed from religious life. Modern man lives by his own myths. What is desperately needed is the reinterpretation of old myths as much as the imparting of religious meanings to the myths of modern man. This has been indeed the merit of the Vatican Council, to relate the Church to present history and to launch the Catholic Church boldly into a process of renovation, in order to be able to meet the world, as it is, at all levels, and thus to help the rediscovery of the worship of Christ. The nāma-rūpa, the names and forms, must always be shown in their connection with the experience of the Presence inside, outside, everywhere.
In view of the secularism of modern times and the disaffection of modern man for religion—for all religions in general—culminating in the growth and spread of atheism, is it really the first task for religious people to fight against one another, and to try to change by all means the religious affiliation of the remaining devotees, through preaching which remains too often on the level of nāma-rūpa? A sincere dialogue between people of diverse religious affiliations is therefore asked for by the present religious situation of the world. Some advocate it as a means to counteract atheism and chiefly Communism. It would be a kind of crusade to save God, as it were, from having His name forgotten on earth. Such a negative attitude shows by itself to what low degree most of the so-called religious people have come down. The teaching on the ‘sword’ has been, it seems, forgotten by Christians. And in India, what was the motto of Gandhiji to his people if not “never to oppose violence to violence”!

If Communism and atheism are so widely spread in the world today, the first cause is that the majority of the so-called religious people have remained at the level of nāma-rūpa, without practically making serious efforts to go beyond the rituals and the formulae, unconcerned as they were to the task of making their faith shine in their life in society.

Christians and Hindus, for instance, can discuss indefinitely the respective superiority of the Gītā or of the Gospel. It would be much better for both parties to decide to put into practice the teachings here of the Gītā, and there of the Gospel. The competition between religions should be really at the level of life. This confrontation will help each of the participants to realise the limitations and the drawbacks of his own tenets provided he is fully sincere. The Christian in such a sincere dis-
discussion, will realise what precisely prevents his message from going home to his interlocutor. Of course there are the essential difficulties, as the uniqueness of incarnation, but there are so many things too on the phenomenological level which make his appeal remain unheard and shake the ground from which he could go further in his demonstration.

At the same time he will discover what are the stepping stones, the aspects or rather the deep aspirations of Hinduism which ask, so to say, to be the complement of Christ’s revelation. He will discover wonderful foundations on which the faith in the triune God, the mysteries of the Father, the incarnate Son and the pervading Holy Spirit, could be built or, to change to the Pauline analogy of the tree-trunk on which faith could be grafted, and then give in time fruits of contemplation unthought of till now. He will necessarily reflect deeply on so many remarkable coincidences between the mystical experiences of the Christian saints and those of the sages of India. These are achievements in spiritual life which manifest the unmistakable presence of the Spirit.

Of course the Christian will never forget nor deny the hiatus between the greatest achievements on the unrevealed plane and the call of the Gospel, a gap that only a special grace can overcome.

Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Jews should come together to dialogise and try to know their respective greatness, and to overcome, each of them, the limitations which prevent them from fulfilling their spiritual role in the modern world. Muslims and Jews will put stress on the prophetic aspect of their religions, Hindus and Buddhists on the mystical trend of their traditions. All will realise then that they are complementary to one another.
All are called to mutual help and deepening of faith and to strive for unity in proportion as they move nearer to their own centre, which is finally the centre of all. Christians then will understand that both the prophetic experience and the mystical advaitic experience culminated in Jesus, and that therefore, it is their real vocation in this world to 'reconcile' everything, following the example of their Master and to be, in their own religious life, the living synthesis of all aspirations of men to God, and of all graces ever received by men from God.

Even the most zealous of missionaries are obliged to admit that in spite of all their efforts, and with the techniques used, only a small number of non-Christians will ever be reached by evangelical preaching. In an article\(^5\) Cardinal Bea reminded his readers that at least 90 per cent of the non-Christians have practically no chance to come in their lifetime to a sufficient knowledge of the message of the Risen Christ.

Yet no Christian can accept that he is not responsible personally for the salvation of each of his brother-men. The duty of the Church does not stop with her members or catechumens or with people ready to listen to her voice directly. Christian salvation is a corporate work, and here lies one of the main differences between Christianity and Hinduism. Moreover, the Vatican Council has endorsed officially the view which is becoming increasingly common among theologians that the salvific work of God does not limit itself to the compass of the 'visible' Church, though it is quite unpalatable for many that God may make use of religious means, quite alien apparently to Christian tradition, to save his children.

Now, if the Church is responsible for the salvation of those too who will never be incorporated to her by baptism, how will she fulfil this duty? Through prayer doubtless, and chiefly through the constant offering of the sacrifice of the Lamb for all the children of the Father who is in heaven. The Church however has to see too to the ‘revealing’ of the sacrament in all souls, including those who do not belong to her actual fold. If the direct act of faith in Christ is not yet possible, the Church has at least to see that acts of love and surrender are made by each one according to his own light.

This has innumerable implications. It is not our purpose to discuss them here. Let the faithful first meditate on their responsibilities before God towards this multitude of their brothers who will never be baptised. The Spirit Himself will make them aware of what He is expecting from them. Then, what would have appeared simply unthinkable at first view, will be considered as normal if not obligatory. At least that means that Christians, for their part, should be interested in the spiritual development of all religions; and, as regards individuals, in the spiritual awakening of each one to the realities of his own traditions, beyond customs and practices which appear to him out of date.

For such dialogue, our prayer is that responsible people of great religions come together, approaching each with respect and love, as shown for instance in the joined hands of the Hindu salutation, adoring the divine Presence in the heart of the ‘other’. Then, once joined together, let them try not so much to frame some rules and the like, as to foster their spiritual koinonia. In recent years a group has been formed in India of Christians belonging.
to different denominations, in order to *look together*, the *koinonia* of the invisible Church, at the riches prepared by the Spirit in the Hindu tradition; in other words to look at Christ already present amongst Hindus and waiting to be uncovered. We would like similar groups to arise among men of different faiths, among men who have reached the proper spiritual level of understanding, who are able to look at God present in one another, with the simple eye of faith, apart from any sense of superiority or self-complacency.

We wish even more than that.

Recently some have suggested the formation of Christian *ashrams* or *maths* grouping Christians belonging to different confessions. Circumstances may still make such a project a little premature, except between Christian groups which have already some possibilities of intercommunion. No matter what may happen in the future in that direction, an even bolder step has been proposed and even some effective steps taken to realise it. It would be the preparation of an hermitage in which Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist monks could live their life of prayer and contemplation according to their own traditions, in the necessary solitude and silence, and at the same time with some kind of common life or order to express and foster the mystery of their *koinonia*—a common life which should include times of meditation and even of worship together. They would be there together, in the presence of God, in the presence of God in each other. They would refuse any kind of proselytism, direct or disguised. They would have but one aim, the deepening together of their life in the spirit, and a life in community.

It is in such privileged places, in such a spiritual atmosphere of solitude and contemplation, that the dialogue
spoken of all along these pages would obtain its most perfect form. Such a centre will play the role of a catalyser, not unlike some places which, like the community of Taize, have played in the development of Christian ecumenism in the West. It is indeed in prayer and spiritual life that the real understanding in charity is possible.

We are not unaware of the problems implied in such proposals. They require perhaps a more elaborate theological basis. Yet often the Spirit blows, first, and only later man begins to understand. The task of the Church and the task of each Christian is to be attentive to this call of the Spirit and to accept it and to work in that direction to the best of one's abilities.

Other papers in this symposium will have stressed the scriptural bases of dialogue. The scriptural bases of the techniques of dialogue seem to us to be love and humility; love which is meek and patient. It will be enough to remember Paul's incomparable homily on love, I Cor. 13. Humility is Truth. It is in the spirit of this love and humility, commanded and first exemplified by Christ, that Christians have to approach all their brothers, whoever they be. Christ is the Word of God. But it is in the Spirit only that the Word becomes manifest to man. It is only through their life in the Spirit that Christians will be able to speak the word in Truth, with authority and effectiveness.

Besides, they will never forget that Christ came to fulfil, not to destroy; to save, not to condemn. If surrender to Christ means inevitably death, even more it means resurrection. It is not at the death of religions that Christian revelation aims, but at their most glorious fulfilment within Christianity, at their resurrection in Christ, at their blossoming in the Spirit, to the glory of the Father.
Hindu and Christian—
A Moment Breaks

By C. Murray Rogers

Our Vocation in Jyotiniketan

On December 2nd, 1964, the Wednesday in Advent week, the strangest thing happened in Bombay. His Holiness the Pope, Paul VI, was given such a tumultuous welcome by the people of the city and by the thousands who had travelled from all over India that the reception given to previous famous visitors to our country, Queen Elizabeth, Khrushchev, Eisenhower, looked small in comparison. Did the Pope, I wonder, as he drove through those dense crowds to the Oval in the heart of the city, where a congregation of some 60,000 awaited him, think upon the fact that 2% of the population of India are Christians, that the vast majority of those cheering him were Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Secularists?

Why did it happen? Perhaps we will know in fifty years time; until then we will probe and guess. Was it because we Christians of India are outstandingly holy and Christian? Was it because our non-Christian neighbours, the 98% wanted to express gratitude for the part we Christians play in national life, or for what Western Christians have done for India? Was it because these masses want to become Christians? I am afraid not.
Later that week, in a short speech to a group of non-Christians, the Pope may have given a clue, though he was not addressing himself to our question, when he said: “Yours ... is the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and in hymns of fervent prayer.” We may be involved as a nation in a vast technological revolution (and not a moment too early), we may be turning to materialism with a speed unexpected in the so-called “spiritual East”, but something down in the depths, the unconscious depths, of millions of Indian people kindled at the coming of a great spiritual leader.

From the International Eucharistic Congress in Bombay to Jyotiniketan Ashram, the community where I belong in North India, may seem a far cry! Indeed it is, and yet, strangely enough; the two fall into one angle of vision, at least so it seems to the present writer.

For well over two thousand years, dotted up and down this subcontinent, chiefly in jungles or by the side of holy rivers, there have been little settlements of men and women, living in great simplicity, under obedience to their spiritual guide or Guru, doing precisely what the Pope indicated: seeking God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and in hymns of fervent prayer. These little and hidden settlements or ashrams were Hindu, lying at the heart of living Hinduism, as they still do, and it was not until the second decade of this century that a very few Christians found themselves called to this ashram life of discipline, hard work, spiritual struggle and striving—and much joy.

As was no doubt very understandable though not less unfortunate for all that, people who had adopted the Western garb of Christianity conceived of Christian ashrams as a
means of evangelism, a technique by which the Gospel could be more effectively proclaimed, or as centres from which Christian social work could be made more readily acceptable. This inevitably has led to an emphasis on external work, both in most Christian ashrams and in some westernised Hindu ashrams of the Gandhian Movement and of the Ramakrishna Mission, a stress on words and programmes of activities very foreign to the contemplative ethos of Hindu ashrams down the ages.

Jyotiniketan, we believe, is called to a life more closely related to the ancient (and modern) Hindu ashrams of silence and prayer, of adoration and worship, set immediately and deeply in the modern world of great poverty and injustice, of national reconstruction and cultural spiritual upheaval. The style of our life includes daily four times of corporate worship (the first at 5-15 a.m. and the last at 8-30 p.m.) and times of personal prayer in huts and garden, times of work on the small farm and in the kitchen and library, and readiness to be at the disposal of neighbours and visitors; in this way it expresses our conviction that the spiritual may not be understood as standing over against the material, nor the material over against the spiritual, if we are to be faithful to the Word made flesh.

Another way of explaining our vocation is to say that our job is to love God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not as a preparation for some other work but simply for Himself, because no one and nothing is more lovable. This implies a life without walls, a life wide open to God and to our neighbours.

When we first came here almost ten years ago, and this community began to be born, we saw this life for God, in
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God, in terms of our two nearby villages. Now our neighbourhood has grown and we find ourselves drawn into a dialogue which involves more and more of our energies, mental and spiritual, a dialogue which is just beginning with the Hindu world. Four years ago two outstanding Roman Catholics, Dr. J. A. Cuttat, Swiss Ambassador to India, author of *The Encounter of Religions*, and Swami Abhishiktananda (French Benedictine, now of Saccidananda Ashram, South India, colleague of the late Fr. Jules Monchanin) called together a small group, eight Roman Catholic priests, one Orthodox and two Anglican. This first meeting has resulted in the spontaneous formation of a “circle” which comes together from time to time to consider the meeting point between Hindu and Christian spiritualities; this “circle” now includes one or two Presbyterian and Methodist members. What I now report comes from this circle and more particularly from the two men just mentioned who, more than any others, have brought us to the threshold of an entirely new “moment” in the relation between Christian Faith and Hinduism.

Three Approaches

The growing interdependence and interpenetration of civilisations and cultures has created as a means of escape from total destruction a desire, even a demand, for unity, for mutual understanding, for the end of an atmosphere of exclusiveness between peoples of different cultures and religions. In spite of the fact that we Christians witness to a universal Reality, we find ourselves strangely uneasy about this demand; it seems as if our religious convictions are challenged at their core if we are asked to cease to think of ourselves and of our Christian Faith as standing over against, in opposition to, Hinduism. To leave behind the
conquering conception of the Mission of the Church seems somehow to imply betrayal of our Christian convictions.

This polemic attitude, which dies so hard, sees the work of mission and evangelism in terms of military operations, to be described as advance and retreat, triumph, struggle, lines of defence, plans for attack, as if we were waging a war against other believers. It is the spirit of the Crusades, too often still alive in the missionary work of today, and, as Dr. Cuttat has remarked "it forgets that Christ's injunction to baptize all nations is not the first divine command, but the corollary of the second". Where this crusading attitude persists Christians refute and condemn from the beginning of their encounter with a Hindu; indeed too often before they meet, their minds and spirits are set for combat. This very common approach cannot bear scrutiny when it is brought to the light of Christ's attitude to the Gentiles of his day; He was set "to gather together the scattered children of God," not to wage war on them.

Alongside this polemic approach there has been, since the 18th century, what one might call the descriptive or neutral attitude represented by the few learned orientalists who translated the sacred scriptures of Hinduism and Buddhism and laid the essential foundation for a human understanding of these faiths. However, more often than not, they approached these faiths from the outside; they were concerned with "facts", with a technical and objective understanding of the faiths as phenomena to be examined, described, and understood intellectually. Essential as this was, it failed to recognise the intrinsic inwardness of a religion as spirituality, as the movement of the soul towards the Holy. Although in more recent years there have been orientalists who have gone far beyond this objective approach
and have penetrated to the very centre of non-Christian spiritual experience yet a letter written recently by a Professor of comparative religion, in commenting on the report of the recent Jyotiniketan meeting, illustrates this view-point; “I am not sure,” he writes, “that meditation on the texts (of the Hindu scriptures) is the best method of appreciating them. Thus our best insights in relation to the Bible in recent times have come from the intellectual critique of the material generated by scientific history, etc. There may be the same danger in meditating as there would be for the aircraft designer in praying rather than getting down to the drawing board”.

The third attitude to non-Christian faiths stands at the extreme opposite to the polemic; it is the syncretistic attitude. As an essay in understanding and as an attempt to assess the various religions by a common measuring rod it arose last century. If various religious phenomena can be understood in this way, as springing from a common denominator, a common irreducible base, then men might achieve the universality for which they long. Christian writers of the West, Hendrik Kraemer, W. A. Visser’t Hooft, and others, have seen the dangers of this syncretism to the Faith and Mission of the Church and their writings have created among many Asian Christians what one might describe as a pathological fear of any form of relativism. It may well be that the danger of syncretism is in fact greater in the West than it is at present in India where fear of heresy, induced from abroad, has too often inhibited steps which could have resulted in a valuable dialogue between Christians and Hindus.

Although these three approaches are, in our opinion, defective, yet one can see in each of them certain positive aspects which we may expect to find purified and corrected
in any more genuine Christian attitude. The missionary zeal which led to polemics must now lead to not less but more love for Christ, as we look at Him through the eyes and heart of the Hindu. The objectivity of the student of religion must not be lost but broadened to include the transcendent quality of faith and openness to new spiritual dimensions. The striving for a spiritual universality of the syncretist will no longer reduce or remove religious differences but will lift these irreducible insights and spiritual experiences to a higher point of convergence.

A New Ecumenical Experience

It was at our first meeting of the "circle" four years ago that Dr. Cuttat asked whether any of us, looking back as convinced Christian men on our varied experiences of Hinduism, felt our life in Christ had been deepened by that contact. There followed an hour which proved to be as crucial for our understanding as any given to us since that day. Speaking out of greatly varying backgrounds of Christian experience and practice, and of widely contrasted areas of Hindu life, each member was constrained to say that the Spirit of God had revealed to him, through close touch with Hindus and Hindu spirituality, some new treasures of spiritual life in Christ. As a result of these experiences we were quite unable with honesty to wish for the end of Hinduism, or to conceive of this spiritual phenomenon as being simply apart from Christ, from the workings of God's spirit. We found to our surprise that we each had been personally enriched in Christ by our contact with living Hinduism. This experience of God's gift through Hinduism cut across our separateness as members of different Christian confessions and became, simultaneously, an ecumenical experience entirely new to most members.
This dialogue between Christian and Hindu in which a growing number of us find ourselves involved has, as an essential precondition, a willingness and a readiness to listen to the other as other. We may not listen in order to prepare our next words of approach, proclamation or attack, but with the awareness that Christ speaks to us from the other. Far from expecting to despise or belittle what we hear we will be set to appreciate. To listen, means therefore far more than simply to stop talking; it demands a silence in oneself in order to understand the non-Christian brother as he understands himself, a "putting into brackets" of my own explicit Christian convictions. The moment will come in real dialogue when the Christian will speak and when that comes it will not be a pre-fabricated answer but a word to a partner who has been understood.

The Inner Dialogue

As we begin to see it, this dialogue in depth has two distinct parts, the inner or Internal Dialogue and the External Dialogue when there is a face-to-face meeting with the non-Christian believer. The Inner Dialogue is an essential prerequisite of the External and must take place within us as individuals and between us as a group of Christian men. It is fatally easy at this point to take a short cut, to dispense with the spiritual and intellectual discipline and strain involved in the inner dialogue, and to come at once to the direct encounter; if this happens the level of the meeting with the Hindu will once more fall back to one of the three ways which, as we have seen, have proved false.

What then is involved in this Inner Dialogue? First, and most essential, there is the need for the Christian to be unshakably rooted in Christ. A mental and cerebral
faith is, by itself, insufficient, for only the man who knows that each day is lived from the living grace of Christ in the Word and the Holy Eucharist can face the danger of being vulnerable before the living faith of a non-Christian believer. To live this way drives one back to the deep mysteries of our Christian Faith, to prayer and contemplation, for pitfalls—including the loss of one’s faith—can only be avoided where rootedness in Christ is being continually reinforced.

Where this is happening we are ready for the next stage, in which we open ourselves in order that the non-Christian religious experience may begin to happen within us. This sounds dangerous; it is, but with the living Christ to hold us and a genuine grasp of the Faith, we can, rather like a diver joined to his ship by the air-pipe and rope, dive deeply into non-Christian spiritualities. Not only will we not lose sight of Christ but we will catch glimpses of Him, and levels of awareness of His work and presence, to which we would not have been alive without this plunge into Hinduism. We will see that the Spirit has been drawing Hindus into the orbit of Christ long before the Church came to India, and millennia before the Name of Christ was heard. We will begin to be grasped by the fact that spiritual dimensions which on one level appear contradictory and mutually exclusive, in reality converge towards Christ. Two of our number, speaking of this experience, have said: “The relation between non-Christian religions to Christianity is neither that of error to truth nor that of one species to another, but of immemorial prefiguration to inconceivably new fulfilment” (J. A. Cuttat), and, “Christianity is not a religion among others, nor even the religion as such (this would level it down to a kind of pretension to be the best or unique religion), but the conversion of all religions to their fulness in Christ” (Raymond Panikker).
Our reading and study of pre-Christian scriptures play a large part in this deepening within ourselves of Hindu spirituality, and our own Christian scriptures, and our Lord’s understanding of Himself in the Old Testament, give us the key by which we may do this. When, for example, we do Upanishad study we set ourselves to listen to the Holy Spirit, to hear what the Hindu scriptures say of Christ, the Christ who is living in India, present in His Church in this very moment of time, “to gather all things into Himself to the glory of the Father”. To do this is fundamentally not a mental operation which would separate some “elements” of the Vedantic experience, putting aside some and retaining only what suits us Christians. It is, rather, an assumption of the whole Hindu experience and understanding, its fulfilment and culmination in Christ, and this implies a death and resurrection. It is for this death and resurrection, this *metanoia*, of the Hindu experience to happen within us that some Christians are called to offer themselves.

Then comes Stage 3 of this Inner Dialogue, when the Christian man, within the Hindu spiritual experience to which he has given himself, becomes more deeply aware than ever, of the irreducible uniqueness and transcendence of Christ, of Christian Faith. Without this stage either we fall back into syncretism and an easy and false equation, or the pre-Christian spirituality and Christian Faith will remain unconnected in a sort of awkward truce. At this point the difference and contrast between Christian and pre-Christian have to be stressed and seen in their clear light. Rationally these contrasts will seem to be insoluble while at a deeper level we will begin to perceive a “supernatural complementarity”, a coming together in Christ of all that is genuine in non-Christian spirituality and experience.
Already we are on the fringe of Stage 4, for it is at this point that the Hindu and Christian spiritualities may be deepened together. Just as the life and experience and scriptures of the Jewish people found fulfilment and were transformed in Christ so we are expecting and working for such a transformation and flowering of the Hindu experience which will be purified, perfected and find its fulness in Him. Precisely at this point "Christian transcendence must manifest its concrete universality by showing that what it surpasses is not simply left behind, but recapitulated, gathered up, drawn into the orbit of the totus homo—totus Deus".

When for sometime this "inner conversation" has been happening within the Christian or a group of Christian men then one day a Hindu believer comes. He too has been prepared for this meeting by the Spirit, for if one thing is certain it is that such deep dialogue between two believers, Hindu and Christian, cannot be arranged and "set up" because someone is keen on it. It must simply happen, be given, if it is to be genuine and real.

The External Dialogue

The moment for which the Inner Dialogue was the preparation has arrived: the Christian and the non-Christian believer meet for conversation. If for the sake of clarity we are to speak of four distinct steps in this External Dialogue with our Hindu brother it must be clear that each step merges into the other, is carried forward and remains hidden within the living encounter as it proceeds. This inter-religious field of meeting is so complex and so largely unexplored that we must be on our guard against over-simplification.

The first step in this direct encounter is for the Christian to know that he meets his non-Christian friend in Christ.
The man who is before me long before being “a non-Christian,” “a Hindu,” is an image of God, made for God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, already being drawn towards Christ by the Spirit. Quite possibly in the actual time of meeting I will have no opportunity to think this thought theologically, indeed if this is nothing more than a concept or proposition of doctrine, then I am unready spiritually for the encounter. This silent assent within me to what the other man is in his fundamental being is essential, for in this way we are both centred in Christ before the conversation begins. In this way I, the Christian, will be saved from the natural but most often egoistical question: “What should I tell this non-Christian man about God?” and instead ask—in the depth of my spirit—“What does God tell me through His image in this pre-Christian man?” I will in fact be far more ready to listen than to speak.

Step 2 arrives when it is my turn to speak. How am I to share with my Hindu friend, in word or silence, the results of my previous “internal dialogue,” as a Christian, with his scriptures and with his genuine spiritual experience? If I point out at once the contrasts between “his scriptures” and “mine,” or if I try to show bluntly how his spiritual world is transcended by mine, I would be guilty of spiritual tactlessness and, far worse, of lack of love, and would of course throw him at once into opposition. No, my responsibility is to acknowledge thankfully and to pay full tribute to the values in themselves of his Hindu faith. I say “in themselves” for sincerity demands that. This step is not a method by which I draw my neighbour into my “Christian net”! It is the frank and glad acknowledgement that he has not been outside the generosity of the Spirit’s gifts and that these gifts deserve my admiration, my thankfulness, in themselves.
The common danger at this point is for me to love him not for the human and spiritual values that are his, but "for Christ's sake". To do that is to reduce him to a mere means and, incidentally, to deprive the Church of the new pre-Christian spiritual dimensions and perspectives with which my Hindu friend could enrich the Body of Christ.

Then comes the moment when our Christian task is to imitate the risen Christ's "Incognito" on the road to Emmaus. In Step 2 we have walked with our partner on his way. Without revealing His identity the unknown Christ explained to His companions what their own scriptures—pre-Christian scriptures—were saying about Himself. He evidently did this in such a way that after His departure from them they realised both how "their hearts had burnt within them" and how their scriptures in fact pointed to the outcome which had so greatly perplexed them. Dr. Cuttat, who shared his insight of this event on the road to Emmaus at the time of our Jyotiniketan meeting, added: "while He remained unrecognised as Christ, it was nevertheless His very presence as unknown Christ which had imperceptibly acted upon their souls, entered them before they knew it ... words so secretly attractive that even when the risen Lord had unveiled his incognito and stood before them, "they yet believed not for joy, and wondered".

Yet the risen Christ had to appear before the two disciples and be recognised for who He was. There was the moment of unveiling and recognition and this is Step 4, a step of such crisis and danger, of such joy and glory, that the Christian may well tremble. This is the "kairos," the moment when the true face of the "Unknown Christ," hidden and so often deformed in the religions of the world
including the Christian religion, is revealed. This is the moment of conversion, a work of the Spirit, when the Risen Christ in whom the spiritual world of my Hindu, pre-Christian neighbour, is gathered up, purified and transformed, is seen, known and worshipped.

When Pope Paul VI, preaching in Bombay to a congregation of Christians and non-Christians estimated at half a million, contemplated Christ alive and present in the Eucharist “the pledge of future glory,” he recalled “the words of a great poet, son of this land which today, O Jesus, is your home:

Day after day, O Lord of my life, shall I stand before thee, face to face?”

Introducing in this way the poem of Rabindranath Tagore, the Pope went on to quote from the Mundaka Upanishad in his words to the newly consecrated bishops, for in their lives and witness through the Church the insight of that pre-Christian rshi would find its full glory and fulfilment. How greatly we need to discover the universal dimension of Christian Faith, the catholicity of the Church not only as claim but as reality, if this great spiritual world of Hinduism is to discover within itself the Christ, incognito until today, and “not believing for joy” offer its treasures to Him.
Experience: The Basis of Genuine Theology

Increasingly, theologians turn out articles and books dealing with ‘dialogue’. People who never left their Christian home countries and who never even had a talk with a non-Christian write magnificent studies about the encounter of religions and armed with a few scraps of often mistranslated quotations from the Bhagavadgītā and Dhammapada come to far-reaching conclusions concerning the theory and practice of dialogue. None of these studies actually help to promote real dialogue—these rather confuse people and hinder true dialogue, by their uninhibited speculations of what non-Christian religion should be. They perpetuate the theological monologue by calling it dialogue.

2. The only basis for a theology of dialogue can be the genuine experience of real dialogue. Frankly, none of all the grand theories about dialogue have brought about any dialogue or been of any help in actual dialogue. Though the musings of a speculatively gifted theologian about dialogue may sound more attractive to people, who likewise have no concrete experience of it, and though the formidable array of Biblical quotations collected by an arm-chair theologian may sound much more profoundly Christian than that which a man who has tried and entered into actual
dialogue has to say, it remains true: one sentence of real dialogue is a far better starting point than a volume about dialogue.

The present attempt does not take its start from any theological system—not even from the Bible—but from concrete experience. Before we could dare to write a theology of dialogue, we would need a theology for dialogue.

3. By dialogue I do not mean any talk about religion, which can be mere gossip—and often is. Nor do I mean the exchange of views between theologians of different religions. Interesting and necessary as it is, it is not 'dialogue' but 'comparative religion'. The real dialogue is in an ultimate personal depth—it need not even be a talking about religious or theological topics. Real dialogues have one feature in common: they are challenging in a very profound way. They challenge both partners, making them aware of the presence of God, calling both of them to a metânoia from an unknown depth. And this challenge which is the characteristic of the dialogues in depth seems to be the sign that God is working in and through the dialogue: not a God who is the mere fulfiller of human wishes, nor a lofty concept to be analysed, but a living God.

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1 I should like to refer here to the excellent article by Sri Mark Sunder Rao "Inter-faith Dialogue and Spirituality" in Religion and Society, XII/1 (March 1965), pp. 30-34. His concept of Dialogue as bhava-nishta sambhashana is what I mean when emphasising the need to take actual dialogue as basis for theology of dialogue. The paper mentions the 'Cuttat group'. Personally I feel that the group is aware of the necessity of reaching the bhava-nishta sambhashana, though one of its prerequisites is a certain amount of tarka-nishta sambhashana. Also the Upanishads contain much that can help to this end.
God Challenges the Church in Dialogue

1. Never did I experience with greater awareness the truth of our Lord’s word “Where two or three are together in my name, I am amongst them” than in the company of some of my Hindu friends, when engaged in genuine dialogue. And never did I feel more inadequate, shattered and helpless before God. All of a sudden the shallowness of routine religious life lay exposed, the compromises with the ways of the world, the essentially unchristian character of so much that bears the name Christian—all of a sudden the need for a metanoia in depth became irrepressibly urgent. The first sign that God works in dialogue is the call the Church experiences to reform herself in truth and spirit, to return to her first love, to be what she is supposed to be. The basic prerequisite for any interreligious dialogue is a profoundly sincere and honest Christianity. Quite a number of people in all Christian churches have long felt a growing uneasiness when considering the way in which the Gospel is being preached. They felt that the reason why it did not touch the heart of India was that we did not speak to the heart but only to the body and the mind, that we have institutionalized Christianity to such an extent that very often the Spirit of Christ is no more manifest. In and through dialogue God calls us. Living for ourselves within the organizations of our churches we are in danger of mistaking our scurrilities for integral parts of the economy of salvation and the political opinions of some of our Church.

2 In a recent meeting in Jyotiniketan on the “Meaning of Christ” a Bishop expressed very strongly the opinion that the “Image of Christ, represented by the Church in India today is a Christ made inaccessible through huge institutions, complicated Church administrations, sophisticated liturgies, etc.”
men for divine revelations. Dialogue shatters our unchristian complacency in which we feel safe and secure as the proprietors of the whole and sole truth.

2. Dialogue makes us aware of the need to become more essential, more human, more Christian. Theologically it would mean a rethinking in depth—doing away with all the niceties and irrelevancies with which so much of our theology today is engaged. It would mean taking up entirely new problems, growing out of the various cultural traditions of the religions. The very image of God, of man, of the world, seen through the eyes of our non-Christian partner, gives us much food for thought and reflection. It is God's call through dialogue—it is for the benefit of the Church. Through this her work she becomes more truly Christian, more universal. We find deep insight and truth in our partners' views—we learn to understand that under seemingly unorthodox formulations a great wealth of true knowledge of world, man and God is contained. The living experience of actual contact and dialogue is indispensable also for this—everyone who has had the experience of dialogue will agree that the studies of people who learned about non-Christian religions only from books look strangely distorted and devoid of insight. Exposing ourselves sincerely to dialogue will give us a deeper understanding of Christ: Christ is speaking also through the saints of this country, God is revealing Himself to us also through the experiences

3 I refer to the works of Dr. Cuttat (especially his "Experience chérétienne et spiritualité orientale", in La Mystique et les mystiques (Bruges, 1965), pp. 825-1095—the second part consists of a systematic attempt showing the relationship between oriental and Christian basic ideas and the possibility of assuming them into Christian spirituality and Swami Abhishiktananda especially his Sagesse Hindous—Mystique Chrétienne (Paris, 1965).
of the seekers of India. New dimensions of the Bible, so far overlooked, become manifest—the onesidedness of a purely inner-ecclesiastical theology becomes apparent. Dialogue is the means by which God draws us more into the centre of Christian faith.

3. The indispensable prerequisite for religious dialogue is a truly Christian life. This also is a grace of God, that we realize how little the style of life the Christian minister very often lives, corresponds to the message he preaches. Many Christians have seen in India’s sanyāsa tradition a challenge from the side of God. Christian āshrams do not imitate Hindu āshrams because of tactical reflections, but they assume truly Christian elements in sanyāsa: simplicity and freedom from artificial wants, a life-centred in the Spirit, service without propaganda, a life-long attempt to find the Absolute.⁴ They witness for Christ without saying a word—they prove that a Christian need not be a bapu, that it is possible to lead a Christian life within the given circumstances of actual life. They have made many surprising discoveries: the life of the ordinary non-Christian is much harder than that of the ordinary minister, far less secure—and perhaps a far more genuine basis to meet God in dialogue. They have found themselves challenged by God in a new way in their calling to lead a life of prayer. They felt called to open themselves for God and His voice.

God Challenges the Non-Christian through Dialogue

1. It is not our wisdom and our philosophy that make ‘dialogue’ a ‘success’. It is the common encounter of

God. Dialogue makes both partners feel deeply stirred, challenged by God, called to change. Every individual dialogue has features of its own and it will not be possible to schematize dialogue for the sake of a system. But one experience does impress time and again: how deeply and personally God is concerned with every human being, how carefully he guides every man's life. More than once my non-Christian partners themselves called it 'the work of providence' and 'God's grace' that we were given the chance to enter into a dialogue in depth. And more than once even the outward circumstances connected with such dialogues seemed to be a very peculiar arrangement of some higher order.

It is in and through dialogue that the partner realizes the challenge that is Christ. Talking about Christ, even reading a theological essay about Christ, can still keep him believing that Christ is one of many saints and teachers of mankind, that he is perhaps one of the avatāras, and that the Church is one of many sects. In true dialogue, Christ becomes manifest as the door to God, as the revelation of God and it is not sectarian doctrine or theological theory that matters but spirituality.

2. It is precisely in spirituality that Christ is a challenge. All the differences in concepts and formulated doctrines and customs tend to isolate men from one another, giving their systems an exclusiveness. Every sophisticated philosophy engages its adherents enough to fully occupy themselves with the subtleties of the system itself. Spirituality does not depend on systems. 'The Lord is Spirit' the Apostle does not tire to repeat⁵—the essential message of Christianity

⁵ cf. Rom. 8:4-13; Gal. 5: 16; 2 Cor. 3:17.
is ‘spirituality’ and the true Christian encounter takes place in Spirit. But the Spirit is grace and judgement at the same time—and that is the reason why a dialogue in depth does away also with the defences and securities of non-Christian man, opens up an ultimate depth before him, gives him a measure with which he can measure out the length and breadth and width and depth of his own religion.®

Some Conclusions for a Theology for Dialogue

1. Certain topics use to be dealt with in connection with the theology of dialogue: ‘salus infidelium’, ‘adaptation’, ‘extra ecclesiam nulla salus’, etc. They are of purely academic interest—some of them may even be pseudo-problems. The real theological problem of dialogue lies somewhere else. It is the meaning of Christ. What we need as theological preparation for the dialogue is an understanding of a genuinely Christian spirituality and a truly Christian way of life in today’s world. Dialogue is not a tactical device of a Church which sees that other means to win followers have failed but the fulfilment of the calling of the Church, to be witness to the revelation of God in Christ. Christ is ‘God’s dialogue’: in Him the Father utters Himself and through Him he loves Himself, and in and through Him he manifests Himself to the world. The very life of the Church is a dialogue—the dialogue between God and mankind, the communication of God’s life and love. The Church has to listen to God before she can talk to the world—she has to listen to the world too, before she can communicate her message.

2. Dialogue demands much preparation: it presupposes an understanding of the language, the concepts, the way of thinking of the partner—a real and thorough knowledge of his religion. It is much more difficult than most people imagine. Those non-Christians who are prepared to enter into a dialogue in depth have usually gone through a good deal of philosophical and religious study: the Indian religions have produced countless theological systems of great subtlety and complexity. In the field of religious psychology and philosophy the ordinary Christian theologian often finds himself inadequately prepared for a dialogue with a learned Hindu Brahmin. But even when we know something of the religion and language of the partner it is not yet dialogue. Real dialogues come about when God attracts people to Him and to one another: it is a communication not of words, but of the Word in one man communicating with the Word in another man. It is in such dialogues that we realize the meaning of St. John's words, that the Word illumines every man who comes into this world.  

3. Dialogue is an end in itself—it is not a preliminary to the traditional methods of proselytizing. In dialogue the essential encounter of God and man takes place—far more than in the mass-attacks from pulpits and raised platforms. Dialogue does not need psychological gimmicks and rhetorical tricks. Dialogue starts with the conviction that sincerity and respect for human freedom demand absolute fairness and patience, that the success of dialogue does not consist in an increase in numbers of outward membership of a Church but in the real growth in truth and spirit. It

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starts with the conviction that we have to become transparent for God's voice, to enable our partner to encounter God and not us. In dialogue we feel the need for genuine theology—and we realize also the relativity of all theological systems. We see how manifold the ways are in which God and man meet. Every time has its peculiarities and its own philosophy.

We do need a theology of dialogue—but still more we need a theology for dialogue—and more than anything else we need the genuine dialogue in depth, which is very rare as yet.
If one were to write a history of the relationship between Christianity and other religions through the ages, it would have to be divided into three main periods. The first period would cover the four hundred years after Christ of the Early Church, which was expressive of an open dialogue with other faiths on the part of the Church and a real willingness to receive from them. The second period would comprise the following fifteen hundred years, which was characterized by hostility, crusades, colonialism and missionary imperialism. The third period of that history, which might be named the post-colonial era, has just begun, and we can already now see that it will take us into a new inter-religious dialogue, in some ways similar to that of the Early Church.

Such a history of the changing Christian attitudes to other religions would also show that secularization and dialogue are closely connected, the one conditioning the other. As this paper attempts to show, it was the movement of ‘secularization’ of the early period which helped the Christian Church to establish a true dialogue with men of other faiths, just as it was the Constantinian alliance of Church and State from the fifth century onwards which prevented a real dialogue. Today secularization again will prove itself to be the force which brings about a
meaningful and creative relationship between the religions. Secularization is therefore not to be regarded as an enemy of religion in the true sense, but is to be welcomed and accepted so that we may draw the consequences it has, not only for the relation between religion and state, but also for our formulation of the Christian faith. Only thus shall we be able to enter into the coming dialogue.

The Early Dialogue

*Mutatis mutandis* the period of the Early Church may be called an age of secularization. For political reasons the Roman Empire, comprising a large number of different peoples with various religious traditions, decided to grant its citizens religious freedom to a great extent. Except for the emperor worship, which largely speaking was only a formality expressing in a symbolic form one's loyalty to the state, no religious beliefs or practices were enforced upon the people. Thus religion, which had so far been part of a man's tribal, communal or national affiliation, became a personal and private matter. To some degree the Roman Empire may be compared therefore to the secular states of our day. Of course, the Empire, for the sake of tradition, continued to support the ancient worship of Roman gods in the capital, but nobody took these gods and the mythological stories about them seriously any longer. National and tribal religions were gradually dying, as the popularity of the mystery religions showed. A religion had to be a universal faith to attract the attention of the peoples—a faith which offered salvation, not just to one nation or one tribe, but to mankind as a whole. It should speak, not simply to Romans, Greeks, or Jews separately, but to *Man.*
It may well be that Jesus himself was influenced by this new spirit of universalism in the Empire. Most New Testament scholars seem to suggest that Jesus lived in an isolated Hebrew atmosphere and was inspired only by the Old Testament, but why should he not also have been touched by the spiritual currents of the Mediterranean area of his day? He certainly did not accept or support the Jewish claim to be God's only elected people, and his idea of the Kingdom of God included "men from the East and from the West" (Mt. 8) and all nations of the world (Mt. 25). Furthermore, the view of man as part of a universal mankind was a central part of his teaching.

However this may be, there can be no doubt that the Early Church at any rate was influenced by the 'secular' universalism, which was widespread in the Empire, and that it was this spirit which enabled it to establish a real and open dialogue with other faiths. First of all it quickly made a clear break with the Jewish connection of nationalism and religion. In its initial period in Jerusalem, it was a Jewish sect, but as soon as it crossed the borders to the Roman Empire it shook off this part of the Jewish heritage and presented itself to the world as a universal faith. Greek and Roman followers did not have to accept circumcision and the Mosaic Law, in other words: they did not have to become Jews, the Church decided. Both circumcision and the Law were only national customs, which were binding for Jews (also Christian Jews) but not for others. Many Christian Jews (including Peter) found it difficult to accept this 'secularization', but gradually the Church adopted the universalism of Paul and John. Thus, to use Paul's expression, "the dividing wall of hostility" was broken down between Jews and non-Jews. The enmity, the suspicion, and the feeling of superiority which was
implied in the Jewish attitude to non-Jews and to non-Jewish faiths, were rejected by the Christian Church, and it was able to regard all men as members of the same human race, all equal in the eyes of God. God had "created every race of men of one stock, to inhabit the whole earth's surface, and had fixed the epochs of their history and the limits of their territory", the Church taught (Acts 17). In other words, God was not a national or tribal God, but the God who had been leading all nations and races at all times.

Secondly, by cutting itself loose from the Jewish religion, the Early Church was no longer bound by a hierarchical authority and a closed set of doctrines. It entered the Roman Empire without any organizational pattern and any systematic theology and could encounter other faiths, particularly Greek philosophy, with an open mind and adopting the truths, the insights and particularly the terminology of the latter. Thus Christianity came to be a mixture of elements from Judaism, Greek philosophy, the mystery religions and Roman Law, i.e., a syncretistic religion. Syncretism is a naughty word nowadays, but actually the greatness of the Early Church consisted most of all in its ability to be syncretist without betraying the Gospel. It described Jesus in terms borrowed from Greek philosophy and from the mystery religions, and its theologians, as for example Clement of Alexandria, could quote Plato, Socrates, Abraham, Isaiah, and the Sibylline Oracles in one breath, making use of them all to point to Christ. Similarly in its worship it copied the initiation rites of the Isis religion and took over not only the word 'sacrament' but also formulated a great deal of its sacramental theology according to the concepts of the Mithras cult. The Early Church also depicted Jesus in the form of pagan gods, as God's zitherplayer (Orpheus), as 'the true Apollon', or
as the sun-god Mithras riding gloriously in his four-in-hand vehicle, an identification which made it all the more natural for the Christians to take over the great sun festival on December 25th, converting it into Christmas. Above all, it was able to adopt and transform the universal humanism found in various Greek philosophical schools.

In doing so, the Early Church to some extent followed the example set by Jesus. He was a Jew and remained a Jew. Nothing indicates that he wanted to set up a new religion different from Judaism. He took his stand within the Law and the prophetic tradition, and at the same time he used this religious heritage to proclaim something completely new. He reshaped the prophetic tradition by fulfilling it; he transformed the Law by completing it: “It was said to your forefathers, but I say unto you...” Seen from one angle all the old values were preserved in his life and teaching; seen from another he totally changed their meaning and purpose.

Similarly the Early Church was able to preserve the values of the religious and philosophical heritage found in the Roman Empire, and, at the same time, change it all. It could do so, not only because ‘secularization’ had killed the myths of the traditional religions but also because the same secularization had made the Church free to receive from other faiths. It did not reject or oppose these faiths as enemies, neither did it become absorbed by these. By and large Christianity presented itself, in its worship as a mystery religion, in its theology as a new development of Greek philosophy, and in both these aspects also as an offshoot of Judaism, and yet it was much more than any of those, different from all its three roots due to its central message about the new man in Jesus Christ.
The Break-up of the Dialogue

Around 400 A.D., however, a definite change took place in the Christian attitude to other religions, mainly because of the 'de-secularization' which happened about that time. The Empire discarded the principle of a secular state by making Christianity the official religion; no longer could its citizens enjoy the religious freedom which the pagan rulers had granted them. This again had serious consequences for the Church organization, because the clergy, particularly the bishops, now received a number of privileges from the secular authorities which gave them considerable status and power. The idea of the Church as a human fellowship disappeared; instead it became an institution for the salvation of souls, dominated completely by the hierarchy. Furthermore, since the unity of the Church was now also a matter of concern for the Roman State, the rulers began to enforce a doctrinal uniformity which had never existed before. Thus Christianity became a closed system of religious beliefs which everyone had to subscribe to under threat of ex-communication by the Church and capital punishment by the State.

Under such circumstances, the dialogue between Christianity and other faiths naturally broke down. Significantly, the State and Church in brotherly harmony closed the old Academy of Greek philosophy in Athens, killed Hypatia, the only pagan philosopher left in Alexandria, and prohibited pagan cult everywhere. This hostile attitude to other religions was deepened by the sudden appearance of Islam in the 7th century. The Church, which had now come to consider itself as the visible kingdom of God upon earth, naturally interpreted the Muslim attack upon Europe, not simply as an international conflict, but as an assault
upon God and his people. It is a tragic but typical fact that practically all the Christian theologians in the Middle Ages, most of the Reformers included, regarded Muhammed as Anti-Christ and saw in Islam a sure sign that the Day of Judgement was near. Even to Luther the faith of Islam was nothing but “all abominations, all errors, all devils piled up in one heap.”

The ‘dividing wall of hostility’, rebuilt now by the Christian Europe, showed itself even more clearly in the missionary work of the Church. The remaining pagan religions in Europe were wiped out by Christian armies, and their adherents were converted by force. So were the Muslim captives during the crusades. And when the Church, after the great discoveries, found itself face to face with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Asia, it applied the same principles to these. Papal encyclicals urged the Portuguese to “subdue Saracens, pagans and other enemies of Christ”, and the missionaries, supported by the colonial authorities, broke down temples and mosques ‘to the glory of Christ’.

We should not think that this attitude belongs to a distant past. It is true that army attacks and forcible conversions took place only in the 16th and 17th centuries; but the spiritual crusades against other religions continued, and have continued till our day. We need only quote the militaristic terminology used in books, sermons and hymns on mission: ‘conquering nations for Christ’, ‘con-

centrated attacks by evangelists’, ‘missionary homebase and forefront’, ‘Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war’. Or we might point to the philosophy which has been underlying most of Western missionary activity till now, the idea that God has chosen the Western nations to spread Christian civilization, morality and religion to all parts of the world. It was always taken for granted that in God’s providence, Christianity, i.e., the syncretistic religion which came into being during the first three centuries A.D. in the Mediterranean area, should conquer and replace all other religions. On the whole, then, the missionary movement of the Western Church which began in the 16th century and which is only now coming to an end, was filled to the brim with colonialism and imperialism.

Resuming the Dialogue

This crusading spirit can still be found, and yet, an increasing number of Church leaders, theologians and even missionaries today question the assumption which for centuries was the indispensable basis of the Christian religion with respect to other faiths: that the aim of the Church is the progress of and eventual victory for the Christianity in the world. They are no longer so sure that it is in the plan of God’s salvation that the other religions must be replaced by Christianity. The main reason for this questioning is, I believe, the impact of secularization. We saw how the ‘secularization’ at the time of the Early Church was the most important background of an open dialogue between Christian faith and contemporary faiths—and

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how the tragic confusion of religion and politics from the fifth century onwards prevented the continuation of that relationship. But again in our age, the new secularization which began already with the Renaissance in the 15th century but has come through with its full force only in our generation, will prove itself to be the main factor in the establishment of a new dialogue between the religions.

This will happen, and is already happening in three ways. First of all that part of the secularization which consists in the separation of state and religion, and of colonialism and mission, will clear the way for a real dialogue about the real issues. In his book, *God's Grace in History*, Charles Davis writes about the ecumenical movement,

The chief effect of secularization is to check and remove the non-theological causes of Christian divisions. In the past, nationalism, class feelings, economic motives, various social conflicts and tensions have disguised themselves as religious differences... Secular conflicts have now no need or temptation to dress themselves up in religious garb; they can openly be what in truth they are. The removal of confusion between sacred and secular allows doctrinal differences to stand out clearly, unaffected by alien distorting influences.4

This also applies to the relationship between Christianity and other religions. The politicians can no longer dress up political conflicts in a religious garb without being checked,

although some still attempt to do so, as e.g., those American statesmen who try to make their war with Communism into a Christian crusade. Similarly the Church can no longer deny that a lot of its missionary activity and theology has been (in some cases still is) spiritual colonialism dressed up in pious phrases. We can now see that the evangelical zeal for the conversion of non-Christians, which was believed to be the ideal following of the words of Jesus, was a product of Western imperialism. We realize now that the belief in the Christian religion as the only true religion was a disguised form of a Western superiority. Only as secularization helps the Christian Church today to repent of these sins, will the 'dividing wall of hostility' between Christianity and other religions be removed. Just as the Early Church in cutting itself off from Judaism rejected the enmity, the suspicion and the feeling of superiority implicit in the Jewish attitude to non-Jews, so we are to reject the same negative attitudes in our relation to non-Christians. The pluralist, open or secular society, will help us to that, for in such a society men will not try to impose their beliefs upon others by force, whether physical, political or social, but will have to live "in harmony on the basis of intelligent reasonableness, a willingness to listen to others and discuss problems, a desire to reach agreement by persuasion and a constant respect for all individuals and groups".

Secondly, secularization will free us and has already to some degree freed us from that doctrinal system which is called 'the Christian Faith'. In this our age of science and technology, the creeds and confessions of Western Christendom with their doctrines of Trinity, Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Ascension, Justification, Atonement, etc.,

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simply give no sense any longer, not only because they are filled with outdated Greek philosophy and Roman Law, but also because they have as their basis a metaphysical world view which nobody can take seriously today. Theologians in the 19th and 20th centuries have struggled desperately to fill these old shibboleths with new meaning, but it is becoming more and more obvious that their work has been in vain. We shall simply have to discard these words and this way of thinking theologically, and we shall have to try to build up a completely new theology, which is meaningful in an age of H-bombs and spacecrafts. In many ways this is frightening, but at the same time there is much joy and liberation in store for us in the attempt of fulfilling that task.

Our situation, then, resembles very much that of the Apostolic Church which, in its encounter with other faiths, did not have the burden of a heavy doctrinal system. It was free and flexible, whereas we have been like a knight in armour in our approach to other religions. Only if we permit the secular forces to remove that armour, shall we be enabled to enter again into a real dialogue. This should relieve us also of the misunderstanding—still alive among us—that the ultimate aim of our activity in relation to other religions must be to replace these by Christianity. To quote van Leeuwen,

It is therefore not the case that the non-Western world can be or ought to be 'Christianized' in the sense that the traditional non-Western religions would in the long run give place to Christianity in some version or other of the *Corpus Christianum* ... The non-Christian religions may be unseated by a technocratic
ideology, but not by a *Corpus Christianum* which quite definitely belongs to a bygone age.\(^6\)

This new situation will also make a genuine indigenization of Christianity possible. So far, the attempts at indigenization in India have mostly consisted in finding appropriate Sanskrit words and Hindu terms for the traditional Christian doctrines, as the writings of Roberto Nobili and Brahmabandhav have shown. However, this procedure will never lead to real indigenization, for that is, to use a Tillichian distinction, only adaptation and not participation.\(^7\) Only when we put aside the Western traditional doctrinal system and begin to think out the essence of the Christian faith in modern terms, should we be able to *participate* constructively in the living thinking of India today, and we shall then discover that also Hindus and Muslims, being equally under the impact of secularization, are questioning their own metaphysical systems. Thus a relevant dialogue will be established,—a dialogue which will not consist in a comparison of our religious systems,—systems which are all outdated, but in a common search for Ultimate Truth.

It means that in genuine solidarity the Christian can help to bring up stones for the building, prised from the structure of the non-Christian religions: that once the religious myth has been blown away, there is room for the traditions of the non-Christian cultures to bring forth their treasures: that there can


\(^7\) Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 84.
take place a new and noble and creative work of reinterpreting the past: that free and proper use can be made of the rich stores of wisdom and experience deposited within the history of African and Asian cultures. Here are opportunities in inexhaustible abundance for the Christians to steep themselves no less completely than their non-Christian fellows and compatriots in the values, spiritual and material, social and individual, philosophical and psychological, political and economic, of the non-Western civilizations. In that way a Christian can make as vital a contribution to the renewal of Islamic or of Indian civilization as any Muslim or Hindu.  

Thirdly, I believe that the secularization of our society will remove also those hindrances to a real dialogue which are inherent in the organizational structures and the hierarchical set-up of the Church. These structures are bound to die sooner or later; the parishes and dioceses, the paid clergy and authoritarian bishops, the membership lists, the registers, and the Church ‘control’—these phenomena will have to disappear, not only because they have their roots in a feudalistic and autocratic society, but also because they destroy genuine human relationships. To quote again Charles Davis, who recently has left the Church,

My experience has removed the credibility for me of the official Church as the mode of Christian presence in the world. The Church of Christ is essentially the visibility of grace, namely, the visible model and witness of that interpersonal communion amongst men which is the gift of salvation. By essence the Christian Church has to be the model of human rela—

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8 Arend Th. van Leeuwen, *op. cit.*, p. 419.
tionships and human community. When I see the official Church in its structure and activity as destructive of genuine human relationships, I can no longer accept it as the embodiment of grace. Hence I look for the Church in the more informal groupings of Christians, both within and without the institutional Church, where I find a witness that is credibly Christian.⁹

In my view, the true dialogue with men of other faiths can best be established by those who have left the organized Church or stay outside it, simply because only they can feel completely liberated in their manner of communicating their faith to other people. They cannot be squashed by the authority of a bishop, cannot be controlled by the organization, will not have the pressure of 'the Christian Community' upon them, and do not have to identify themselves with the interests of that religious group. The sooner, therefore, the present Church structures are broken down to be substituted by a much simpler, but more genuine, human fellowship, the better for the dialogue with men of other faiths.

It has sometimes been pointed out that the Ecumenical Movement is in danger of becoming mainly an organization for inter-denominational co-operation with a view to defend the Christian Church against the 'onslaught' of Communism and secularization. There is certainly cause for anxiety in this respect. Similarly, it would be no less a tragedy if the new dialogue between Christianity and other faiths developed into merely an attempt at uniting all 'religious'

people in the world,—be they Christians, Hindus, Buddhists or Muslims, in order to build up an effective barrier against the advancing secularization all over the world. The entire interreligious dialogue would in that case become a joining of forces of men who saw themselves pressed against a wall, and who, in their common defense of 'religion' and metaphysics, would cling to obsolete positions which science and technology have reduced to rubble. By all means we must avoid that danger, and do so by emphasizing secularization as being of the utmost value for a true religious dialogue. As this article has tried to show, secularization is not an enemy, but on the contrary an allied force in our attempts to start a real dialogue with men of other faiths.
DIALOGUE AMONG WORLD RELIGIONS
The resurgence of religions is a continuing characteristic of contemporary Indian life. Traditional religious values are being reinterpreted to meet modern needs. Among the different religions there is a spirit of greater friendliness and an increasing desire for co-operation. For one thing, it is recognised that in the interests of national unity, religions should not divide people but unite them. For another, the rising tide of secularism indirectly brings the religions together by challenging some of their basic convictions. Moreover, people realise that irrespective of their religious affiliations, as citizens of a country that is rebuilding its total life, they face problems common to all. Political freedom, economic progress, social justice and cultural renaissance are questions with which all people are concerned as citizens of India and as human beings, not just as members of particular religious groups. Under these

* This chapter was originally published in German in the book Die Gefährdung Der Religionen edited by Rolf Italiander and published by J. G. Oncken Verlag, Kassel, West Germany, 1966, who own the copyright. It is here published with their permission.
circumstances the relationships between religions is slowly changing from conflict to co-existence, from acquaintance to understanding and from mere confrontation to more active co-operation. Instead of a one-sided 'proclamation' which almost amounted to a 'monologue', today the mood is increasingly one of 'dialogue'. This attitude of dialogue may be described as an attempt to establish a two-way traffic in what was hitherto a one-way street. Admittedly, the situation is highly complex where clear analyses, neat classifications and broad generalisations do not take us too far. Yet, the study of the relationship between religions in India today and also their way of reacting to the challenge of secularism is very fascinating. After a brief historical introduction designed to put the theme in perspective this essay will deal with some of the characteristics of Hindu resurgence today and more specifically with some of the major issues in the contemporary Hindu-Christian dialogue.

I

The modern period in the history of Indian renaissance extends roughly from Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) to S. Radhakrishnan (1888- ). It is not the purpose of this section to trace the historical development of Hindu religious resurgence, but to draw attention to some important personalities whose attitudes and ideas are relevant to the theme of this article. Ram Mohan Roy was concerned not just with the revival of Hinduism, but with the renaissance of the total life of India. He was the first who showed a critical understanding of the values of the East and of the West on the basis of considerable study. Those who criticise his religious thought as being too shallow tend to forget that in his time, on the basis of evidence available to him, he had both the sensitivity and the courage
to draw the attention of his countrymen to the values of Christ's teaching. It is his unquestioned patriotism, his breadth of vision, his willingness to go to the original sources, his concern for social justice, his passion for freedom and his readiness to seek truth from whatever sources it might be revealed, that have justifiably earned him the title: the Father of Modern India.

Moreover, in the emerging confrontation between a weakened Hinduism and an aggressive Christianity, he was the first to give serious attention to the essential beliefs of Christianity thereby opening a way for constructive dialogue based on sound learning rather than partisan propaganda. Whatever be one's judgement on his controversy with the Serampore missionaries one should not minimise the importance of his *approach* to the problem of the relation between Hinduism and Christianity. For instance, he was firmly convinced of the depth and value of the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ and their great relevance to the social needs of his time in India. With great courage and facing the danger of being misunderstood both by fanatic Hindus and orthodox Christians, he wrote the following words in his book *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*:

I feel persuaded that by separating from other matters contained in the New Testament, the moral precepts found in that book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding... This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of the God... and is also so well fitted to regulate the conduct of the
human race ... that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in the present form.¹

This tendency to separate the ethical teachings of Jesus from the dogmas about his person continues in India even to this day and constitutes one of the major issues between the Hindus and the Christians. However, the *Brahma Samāj* founded by Ram Mohan Roy is a spent force in India today without any power to inspire or to lead. This is because an artificial synthesis, which attempts to put together selected values from different religions, fails to develop because of its own inner tensions. This is the lesson which the *Brahma Samāj* holds for us at present. Farquhar is right in pointing out that “Ram Mohan and Keshab were wrong in thinking that a new, vigorous, modern religion could be created merely by placing a few of the leading ideas of Christianity alongside a few of the leading ideas of Hinduism and allowing the two to come together on equal terms².” In the contemporary dialogue between religions, it is essential to avoid this danger. Openness to other religions, without commitment to one’s own faith, leads only to a half-way house, the windows of which might look attractive from a distance but the foundation of which would be gravely unstable.

Unlike the *Brahma Samāj* the Ramakrishna Movement refused to make any kind of compromise with Christianity. This movement draws its spiritual inspiration from Sri


Ramakrishna (1836-1886) and its organisational genius from Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Both by circumstance and by inclination Sri Ramakrishna had little to do with Western culture or Christianity. In spite of Swami Vivekananda's acquaintance with the New Testament and his first-hand experience of Western Christianity he never seriously encountered the Jesus Christ of the New Testament. There are many references to Jesus Christ and his teachings in the writings of Swami Vivekananda, but his is always a 'Hinduised version' of Christ and he never made a compromise with Christianity at any point. Therefore, although one can see a certain friendliness towards Jesus Christ and a seeming tolerance of other religions, the posture of this movement is one of complete confidence in the self-sufficiency of Hinduism. Sri Ramakrishna is rightly regarded as the initiator of the Hindu renaissance, giving a sense of universality to the Hindu message. "This new dispensation of the age is the source of great good to the whole world, especially to India; and the inspirer of this dispensation, Sri Bhagavan Ramakrishna, is the reformed and remodelled manifestation of all the past great epoch-makers in religion. O man, have faith in this and lay it to heart."³

In the writings of Swami Vivekananda there are several eloquent passages about Jesus Christ and his teachings. To give just one example, in a lecture entitled, 'Christ, the Messenger', he declared, "If I, as an Oriental, have to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way left to me, that is to worship him as God and nothing else".⁴ But

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one should not be misled by such statements as these. The mood of Swami Vivekananda is that of one who has already attained fulfilment. The social dimension, which Ram Mohan Roy did not find in Hinduism and for which he approached Christianity as a seeker, is found by Swami Vivekananda within Hinduism itself, particularly in the Vedanta rightly interpreted and properly understood. “The heart and soul of his teaching was the message of his beloved Master, Ramakrishna: that each man was potentially divine, and so should both work to unleash the power within himself, and should help other men to do the same”. Therefore the ‘mission’ of Hinduism, and the purpose for which it enters into a dialogue with men of other faiths, is not so much to ‘convert’ others, but to help others to become what they should be. It is to help the Christian to become a better Christian, the Muslim to become a better Muslim or, for that matter, the Hindu to become a better Hindu, since the sole purpose of religious discipline is to realise one’s own innate divinity. Under these circumstances it becomes fairly clear that the mood of the Ramakrishnan movement is more of conversation rather than of dialogue.

In the life of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) the relationship between the different religions in India enters a new phase of friendliness without, however, any serious theological debate. He strongly emphasised the social involvement of religion and pointed out that the reformation of Hindu society depends, to a great extent, on the reinterpretation of some of its classical doctrines. Moreover, his attitude of friendliness towards other religions, notably

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5 W. T. de Bary, op. cit., p. 647.
towards Islam and Christianity, was deliberately designed to bring the different communities together. It was inspired more by a deeply felt political need than by any serious consideration of fundamental beliefs. Also, the fact that different religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Christianity, could claim to have made a contribution to his doctrine of non-violence, provided at least a possible theme for discussion and practical application. Gandhiji did enter into dialogue with the many Christian friends he came into contact with and, undoubtedly, he was influenced by the ethical teachings of Jesus Christ. But it would be a mistake to forget that Gandhiji was primarily a Hindu, as confident of the self-sufficiency of Hinduism as was Swami Vivekananda. A modern scholar, in his assessment of Gandhism, makes the following observation about Gandhiji's religion:

The basic facts, with all respect to Mahatma Gandhi, should be squarely faced. In many respects, Gandhiji was a rather conservative Hindu. In his philosophy and methods, in his daily rituals and routine, in prayer and preachings, in his attempts to rouse the masses through Hindu religious songs like the Ramdhun, in his constant reference to Ram Raj as the ideal form of state and society that was expected to emerge after swaraj, in his life-long struggle for the cause of untouchables, which he regarded more as a cause of Hinduism than a secular and humanitarian cause, in his practically life-long support of the caste system and his opposition to cow slaughter, and in many other respects he was a thoroughly orthodox Hindu and proudly declared himself to be so.6

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To the question, 'What is your religion', Gandhiji replied, "My religion is Hinduism, which for me is the religion of humanity and includes the best of all religions known to me". On this basis, it was obviously not possible for the Muslims to accept him as a supra-national leader, standing above loyalties to particular religious faiths. The assumption that the communal problem was a religious problem, and that friendliness between religions would solve it, was a gross over-simplification, for there were many other deep-rooted historical and political factors which make a Hindu-Muslim dialogue very difficult even to this day. It is being increasingly recognised that the approach to solve this problem in a multi-religious society should be essentially a secular one, for it is only in the context of 'an open secularism' which is impartial in its attitude towards all religions, that a meaningful dialogue between religions can take place.

In the writings of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the philosopher-president of India, there is not only a greater philosophical justification of the Hindu resurgence, but also a more serious questioning of the theological assumptions of other religions, particularly those of Christianity. Much more than any one previously mentioned, Radhakrishnan has challenged some of the basic beliefs of the Christian faith. His acquaintance with the Christian teachers in the Christian colleges he studied disturbed his faith in traditional Hinduism and led him to a re-examination of the fundamentals of his own faith, as well as to a defence of

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8 *See S. J. Samartha, Introduction to Radhakrishnan* (New York: Association Press, 1964), where some of the themes are discussed at greater length.
those beliefs against Christian criticisms. Of his Christian teachers he wrote:

My teachers in Christian missionary institutions ... restored for me the primordial situation in which all philosophy is born. They were teachers of philosophy, commentators, interpreters, apologists for the Christian way of life and thought, but were not in the strict sense of the term, seekers after truth.9

This description of his missionary teachers as 'apologists', and not 'seekers after truth', is not easy to understand, for if this attitude is taken towards those who are committed to a particular faith, then, obviously, no fruitful dialogue is possible. Moreover, although these teachers were admittedly committed to the Christian way of life, on that account it is difficult to argue that they did not possess 'the discipline of mind' and 'a rigorously logical manner', which, according to Radhakrishnan, are 'the essential means for the discovery of truth'. But perhaps one should also note that there is a difference in the understanding of Truth here. To Radhakrishnan, as a Hindu, Truth (Sat), in this context, is primarily a state of being rather than one of cognition. Experiencing the Truth is therefore more important than knowing the Truth, whereas in the Christian understanding, obedience to the Truth is more fundamental than either knowing it or experiencing it. Radhakrishnan also rejects consistently the Christian claim for the 'uniqueness' and 'finality' of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. In spite of all this, however, Radhakrishnan has pleaded not only for a meeting between religions, but also for a fellowship of faiths. He

is a strong supporter of the International Union for the Study of the Great Religions which has for its objective 'a revised religious ideal for man as a social being in this life'.

Reference has been made to some of these selected Hindu thinkers not only because they have contributed to the resurgence of Hinduism but also because in their thinking, certain issues emerge which should enter into any serious dialogue between religions today. Perhaps one of the most important factors which contributes to this mood of dialogue is the growing awareness that the East and the West are coming together in the face of common problems confronting mankind today. Radhakrishnan in his book *East and West* stresses this point when he writes:

> Today both of them (the East and the West) are tackling the same problem, the reconciliation of the values of mind with those of spirit. The tension between the two constitutes the meaning and purpose of history. Whether in the East or in the West, we have unresolved contradictions and attempts to solve them, to learn from each other and adapt the inheritance of the past to new and ever-changing conditions and reshape it into a new and living pattern.¹⁰

Writing in the same strain, a Hindu professor, at the well-known Banaras Hindu University, calls for a universal outlook on the part of the scholars in the East and in the West giving up the sense of superiority and separation. He remarks:

The problem before us today is not how best to promote the sense of superiority and un-Christian pride among people belonging to either East or West, it is rather how to make them understand better both themselves and others, and to realise the possibilities of enlightenment and happiness inherent in the new unified world created by science and technology.\[^{11}\]

This is the larger context in which the dialogue between religions has to take place today. It is the situation in which the resurgent religions have to take into account both the social needs of the day as well as the new outlook on life created by science and technology.

II

The co-existence of faith in religions and what K. M. Panikkar calls 'hope in secular promise' is a significant feature of contemporary Indian life. The dialogue between religions is taking place in a cultural climate in which secularism is an influential force. To ignore this would be to lose a sense of perspective, and to forget an important element which challenges all traditional religions as their adherents face modern problems. To avoid confusion, one should make a distinction between the character of the Republic of India as a secular State and secularism as a philosophy of life born out of confidence in man's achievements. The former is a political attitude, an attitude not necessarily of indifference or hostility towards religions, but one of neutrality or impartiality where religions are concerned. In a multi-religious society as that of India this attitude on the part of the State is reasonable and

\[^{11}\] N. K. Devaraja, "India and Western Scholars", *Quest* (Bombay, October/December, 1964), p. 43.
healthy. But secularism, as a philosophy of life, based on man's trust in reason and confidence in the achievements of science, is a challenge to religions everywhere. There is a *threefold* demand in this challenge: *first*, secularism calls upon the traditional religions, either by its cold indifference or by its militant criticism, to demonstrate 'the secular meaning' of their faiths today; *second*, it draws pointed attention to the possibilities of social reconstruction without recourse to religious resources; and *third*, it builds up 'a philosophy of action' based on human freedom and self-sufficiency which throws out of gear the old religious patterns based on 'faith and works'.

Interest in secular life, or concern with worldly affairs, is, of course, not new in the history of India. The *Chārvaka*, or the *Lokāyata*, or the materialistic school, has systematised this outlook into a philosophy from very early times. In recent years many important leaders have called upon people to lift the nation out of 'a decayed spiritualism' and to recover 'the germ of materialism' essential to the well-being of the nation. No less a man than India's late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, represented this point of view when he wrote:

We have to get rid of that narrowing religious outlook, that obsession with the supernatural and metaphysical speculations, that loosening of the mind's discipline in religious ceremonial and mystical emotionalism, which come in the way of our understanding ourselves and the world. We have to come to grips with the present, this life, this world, this nature which surrounds us in its infinite variety... India must therefore lessen her religiosity and turn to science.\(^2\)

This demand not to neglect worldly affairs, and to recognise that material things do contribute to human well-being, is made not only because of a dissatisfaction with sterile religious dogmas but also because many people feel that social reconstruction is possible without religious reformation. The call to separate problems of social reconstruction from questions of religious reformation has been made very persuasively by K. M. Panikkar in his well-known book: Hindu Society at the Crossroads. The thesis that Hindu social institutions had nothing to do with the Hindu religious beliefs is difficult to maintain. But the real issue here is the relevance of religious values, not just for social stability, but also for social change. This should lead to a reconsideration of the relationship between ātma and deha, between the pāramārthika and the vyāvahārika, between what is satya and what appears to be mithya. At a time when rapid social and economic change is called for, this becomes an important issue not only for Hinduism but also for the other religions.

Those whose outlook on life is primarily secular and those who have an abiding trust in religion are both concerned with economic and social justice. Therefore they can participate in all programmes of national reconstruction. From the time of Ram Mohan Roy, all revival movements have in one way or another concerned themselves with social reformation. The contribution of the Christian missions in this area is not always acknowledged, but it cannot be denied that along with establishing several

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social service projects in India, the Christian missions were at least one factor in making the Hindu social conscience more sensitive to the social evils of the day. The important question here is whether it is possible to bring about rapid social change within Hindu society without, at the same time, drastically reinterpreting the underlying Hindu religious ideals. The secular answer to this question would be in the affirmative. They would point out that social change need not wait for religious reformation. As an example it is pointed out that the Indian Parliament passed the law against untouchability, without in the slightest degree bothering about religious beliefs. However, while it is possible to recognise the secular nature of Hindu social structure, to miss the underlying connection between religious beliefs and social institutions, for example karma and caste, would be to oversimplify a highly complex matter. Moreover, one should not overlook the fact that a great deal of preparatory work had been done by many resurgent movements and by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi before the law against untouchability could even be introduced in the Parliament of India.

Closely connected with the question of religion and social change is an equally important question, viz., the meaning of human action, its method, its motivation and its goals. The tension between an ascetic withdrawal from life and an active participation in its duties, between Yājñavalkya and Chānaka, has always persisted in the course of Indian history. Today when the demand of the hour is for urgent and responsible action for the sake of nation-building, this question becomes exceedingly important. Both secular nationalism and religious nationalism have strongly emphasised a philosophy of activism. Thus Subhas Chandra Bose (1897-1947), the fiery nationalist
leader, firmly held that it was wrong to think of peaceful contemplation as the noblest ideal when there was work to be done. ‘Don’t bark like dogs, but fight like lions’, became the slogan of the day. Bose strongly criticised Aurobindo and wrote that “spiritual progress under the present conditions is possible only by ceaseless and unselfish action, that the best way to conquer nature is to fight her, and that it is weakness to seek refuge in contemplation when we are hemmed in on all sides by dangers and difficulties”.^^ Religious nationalism has attempted to gain support for its philosophy of activism mainly through the reinterpretation of the Bhagavadgītā so that, as is well known, during the period of nationalism, it emerged as ‘a handbook of action’, providing a new ethical, social and political message to meet the needs of the day. It is interesting to note that during the period of Chinese aggression (1962) there was an obvious shift in the selection of religious broadcasts over the All India Radio. There were far more selections from the Bhagavadgītā, where Krishna exhorts Arjuna to give up sloth and fight, than from either the Quran or from the Sermon on the Mount.

There are three major points in the teaching of the Gītā which are constantly being reinterpreted to provide the basis for a philosophy of action. These are (a) the ideal of the sthitiprajña, or gunātīta, the person of calm detachment, of perfect poise, whose mind is ‘like a flame that burns steadily in a place protected by the wind’, (b) the doctrine of nishkāma karma, the call to act without personal involvement in or desire for the fruits of one’s actions, and (c) the principle of lokaśaṅgṛaha, the welfare of the whole

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world, accepted as the goal towards which all activity should be directed. There is no need to elaborate these well-known points except to say that these constitute the ideals of Hindu activism which is at work even to this day. Showing how these contribute to the foundations of the new India that is slowly emerging, Panikkar makes the following observation:

The Gītā has thus become the scripture of the new age, the main foundation on which its ethical, its social and even its political action depends.... It is the inspiration and guide, and no one can understand the developments which are taking place in India who has no appreciation of this fundamental fact.\(^{15}\)

But in contemporary India there seems to be a new phase in the philosophy of activism which is bold enough to question the relevance of these time-honoured ideals. India today is desperately seeking tangible results of work. People are definitely concerned with 'the fruits' of action. They want the National Plans to 'deliver the goods' here and now, not in some distant future. To taste the fruits of one's action is as important as to smell the sweat of one's brow. Therefore the ideal of nishkāma karma is being questioned. At least two points of criticism are being made. First, that this is a highly individualistic ethic which does not take into sufficient account the social context of personal decisions and their social consequences. Therefore, it is claimed, that such an ideal is unsuitable to a fast changing and revolutionary context as the present one in India. Second, its disinterest in the fruits of one's action (phalāśa), removes

the very need for moral and responsible action. To say that Krishna was involved only in the battle, but not in the fruits of victory, \textit{viz.}, putting \textit{Yudhishtira} on the throne and, to establish \textit{dharma}, is to ignore that Krishna was a very practical man. Unless there is a serious commitment to achieve the goals desired, and unless there is a definite interest in the fruits of one's action, there can be no progress at all. The Chinese threat at the border, the Indo-Pakistani conflict, the longing for national unity, the desperate need for economic progress, a stable society which is resilient enough to meet rapid change—all these call for a 'goal-oriented', and not a 'self-oriented', attitude. What is necessary today in India is definite commitment to purposes and goals, both personal and social. Therefore, calling for an alternative interpretation of this doctrine D. C. Mathur writes:

This tension between the need for being goal-oriented and for effective moral and social action to achieve a desirable social end on the one hand, and the need for an \textit{ultimate concern} for the serene \textit{Atman} on the other, has characterised Indian culture ever since. These have never been fully reconciled. In actual practice for the vast mass of people it has meant either a lip service to the transcendental self and a consequent withdrawal from the field of social and moral action, or an opportunistic pursuit of selfish individual goals. In both cases it has been detrimental to effective social change for the better, and to some extent it accounts for the static character of Indian society.\textsuperscript{16}

Such a criticism, coming from Hindus themselves, raises the question whether it is a call for reinterpretation of old doctrines or whether it is a questioning of the adequacy of the Hindu resources to undergird the demand for responsible action today. In any case, the question about the relationship between ultimate concern and immediate needs, between the transcendental self and the moral personality, leads to important issues which cannot be ignored. The relation between the ultimate and the immediate, leads to the question of the avatāras and the Incarnation of God in Christ. The question of personal and social fulfilment involves the relevance of the Church. And, along with these, no discussion about the meaning of human action can ignore the interpretation of history. To these specific issues in the Hindu Christian dialogue, viz., (a) the significance of the Incarnation, (b) the relevance of the Church and (c) the meaning of history, we now turn in the rest of this article.

The centrality of Jesus Christ to authentic Christian life cannot be denied. Many Hindu thinkers however, while recognising this, make an attempt to separate Jesus Christ from what Mahatma Gandhi called 'beef and beer bottle' Christianity. From Ram Mohan Roy to Radha-krishnan, Hindus have shown a great reluctance to take the dogmas about his person seriously while acknowledging the usefulness of his ethical teachings. In the Hinduised version of Jesus Christ, his self-less love, his moral teachings and what they describe as 'the Christ-principle', continue to have a valid place. To the Christian of course, this is not enough because it disrupts the totality of the Christian faith. The real issue here at the present time is not so much about the divinity or humanity of Christ as such; it is how, in the structure of our historical existence, our religious beliefs help us to understand the proper relation between
the ultimate and the immediate. It is from this point of view that one should look at the *avatāras* of Hinduism on the one hand, and the Incarnation on the other.

The Hindu does not regard as legitimate or fundamental the Biblical link between faith and history. He does not believe that eternal truths can be tied down to temporal pegs. *Kāla* or Time is a process in which all creation is involved and in which God is continuously manifesting himself. That is why to the Hindu the *avatāras* are not dated in history. There can be no particular moments as the ‘*kairos*’ or the ‘*eschaton*’. “The whole religious quest of the Hindu is based on the conviction that at any period in *samsāra* he can seek and find the Infinite. In this sense no moment of time is qualitatively different from any other moment. This is why he cannot accept a religion built upon ‘the rock of historicity’”.¹⁷ The ‘Christ-principle’ or the ‘Christ-within’ is simply a Hinduised description of the divinity in man. According to the Hindu, once ignorance is removed, this potential divinity can become actual. Elaborating this point Radhakrishnan writes:

To an educated Hindu, Jesus is the supreme illustration of the growth from human origins to divine destiny. As a mystic who believes in the inner light, Jesus ignores ritual ... He is the great hero who exemplifies the noblest characteristics of mankind, the revealer of the profoundest depths within ourselves, one who brings home to us the ideal of human perfection by embodying it visibly in himself ... For me the person of Jesus Christ is a historical fact. Christ

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is not a datum of history, but a judgement of history. Jesus’s insight is expressive of a timeless spiritual fact; but what the theologians say of it are after-thoughts, interpretations of the fact, viz., the life and death of Jesus.\(^\text{18}\)

Two points have to be made here by way of criticism. First, a purely *individualistic* interpretation of the life and work of Jesus Christ fails to do justice to the social dimensions of the Gospel as seen in the New Testament and subsequent Church history. One cannot ignore the relevance of such ideas as ‘the people of God’ in the Old Testament and ‘new Israel’ in the New. To describe Jesus Christ as ‘a mystic’ or ‘a hero’ or ‘an example’ or ‘a jivanmukta’ or ‘a yogi’ is to put him into a totally different context. Second, one must see that the issue is not one of humanity or divinity. It is not of particular importance to say whether the Incarnation or the *avatāra* is humanity raised to the level of divinity, or divinity brought down to the level of humanity. Such formulations seem to be outdated today. More important is it to see how in the actuality of history the immediate and the ultimate are brought together. The issue is the one between ‘the Christ principle’ and ‘the Christ event’. It is the latter that has social and historic consequences. The renewal of man and the remaking of society are historic possibilities in Jesus Christ. Stephen Neill remarks:

The purpose of this life of freedom was to restore to all men the possibility of true human life as from the beginning it was intended to be. Life as we know it is full of contradictions, and contradictions lead to

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frustration and weakness. Here is life without inner contradiction and therefore peerless in its strength.  

The second major issue in the Hindu-Christian dialogue is the relevance of the Church. Unlike Buddhism with its social expression of the Sangha, and Islam with its strong emphasis on the Brotherhood, Hinduism has been traditionally individualistic. The caste is a given community in which the place of the individual is determined not by choice but by birth. It is admitted by certain Hindu scholars that the importation of the social conscience into Hinduism is of recent origin. The Hindu has consistently rejected the Christian emphasis on the Church being an integral part of the Gospel. For one thing, he regards the Church as a communal organisation which is Western in origin and pattern. To belong to it would be a cultural betrayal. For another, he feels that any kind of organisation stifles the free spirit of the individual, for religion is primarily a personal matter to be pursued alone in quietness, devotion and the spirit of renunciation. Moksha to the Hindu is an individual attainment. Murti remarks that there is "something inherently secular and unspiritual in any organisation. It tends to create vested interests and to breed corruption ... What we need is the realisation of the spiritual, which is the bedrock of all our endeavour".

Today one can see that there is everywhere in India an emphasis on the social dimension of national life. Resurgent religions are everywhere concerned with social service.

and social change. Not only in the matter of the reinterpretation of caste based on guṇa rather than jāti, but also in its involvement in all kinds of welfare schemes, resurgent Hinduism is vigorous in its social activities. Therefore the question to what extent would an individualistic religion undergird the social dimension of contemporary life is bound to arise. The Christian understanding of the Church and its place in history has perhaps something to contribute to the Hindu-Christian dialogue today. True, one has to admit the weaknesses of the Church as a human organisation in history, but this could be a cause more for Christian humility than for Hindu rejection. The outreach of the Church in various kinds of service projects, as expressions of Christian love, and the tremendous growth of the ecumenical movement as an expression of the oneness of the Church have not been without influence on the Hindu mind. To a religion as individualistic as Hinduism, but which is becoming increasingly conscious of its social responsibilities, the life and witness of the Christian Church, both in its particularity and its universality, cannot be wholly without significance.

The third important issue is the respective Hindu and Christian attitudes towards history. This is perhaps the most crucial one because it touches the two previous ones we have discussed briefly. The consciousness of history is a quest for meaning, an attempt to make sense of the happenings in the life of a nation. It is a search for individual fulfilment and social purpose not in an other-worldly, transcendental context, but within the framework of history. Those who take an affirmative attitude towards history would place greater emphasis on change and progress than on tradition and stability.
It is now generally recognised that classical Hindu thought did not pay sufficient attention to the historical dimension of man's life in its quest for meaning beyond history. True, there did exist an 'activist' social and political tradition in India. Chanakya (Kautilya), the Brahmin Counsellor of king Chandragupta, did undoubtedly take an active part in politics and did succeed remarkably in achieving his objective. But having succeeded in gaining this purpose, he goes into the forest in his pursuit of moksha. Political participation was just a temporary interruption in his long-term pursuit of moksha, which was to be sought, not in the dust and heat of worldly life, but in the quiet loneliness of the forest. In the Indian philosophic tradition individuality was something to be transcended. Hindu thought has always emphasised that aspect of human freedom which enables him to rise above the flux of time. Classical Hindu tradition has always looked inward to the depths of man's consciousness in its quest for the nature and destiny of man. Deeds were considered as links that bind man to the wheel of samsāra. The requirement for enlightenment was not involvement, but detachment. It has been rightly observed therefore that "to see the world in its historical dimension was not a basic concern of a civilization more attuned to the values of a transcendent immateriality".

Today it is undoubtedly true that there is a distinctive emphasis on history in India. India is no longer a spectator

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of history, but an active participant in its drama. There is a shift of emphasis from contemplation to action, from detachment to involvement. The anticipations of change take on the characteristics of historical fulfilment. The Hebrew-Christian understanding of history has made an impact on Indian thought through India’s contact with the Western civilization and culture. The characteristics of a distinctive awareness of history: (a) a messianic perspective, (b) the expectation of historical progress and (c) an emphasis on individual commitment and activism in achieving goals—these are to be discerned in various degrees in the Indian life today. This means sometimes a radical reinterpretation of some of the classical doctrines. We have already pointed out that the ideal of nishkāma karma is being questioned, and alternative interpretations are sought. Karma is being reinterpreted so as to give greater attention to individual freedom and responsibility. Caste is undergoing radical social change. Serious attempts are being made to remove the impression that māyā means ‘illusion’ to show that all that it does mean is that the world has ‘a dependent reality’. All these are symptoms of a more affirmative view of history.

This then is an area where one should expect greater possibilities of a creative dialogue between the Hindu and the Christian. An awareness of time as being more an opportunity than a limitation, an interest in the past which is future oriented, a longing for individual fulfilment along with social progress, and a search for the transcendent within the structure of historic events—these are some of the points which must be noted carefully. Already there are several contemporay writers who try to bring new insights into their thinking on history. Panikkar’s treatment of ‘the determining periods’ in the history of India is strikingly
reminiscent of the Biblical understanding of the 'kairos'.

Devasenapati, a Saiva Siddhanta scholar at the university of Madras, in his Miller lectures has strongly emphasised the reality of time and has attempted to combine the cyclical with the progressive view of history. Sankaranarayan points out that unless metaphysical values are transformed into social virtues they are of little use in the contemporary situation. An acknowledgement of the eternal values, satyam, śivam and sundaram, is of little use unless there is the possibility of their actualisation in history. Therefore decisions and deeds are important. "The sense of value and the urge to act go together. Conduct springs from a consciousness of value and is concerned with its conservation and increase. So understood, values constitute the urge for human activity". All these are highly significant efforts on the part of contemporary Hindu thinkers to recognise the framework of history as being important for personal and social fulfilment. To the sensitive Christian who is humble enough to enter into a dialogue with his Hindu brethren and who, at the same time, is strong enough to be rooted in the foundations of his own faith, there are many opportunities both to learn from the dialogue and to contribute to its creative fruits.

Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

By Lynn A. De Silva

The Buddhist Resurgence

1. The Missionary Dynamism

Christianity today is confronted with resurgent religions which have become mission-conscious and have broken the territorial limits within which they have hitherto been confined. They have invaded the Christian parts of the world and have begun a world-wide missionary campaign which presents a powerful alternative to traditional Christian belief. This missionary spirit is particularly evident in Buddhism. The foremost operative factor in the Buddhist resurgence is its positive missionary outlook embracing the whole world.

During the Buddha-Jayanthi celebrations (the 2,500th Anniversary of Buddhism) in 1956, a globe with a diameter of about 10 or 12 feet was set up in Matara, a town in Ceylon, and the Buddha, represented by an image, was enthroned upon it as the lord of the world. This is an act symbolic of the missionary dynamism of the Buddhist resurgence, which is probably a feature more prominent in Buddhism than in any religion other than Christianity.

From the very beginning, in spite of its monastic ideal, Buddhism had a missionary character. Just as Jesus sent
out His disciples to preach the Gospel, the Buddha sent out his disciples to preach the Dhamma, saying:

Go ye now, O Bhikkus, and wander for the gain of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain and for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. Preach, O Bhikkus, the doctrine which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, glorious at the end, in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness...

Although Buddhism has been called "The Light of Asia", this light is not to be confined within continental limits. Buddhists feel that Europe and the Western hemisphere which are plunged in darkness as a result of wars and rumours of wars, are in dire need of this light which can bring peace to the world. Nor is the light of the Dhamma confined to this world; it is for all worlds "for the welfare of gods and men". The Buddhist missionary outlook is not merely international, it is universal or rather cosmic. In one of the formulas found in several of the Nikayas, the Buddha is depicted as one "born into the world for the good of many, for the happiness of many, for the advantage, the good, the happiness of gods and men, out of compassion for the world." The Buddhists feel that it is their duty to fulfil this mission. The consciousness of such a cosmic mission is by far the most powerful operative force in the Buddhist resurgence.

Buddhism is also deeply bound to the life of the nation, and nationalism plays a vital part in the present revival. While it is true that Buddhism in some respects has got badly mixed up with politics, this must not blind us to the genuinely religious character behind the national sentiment.
Nationalism in the Theravada countries, namely Burma, Thailand and Ceylon, is religiously determined, for religion is considered to be necessary to undergird the emerging national states and provide the spiritual dynamic for national life. Thus nation and religion are interrelated in a profound way, vitalizing each other.

One characteristic of the religio-national sentiment peculiar to Ceylon must be noted.

The Sinhalese Buddhists believe that they are the ‘chosen people’ and that Lanka is the land greatly favoured by the Buddha, as the land in which the Dhamma will shine in all its glory and from which radiate its light throughout the world. The Buddha is believed to have visited this land three times because Lanka was to be the centre for the spread of the Dhamma.

There is a legend recorded in the Mahavamsa which says that the Buddha at his death asked Sakka, the chief of the gods, to take care of Vijaya who was to be the founder of the Sinhalese race, because it was the Enlightened One’s belief that the Dhamma would be established and preserved in its pristine purity among the descendants of Vijaya, who would form the Sinhala race. Lanka is therefore considered to be the Dhamma Dipe (the Island of the Dhamma or the Light of the Dhamma). This has created in the minds of the Sinhalese Buddhists a sense of destiny, the feeling that Ceylon and her people are the chosen land and race for the spread of the Dhamma. Other Buddhist countries have acknowledged the favoured place Lanka and her people hold, and have identified themselves with the local sentiment.

This deep missionary calling has made Buddhists take history more seriously than before. The Buddhist cyclic
concept of history with its repetitive ages ending in a cataclysm, and the belief that Buddhism, in accordance with the Buddha’s prediction, is gradually declining and will disappear at the end of 5,000 years, would seem to make history unimportant and tragic. But for the modern Buddhist, history, is not māyā, as it is in Brahmanism. This world is the realm in which Buddhas are born, and to attain Nibbana one must be born here. This age in which we are is particularly favoured because four Buddhas have already been born in this age and there is one—the Maitriya Buddha—yet to come. This is called the Bhadrakalpa. The Buddhists look forward to the coming of Maitriya Buddha just as the Christians look forward to the second coming of Christ, and this expectation has given an apocalyptic turn to the cyclic concept. History is therefore important.

2. Organization for Mission

It is a significant fact that the important Buddhist organizations that have recently come into being are not only inward looking but also outward looking, motivated by the desire to propagate Buddhism particularly in the West.

(a) Buddha Sasana Council.—This is one of the most important organizations in Burma, established in 1950 by an Act of Parliament. The aims and objectives of this Council are (i) to repair pagodas and encourage the study of doctrine and meditation; (ii) to publish and distribute Buddhist literature; and (iii) to send missions to other countries. This Council was responsible for organizing the Sixth Buddhist Synod, to mark the 2,500th Anniversary of Buddhism, in which Buddhist leaders from all over the
world participated. Substantial buildings were put up for this unique event, of which the World Peace Pagoda stands, not only as a magnificent memorial, but also as a symbol of the message of Buddhism or world peace. The Buddha Sasana Council was mainly responsible for developing the International Institute for Advanced Buddhistic Studies, which has no rival in any part of the world for the study of Buddhism. A Pali University also has been established for training monks, particularly for missionary work in foreign lands. Missions to Burma's hill tribes as well as to India and the West, have been undertaken and encouraged.

(b) The World Buddhist Fellowship.—In 1950, delegates from 129 countries gathered at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Ceylon, and formed the World Buddhist Fellowship. The president, Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, enumerated the aims of the Fellowship as follows: (i) To promote among the members strict observance of and practice of the teachings of the Buddha; (ii) to secure unity, solidarity and brotherhood among Buddhists; (iii) to propagate the sublime doctrine of the Buddha; and (iv) to organize and carry on activities in the field of social, educational, cultural and other humanitarian services. A resolution adopted by the first conference indicates clearly the missionary concern:

We pledge ourselves and those whom we represent to make our utmost endeavour to observe and practice the teachings of the Buddha that we may be radiant examples of the living faith; to foster unity, solidarity and brotherhood among Buddhists everywhere; to strive with all might and main to make known the sublime doctrine of the Buddha, so that its benign spirit of service and sacrifice may pervade the entire
world, inspiring and influencing the people of the earth and their governments to lead the Buddhist way of life which is for all ages and all climes, that there may be peace and harmony among men and happiness for all beings.

(c) Lanka Dhamma Duta Society.—This organization was founded at the World Fellowship of Buddhists as a special missionary agency for activity in Germany. It has capital funds of over two hundred thousand dollars. A substantial building has been put up and was opened by the Prime Minister of Ceylon in 1956. It has space for fourteen monks, and a library which contains German literature. Missionary methods are being studied from Christian literature, and a centre for the propagation of Buddhism in Germany has been established in Berlin where monks from Ceylon are at work.

(d) World Buddhist Sangha Council.—This is the most recent international organization, inaugurated on the 8th of May, 1966, in Ceylon, and in a sense unique because it is the first serious attempt of significance to reconcile the Theravada and Mahayana schools of thought. Forty-three delegates representing fourteen Buddhist countries participated in the deliberations. One of the major concerns of this organization is to unite the different sects in Buddhism for more effective evangelism throughout the world. According to a statement made by the Joint-Secretary of the Council, the main concerns of this organization are as follows: (i) What steps should be taken as regards Buddhist missionary activities in each country and also internationally? (ii) How to organize a United Front of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist Bhikkus without damaging the traditional rights of the different groups. (iii) Should the
education of *Bhikkus* be continued in the present form? If not, what type of re-organization should be done? (iv) As it is necessary for the Buddhist monks to play a more dynamic role than they now do as teachers and leaders of the millions of Buddhists scattered all over the world, how best can they be trained to do so and how best should this be done? What should the *Bhikkus* do for the promotion of world peace?

(e) *Thailand Religious Department.*—Although in Thailand there are such organizations as the Buddhist Association of Thailand, a long organization with about 58 chapters, and the Young Buddhist Association with about 24 chapters, they have mainly been concerned with the study, practice and propagation of Buddhism and social service within the land. But in recent times the sense of mission has come to life. In 1961, at a gathering of over 500 abbots from all over Thailand, one of the subjects discussed was "Missionary work of Thai monks abroad". More significant is that the Thailand Religious Department, set up by the Government for the development of Buddhism side by side with that of the country, has become missionary-minded and is making a planned effort to send missionaries to Britain, and to Malaysia, Singapore and India.

Buddhists know all too well that the goals they have set before them cannot be achieved without vigorous inward preparation. There is therefore a vigorous intensification of every means of educating the Buddhist by an extensive use of literature and the radio. Great effort is expended to revive and strengthen the practice of meditation and numerous meditation centres have been set up. Meditation centres are considered to be the centres of power in Buddhism.
3. Apologetics for Mission

As a result of the contact with Western culture and faced with the challenges of the modern world, Buddhist writers have seen the need to reinterpret Buddhism in a way that would make it capable of becoming a world religion. In this process of reinterpretation four themes have come into prominence, particularly in Buddhist apologetic literature.

Firstly, Buddhism is the only religion that is capable of being the basis for world peace. Buddhists make pointed reference to the two great wars as the creations of the so-called Christian nations, and in contrast trumpet the claim that during the past two-thousand-five-hundred years of Buddhist history not one drop of blood was shed in the cause of Buddhism. They say that missionaries came to Eastern countries with imperialistic motives, carrying the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other. Since craving or desire (Tanha) is the root cause of all evil, peace can be established in the world only by conquering Tanha and, Buddhism teaches better than any other religion how this can be done through the practice of meditation and other ways of self-discipline.

Secondly, Buddhism is in accord with modern science. In fact scientists are discovering today what the Buddha taught long ago, and in addition modern psychology seems to be discovering secrets of the mind which Buddhism has taught all along. It is claimed that the truth of the Buddha Dhamma can be demonstrated in a fully scientific and experimental manner. Buddhism is not a blind faith like Christianity, but a religion which invites people to “come and see” (ehi passico). A leading Buddhist scholar, Dr. K. N. Jayatilleke says:
Buddhism is in accord with the findings of science so that it is not likely to be at variance with science so long as scientists confine themselves to their methodology and their respective fields without making a dogma of materialism.

On the contrary he says that science undermines Christian belief.

Not only did science controvert the specific dogmas of Western religion, but it seemed to have undermined the foundations as well as the fundamental concepts implicit in the religious outlook on things. ... But much more serious was the effect of the scientific outlook on the general religious attitude which involved a belief in a personal God, in purpose and in the objectivity of moral values.¹

Thirdly, Buddhism is a universal religion without sectarian interests. Conversion from other religions to Buddhism is not the primary aim of Buddhist missions, although Buddhists will rejoice to see conversions to Buddhism take place. What is sought is the inculcation of Buddhist principles while men may adhere to any religion they choose. The aim is to permeate the world with the spirit of Buddhism. Buddhism will have achieved its purpose if Western thought and life is appreciably modified by the impact of Buddhist truths and insights.

Fourthly, Buddhism has an unrivalled social message. The Dasa-Raja-Dhamma or the Ten Duties of the King

outlined by the Buddha, are believed to embody the principles essential for a good and stable government. These are the principles so remarkably exemplified in the Emperor Asoka’s reign.

The Buddhist social conscience today is wide awake and there is a growing emphasis on the performance of good works that are socially important, such as medical, educational and humanitarian deeds. Accordingly the Buddha’s message is adapted to fit into a socialist framework. Unlike in the past, the emphasis today is not on detachment from the world but rather on service of mankind. The Bodhisatta ideal of compassion and self-sacrifice for the welfare of mankind is fast gaining ground and is replacing the individualistic ideal of the Arahant. U. Thittila, one of the most distinguished Burmese monks, seeks to interpret the concept of Metta or Maitriya (loving kindness) as a principle of social action. Metta is not a matter merely of radiating benevolent thoughts; it is the ground for involvement in practical service for mankind. In this connection it is of interest to note that Burmese Buddhists speak of ‘Lokanibbana’ (nibbana on earth) which is a state attainable within history and towards which history is moving. A Buddhist utopian idealism is in the making.

4. The Appeal of Buddhism

Buddhism has already made a considerable impact on the Western world, which has only comparatively recently come to realize that there are Eastern religions with lofty philosophies and admirable ethical systems. There is a great interest in the study of Buddhism in Europe and in America which has been greatly enhanced by translations of the Buddhist scriptures and other literature. There are
many things in Buddhism that appeal to different people for various reasons, but four are of particular interest.

(a) The Buddhist philosophical system has greatly impressed the intellectual world. It was perhaps largely through Schopenhauer, who found in the Buddha’s teaching much that was in accord with his own philosophy, that Buddhism was introduced to the intellectual world in the West. Schopenhauer had a great influence on Paul Dahlke, a notable German scholar, who came to Ceylon to study Buddhism and later founded the Buddhist House in Berlin which has become the centre for Buddhist activities in Germany. Academic interest in Buddhism was further kindled by the establishment of the Pali Text Society in London in 1881 by T. W. Rhys Davids, which made the Pali canon available in Roman script and in English translation. It is a noteworthy fact that interest in Buddhism in the West was first created, not by missionaries from Asia, but by Western scholars. Even at present much of the interest in Buddhism is on the academic level.

(b) The Buddhist agnosticism about God is bound to make a powerful appeal, especially in this secular age when theologians are debating as to whether God is dead. The “Death-of-God” theology will be a powerful weapon in the hands of Buddhist scholars. One aspect of agnostic Buddhism is its claim to be not a dogmatic faith, but a “come-and-see” doctrine based on personal experience and not on any authority. This is a claim that will appeal to the secular mood.

(c) The Buddhist ideal of Nirvana, symbolic of serenity and peace, has much to commend it. This serenity and peace are visibly borne out in the images of the Buddha. No
one seeing these images can fail to catch the spirit of serenity of the One who attained the peace of Nibbana.

(d) The doctrine of Karma and rebirth, which was not unknown to the West in the past, is today seeing a revived interest. Psychical researchers are carefully examining the evidence for rebirth and some are favourably disposed towards this belief. Some well-known Christian writers have found this doctrine very attractive. To many Christians who are vexed by the question: “Why is there suffering and evil in the world if the Creator be good?” the doctrine of Karma and rebirth provides an answer that gives satisfaction to the mind and solace to the heart.

(e) The freedom of thought and the critical approach to religious truth encouraged in Buddhism, appeal to many people disillusioned by dogmas, rituals and ceremonies in other religions. This spirit of the open mind and free thought in Buddhism is bound to appeal especially to many a man living in this secular age.

This must not lead us to think that everything is well with Buddhism. Actually there are tensions and disruptive forces in Buddhism which have made Buddhists deeply concerned. The participation of the Buddhist monks in politics, their communist leanings, their engaging in secular remunerative employment, thus breaking the Vinaya rules, have all violently shaken the faith of the lay people in the Sangha, the third Refuge. The authority of the Buddhist scriptures is now being questioned, and one can see the beginnings of textual criticism being applied to the Buddhist Canon. How will the second Refuge, the Dhamma, stand in the face of higher and lower criticism? The wide disparity between theoretical or philosophical Buddhism and
popular Buddhism or Buddhism as it is practised, is becoming more and more clear. What will happen to the first Refuge, the Buddha, when the rationalistic attitude of orthodox Buddhism now gaining momentum, breaks the faith of the common man who believes that the Buddha is a God who lives now and is able to hear and answer prayer? Furthermore, just at the time when Buddhists are becoming ecumenical and mission-minded, they are painfully made conscious of their “sins of division”. Missionary Buddhism, as is seen particularly in Germany and England, is becoming divided into different camps which are at times opposing each other. What will happen to the concept of Buddhism as the one religion for this divided world? These are some of the questions Buddhists have to face. But which is the religion that does not have tensions and difficulties like these?

The Christian Response

The Christian response to the challenge that comes from Buddhism should take account of (a) the claims made by Buddhists to the detriment of Christianity; (b) the main areas of disagreement and the possible solution to them; and (c) the specific questions facing Christians living in a Buddhist environment.

The Buddhist Claims

(a) The claim that Buddhists are most loudly trumpeting today is that Buddhism is a tolerant religion, with no record of the shedding of one drop of blood in the cause of spreading the Dhamma during the last two thousand five hundred years of its history. This is a claim which carries with it a reproach to Christianity which has had a
bad record of war and bloodshed. Buddhism has a clean sheet; Christianity has many dark spots. But this claim cannot stand in the face of facts, as is made clear from the following quotation from Edward Conze:

In their desire to express disapproval of Christianity, many authors have painted the record of Buddhism too white, and it will be necessary to admit that on occasion the Buddhists were capable of behaviour which we usually regard as Christian. In Tibet, for instance, there was a bad king Land Dar-ma, who about 900 A.D. persecuted the monks. A Buddhist monk murdered him. The official Tibetan history praised him for his compassion for the king who was accumulating sins by persecuting Buddhism, and later generations, far from disapproving, have cannonised the monk. Nearly all European histories praise the Yellow church, which has dominated Tibet for the last 300 years. They suggest that the ascendancy of this sect over the older Red sects was due to the great learning of Tsong-kha-pa, to the purer morality of its adherents, and to their comparative freedom from magic and superstition. This may be true to some extent, but some of the success of the Ge-lug-pa was due to the military support of the Mongols, who, during the 17th century, frequently devastated the monasteries of the rival Red sects, and who throughout supported the Dalai Lama, the head of the Yellow Church. In Burma, King Anuruddha, in the 11th century, made war on the neighbouring kingdom of Thaton in order to seize a copy of the Holy Scriptures, which the king of Thaton refused to have copied. In a warlike country like Japan, the monasteries during the Middle Ages were a source of constant turmoil, and the monks were in the habit of invading
Kyoto in vast armed hordes from their mountain retreats. The Boxers were an example of a popular movement resorting to violence and employing Buddhist terminology. This fusion of popular discontent with Buddhist beliefs is fairly old in China, and the predecessors of the Boxers, such as the White Lotus sect, have had a powerful influence on Chinese history. In Burma, the English offended the religious feelings of the Burmese, for instance, by licensing and promoting the sale of liquor. They also destroyed monastic discipline by suppressing the hierarchy of the Church. In consequence, a kind of political Buddhism spread more and more, since there was nothing to check it. Saya San, a popular leader, for instance, issued in 1930 a proclamation which, according to M. Collis (Trials in Burma, 206), read: “In the name of Our Lord and for the Church’s greater glory, I, Thupannaka Galon Raja, declare war upon the heathen English who have enslaved us."

Conze goes on to say that “these examples could be multiplied indefinitely”. One example may be given from Ceylon which claims to be the Dhammadipe, the island where the Dhamma has shown in all its splendour. Referring to the military exploits of King Dutugemunu, Dr. S. Paranavitana writes as follows:

The ideological factor was duly taken into account; it was instilled into the minds of the soldiers that they were risking their lives and fortunes, not in their self-interest, not for the aggrandisement of their king, not

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even for their wives and children, but solely for the glorification of the faith which was so dear to them, for Dutthagamani and his advisers knew that men would give up their lives for a noble cause more readily than for personal gain. The campaign thus assumed the character of a holy war and, so as to give emphasis to this, a band of bhikkhus accompanied the army.

... That purpose was publicly proclaimed to be the glorification of the religion of the Buddha who proclaimed all manner of killing to be a sin. And this killing of human beings was carried out not only with the knowledge of the sons of the Buddha, but also to a great extent with their approval, for a contingent of bhikkhus marched with the army.¹

In *A Concise History of Ceylon*, Dr. Paranavitana puts the matter concisely: "The necessary preparations were gone through, and the soldiers were made to realize that they were fighting for their religion. Five hundred Bhikkhus accompanied the army to inspire the troops."²

Buddhists do not seem as yet to be aware of these facts and when they do become aware of them, it is bound to have a salutary effect on the arrogant tendencies that have appeared in Buddhism in recent times.

This must not lead to self-justification on the part of Christians in any way. These hard facts should rather serve to make Buddhists and Christians realize that sin or tanhā (desire) which has been the cause of war and rumours

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² (Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1961), p. 64.
of war, is the enemy against whom we have unitedly to wage a spiritual battle.

(b) The second claim is that Buddhism is in accord with science and that the truth of the Buddha Dhamma can be demonstrated in a fully scientific and experimental way. This is in contrast to Christianity which is based on 'blind' faith and not on scientifically verifiable facts.

In reply to this three things must be pointed out.

In the first place, Buddhist cosmology which conceived ours as a vertical static three-dimensional universe with thirty-one planes, is a notion derived from primitive folk-lore and is not in keeping with what astronomy knows of the universe. The calculations regarding the dimensions of the earth, the moon, etc., the depth of the sea and the height of the mythological Mount Meru, are mathematical aberrations. Again there is no scientific evidence for the cyclic concept of the universe with its repetitive ages.

Secondly, it is claimed that the *Karmic* order, the Law of causation that governs the universe, is a scientifically conceived causal order. But there is a world of difference between the Law of *Karma* and the laws which govern nature. The former is a moral law and the latter are physical laws. As Professor Hocking says: "The whole genius of the 'laws of Nature' as science finds them is that they are indifferent to the ethical quality of what they regulate, whereas the law proclaimed by Buddhism is, after all, a moral law."\(^5\)

Thirdly, it is claimed that the Buddhist truth is verifiable, just as scientific facts are verifiable, whereas Christianity

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has unverifiable dogmas accepted by faith. The call to “come and see” (ehi passico) is a call to “come and experiment”. This is a question that demands a lengthy discussion but, in brief, it may be said that Buddhism speaks of certain higher truths apprehended in the supra-mundane (Lokuttara) realm which cannot be known on the purely sensuous and rational level. They are realities beyond the scientific realm which can be known only by a Buddha or one who has developed super-normal cognitive powers. The Abhidhamma speaks of the emergence of states of insight which can plumb depths of truth which discursive intellect cannot reach. The faculty of “believing-I-shall-come-to-know-the-unknown (An-annatamassāmit’indriya) is such a state of insight the validity of which cannot be tested by scientific experimentation.

Christianity also has from time to time sought the support of science and has suffered much as a result. The lesson to both Christianity and Buddhism is that religion and science and their respective truths must be clearly distinguished, for religion deals with the inner states of consciousness and supra-mundane realities, whereas science deals with the impersonal material objective world.

(c) The third claim is that Buddhism encourages the spirit of free inquiry; it is free from dogmatism and authoritarianism which are considered to be characteristics of Christianity. The Kālāma Sutta which is quoted in this connection is believed to set forth the principles of the autonomy of reason. This claim needs to be closely examined.

The Buddhist scriptures assert the authority of the Buddha and the Buddhist canon. The Kevaddha Sutta
emphasizes the supreme authority of the Buddha. The various ranks of gods came to him to learn the truth. Even the Great Brahma acknowledges his ignorance in the presence of the All-knowing One. The Buddha is the ultimate source of all true knowledge and salvation and the Buddhists must believe that he is the fully enlightened one, the teacher of gods and men, who has proclaimed the infallible truth for the salvation of the world. The word of the Buddha, the Dhamma, has existed eternally. When a Buddha appears in the world he does not preach Dhamma he has discovered by his own unaided intuition; he discovers the truth through recollection of what he has heard from a Buddha in a previous birth. All the Buddhas preach the same Dhamma and therefore, the Buddhist scriptures are authoritative. Although the sacred texts were committed to writing about five hundred years after the Buddha, they have been preserved in an inerrant oral tradition. It is not permissible for anyone to interpret the scriptures as he wills; their interpretation is handed down in the authoritative tradition of the teachers.

Of course Buddhism allows man the freedom even to reject the Dhamma. Man is allowed to arrive at the truth through the use of his own reason without relying on a teacher or a book. This spirit of free inquiry is encouraged in Buddhism as is particularly seen in the Kālāma Sutta. But the truth a person arrives at on his own is true only if it is in accord with what the Buddha taught, and he will inevitably take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, as the Kālama’s did.

To the mass of Buddhists, the Buddha is the centre of devotion and approximates to a deity or saviour in other faiths; the Dhamma which is the word of the Buddha is
as authoritative as the scriptures of any other religion; the Sangha occupies a central place as any other ecclesiastical order does.

Areas of Disagreement

(a) Agnosticism about God.—The ‘Death-of-God’ debate that has in recent times gained momentum, mainly as a result of the publication of Honest to God, has made many an aching heart wrestle with the question as to what it means to be honest to one’s belief in God. The doctrine of God presents intellectual difficulties to many. The word God has become meaningless in the traditional images in which it has been expressed. In such a climate of thought, the Buddhist agnosticism about a personal God and the offer of a way of peace and insight without the need to believe in God, presents a novel and powerful challenge to Christianity. This situation certainly points to the need for a reorientation of Christian thought about God. Already dialogue has begun on this question between Buddhist and Christian scholars at a highly theological and philosophical level, especially in Japan, and the discussion is moving towards a mutual understanding of God in terms of Being. Paul Tillich is widely quoted in this connection. Both Buddhists and Christians find meaning in the terms “Being-Itself” or “Ground-of-Being” which he uses to signify God. Christians are beginning to see in the phrase “I-am-that-I-am” translated “I am what I will become”, meaning active and unfolding Being, the essence of what the term God


Exodus 3: 14.
means, and Buddhists are beginning to see in the term Tathata, translated "The-Truly-So" or Suchness or "That-which-is-as-it-is" an indication of what Ultimate Reality is. The fusion of these two concepts may lead to a clearer understanding of the meaning of God which people today are hungering after.

(b) The Doctrine of Anatta.—This doctrine has been the bone of contention between Buddhists and Christians for long and the gulf has been thought to be unbridgeable. The main difficulty is that the Christian view of man has been coloured by the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul which is quite foreign to the biblical teaching about man. Biblical scholarship has established quite conclusively that there is no dichotomous concept of man in the Bible, such as is found in Greek philosophy, so that Christianity, along with Buddhism, can deny the 'soul' as an immortal self-existent entity that enters the body at birth and leaves it at death.

In the writings of St. Paul, in particular, the unity of man is represented by the words psyche and sark which bear a close similarity to the Buddhist terms nama and rupa. Psycho in a broad sense, like the word nama, represents the psychical aspect of man, and sark, like rupa, represents the physical aspect of man. Christianity could agree with Buddhism in asserting that this psycho-physical complex, or in modern medical parlance, this psycho-somatic unity, has no independent soul-entity within it or identifiable with it. Here therefore is a basic agreement between Buddhism and Christianity which can be the basis for a fruitful dialogue.

One must however hasten to add that Christianity does not deny the ontological reality of the person. About
this matter the Buddhist teaching is ambiguous, for it is said that the Buddha was neither a nihilist (ucceda ditti) who denied personality absolutely, nor was he an eternalist (sassata ditti) who affirmed the self positively. Here then is a gap in the Buddhist understanding of man which, it seems, can be filled by a rediscovery of the biblical understanding of man, according to which man’s personality is to be found only in a relationship. That is part of the meaning of being created in the image of God. Personality can arise only in the community of ‘I’ and ‘Thou’. Apart from this relationship there is no personality; man, in other words, is Anattā. Personality is the identity of the self in the mutuality of the ‘I’ and the ‘Thou’; it is the identity of the self-shining through the contingencies of community. Such an understanding of the nature of man can hold together both the Buddhist idea of Anattā and the Christian idea of personality without doing violence to either.

(c) The Doctrine of Re-birth.—This is a very attractive doctrine, particularly because it provides a solution to the problem of suffering and gives man hope of another chance or chances of perfecting himself, if he has failed to achieve it in this life. Many great people in history have believed in reincarnation and psychical researchers of repute have found support for this theory in their researches. The notion that passes as orthodox Christian teaching, that man has an earthly span of life of three-score years and ten, after which he passes at death either to everlasting damnation or eternal salvation, is most abhorrent to Buddhists and theologically unacceptable to many Christians.

There are many difficulties about this doctrine of rebirth especially to Buddhists who deny the self but speak of the person being reborn, but the Christian notion of the twofold
destiny of man finally decided within this short span of life has greater difficulties. For a satisfactory alternative to the doctrine of reincarnation, Christians will have to rethink the meaning of life after death in some such terms as the continuous development of the positive elements in life in which reincarnation, with the doctrine of karma as its corollary, is admitted symbolically as pointing to the higher and lower forces in man which fight with each other in his effort to move towards the goal.

Questions Facing Christians

For effective participation in dialogue with Buddhists, Christians have to ask themselves three basic questions.

1. *What should the Christian attitude to Buddhism be?*

There is a doggerel which runs as follows:

We are God's chosen few
All others will be damned

There is no room in heaven for you
We can't have heaven crammed.

This dog-in-the-manger attitude, this arrogant and exclusive attitude to other faiths which still prevails in some Christian circles, has only served to antagonize non-Christians and earn their hatred. In such an atmosphere of hatred and suspicion the Gospel will not be heard.

At the close of the last World War, when Holland was about to lose her Empire in the Far East, the Governor of Java was puzzled about the reaction of the people to the Government. One evening he remarked to Lawrence Van
der Post who was staying with him at the time: "der Post, I cannot understand it; we have given these people good government, we have built roads and schools, we have provided an economic structure, we have gone far in controlling disease. We have done all this and yet they do not want us. Can you tell me why it is?" Van der Post thought for a while and said: "Yes, I believe I know why it is. When you have spoken to them you have had the wrong look in the eye."

What is needed therefore is the right look in the eye, the look of sympathy, understanding and reverence. This is the key to effective engagement in dialogue as well as to Christian service.

Many years ago the late Archbishop William Temple saw the need for a new attitude to people of other faiths. He said: "Whatever thoughts any human soul is seeking to live by, deserve the reverence by every other soul... everything men believe deeply is worth studying sympathetically and deeply."

It is an encouraging fact that as a result of the Christian confrontation with resurgent religions, two things are happening with regard to our attitude to non-Christian religions. Firstly, we are more ready today to listen to what the other man has to say, than in earlier days when the Church adopted the attitude that all religions except Christianity are false. Secondly, we are more respectful of the religious beliefs and practices of people of other faiths.

2. What is our understanding of mission in the cultural situation in which the Christian Church is placed?

There has been much talk about the Church as an evangelizing community but most of it has not touched the
centre of the Church’s life. Evangelization is more or less thought of in terms of the numerical expansion of the Church. The Church will be satisfied if it keeps on adding one by one to its membership—though no one would doubt its importance. But this is not evangelism in the true sense of the word. Our Church has established mission stations in different parts of the Island and we are overjoyed when we hear of a few adult baptisms here and there. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin has a name for such mission stations. He calls them “fishing stations”. A series of fishing stations is not going to make the Church an evangelizing church. In the words of Bishop Newbigin: “The Church must be where men are, speak the language they speak, inhabit the worlds they inhabit. This is the simplest of missionary principles.” In other words, the Church must take root in the native soil and bring forth its own fruit, a kind of Christian life which is not simply a reproduction of a Western form of Christianity, but one that is habituated to the culture of the land. In other words, this is a matter concerning indigenization.

What indigenization means is perhaps best illustrated by the story of the great Italian missionary, Roberto de Nobili, about whom Bishop Newbigin writes as follows:

One of the greatest missionaries of all time was the Italian Roberto de Nobili, who went to Madura in South India in 1605 as a member of the Portuguese mission there. He found himself part of the mission community outside the city, consisting of the foreign priests and a handful of converts from the outcast

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communities. It was not long before he realized that this mission station was not really in India at all. It was an out-post of Portugal, and the converts who had attached themselves to it had really been lifted out of India and put down inside the Portuguese compound wall to become imitation Portuguese Christians. An Indian Christian Church did not yet exist, and there was no hope whatever that the cultured Brahmins of Madura would ever accept the invitation addressed to them to join the only Christian congregation visible to them. De Nobili decided that this was not what he had come for. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground. To the indignation of his colleagues he abandoned the mission station, put on the dress of a Brahmin, and disappeared into the precincts of the great Temple Meenakshi in Madura. There he became the first European to master the Tamil and Sanskrit languages, and to study the sacred literature of Hinduism. He lived as a Brahmin who belonged to Jesus Christ. Here was the beginnings of an Indian Christian Church. Before long a considerable company of devout and learned Brahmins joined him and were baptized. There was created out of this single corn of wheat something which had never existed before, a truly Indian Christian Church, the first-fruits of India for Christ.⁹

The grain of wheat must fall into the native soil; it must die; it must take root in that soil; it must grow and bring forth its own fruit. What we need is not Christianity in Burma, or Thailand or Ceylon. What we need is Burmese Christianity, Thai Christianity and Ceylonese Christianity.

3. What should be the manner and form of the Christian message as it seeks to express itself in an indigenous culture?

Professor C. H' Hwang, speaking at a meeting of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism in Mexico in 1963 said: "Our depths are known to us in the Bible. This is an Asian book. Preserved and mediated to us by Europe and America, it must be reclaimed by Asians in their task of rebuilding. The Bible must speak to a New Asia through commentaries in Asian terms. Its richness must be mined by Asians for a word in season to neo-Confucianism and resurgent Buddhism."

The need for a re-statement of the Christian message in the idiom of indigenous cultures has been stressed over and over again, but the Church still continues to be satisfied with forms and formulations imported from the West.

More often than not, it is phraseology that is a barrier to right understanding. Words and terms in the context of one culture may not mean the same to a person looking at them from the context of another culture. It is therefore essential to find ways and means of expressing the Christian message in the terms and thought-forms of the indigenous cultures in which it is preached.

This aspect of the meaning of dialogue is implied in the advice the Buddha gave one Cunda as to how he is to deal with a person who has mixed up meaning and phraseology.

Unapproving, unblaming, ye are to address him thus: of this meaning brother, either this is the phraseology or that: which fits better? Or: Of these phrases
either this is the meaning or that: which fits them better? If he reply: Of this meaning brother, just that phraseology is the more fitting or of these phrases brother, just that meaning fits them better, he is neither to be set aside nor upbraided. Neither setting him aside nor upbraiding him, ye are with careful attention to explain to him both meaning and phraseology.\(^\text{10}\)

In keeping with this advice, the Buddha himself used such terms as *Karma, Dharma, Nirvana* and *Brahma* taken from the Hindu context to communicate his teaching in the cultural situation in which he was placed. There can therefore be no valid objection to the use of Buddhist terms and concepts to communicate the Christian message to the Buddhists. The question, however, is how to do this.

Some attempts have been made to do this and the following are but a few examples which illustrate both our failure in communicating and the need to express the Christian message in an indigenous idiom.

\(a\) Some time back a group of Christians conducted an evangelistic campaign in a Buddhist village and distributed a tract specially prepared for this campaign. It was the simple story of the Prodigal Son, considered to be the greatest short story in the world. But quite contrary to expectations the villagers were repelled by this story, for they said that they did not want a God who caused a calf to be killed for a feast, neither did they want a beef-eating religion. The fact that killing the fatted calf is mentioned three times in this story diverted their attention from the central message of the love and forgiveness of God. Recently the Bible

\(^{10}\) *Digha Nikaya*, 29: 18–19.
Society used this same story for a tract, avoiding the offensive part of it by simply stating that a grand feast was prepared to celebrate the occasion. This illustrates the need for a delicate sensitivity to the sentiments of the people to whom the Gospel is preached.

(b) A Christian minister was once teaching Christianity to a Buddhist monk. When he spoke to him about repentance the monk was greatly surprised and showed some dislike for Christianity. As a Buddhist he had learnt and taught that repentance was a bad thing, it was a blemish, a hindrance to the spiritual life. He, therefore, could not understand how repentance was a virtue and had such a central place in Christianity. On going deep into the matter it was revealed that the word repentance, especially the vernacular word, meant nothing but remorse, and remorse (Pali: \textit{kukkucca}), is a defilement according to Buddhist preaching. But when it was explained to him that repentance (\textit{metanoia}) primarily meant a change of mind (\textit{citta}), that it means a reorientation of man's life and personality which includes a resolute turning away from sin to God (not a gloating over one's past deeds), and a commitment to a disciplined ethical line of conduct, and that in this sense repentance could embrace the Noble Eight-fold Path, he began to see new light in the Christian teaching. This illustrates the need to redefine basic theological terms in the light of Buddhist thought.

(c) It is said that when Adoniram Judson translated the Bible into Burmese he used the Pali term \textit{Vinyana}, meaning consciousness, to translate Holy Spirit, discarding the ordinary Burmese word \textit{Nat} for spirit, which means a deity or divine inhabitant of the heavenly realms. \textit{Vinyana} is the word used by some schools of Buddhist thought in Burma,
to denote supramundane consciousness which transcends mortality and persists after death in Nirvana. This is a word that can convey more of what Holy Spirit means than the word Nat. In fact, the word Nat would give a wrong idea of the Holy Spirit. Professor Pe Maung Tin commenting on this says that Judson’s “translation of the Holy Spirit by Vinyana is a standing challenge to the Buddhists: If they believe in Vinyana, the consciousness that persists in Nirvana, why should they not believe in Vinyana, the Holy Spirit of the Christian Trinity.”

This illustrates the need for baptizing Buddhist terms into Christianity.

Regarding the use of terms, one of our primary concerns should be to see whether this could be done on the level of basic doctrine. For instance, can the three signata in Buddhism be related to the Trinity in Christianity? We could briefly and in broad outline indicate the lines on which one may attempt to do this.

Christianity, like Buddhism, can characterize man’s existential situation in terms of Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta. Man’s lost condition is due to his denial of these three realities of creaturely existence by pretending to be his own lord. Anicca means impermanence or transitoriness. There is no unchanging reality in existence as such. Dukkha, though ordinarily translated ‘suffering’, means much more than that and is probably best translated by the word ‘depravity’ which is suggested by the two syllables Du (contemptible) and Kha (void). Anatta means soullessness or mortality. Man is mortal; there is no immortal soul in him. But Buddhism speaks of the Real and the Permanent ("There

is O Bhikkus an unborn, unoriginated, unmade and unconditioned”), of redemption (Vimukthi), i.e., of an escape from the born, originated, made, and conditioned, and of the Deathless (Amata). If these three negative facts in existence as Buddhism teaches, mean anything, their counter, positive realities cannot be derived from the existential situation itself. Anicca cannot produce that which is Permanent; Dukkha cannot give rise to redemptive grace; Anatta cannot “put on” immortality by itself. The source of these positive realities have to be found outside the human situation. The Christian solution to the problem can be stated as follows: Anicca is overcome by God who is the unchanging Reality; Dukkha is overcome by Christ in whom is redemptive grace; and Anatta is overcome by the Spirit who gives ontological reality to the individual. Thus the Christian Trinity is the answer to the three signata in Buddhism.

4. Can Christian living be relevant to the context in which we live?

Is there anything in the Christian way of life that appeals to the Buddhists? Of course there have been individual Christians whose exemplary lives have created a deep impression on the minds of Buddhists, but what is the general image they have of Christian living? Thomas Ohm, in Asia looks at Western Christianity, has this to say about Christians.

The Christians bring and sow divisions. They do not ensure brotherhood. They always deal with others from above, and through their ignorance have brought the race question into the world. They love money. The whole colonization processes rested on profit motive. Where the colonial powers put money into the colonies they did so only to take out more.
Western civilization is brutal: it aims always at material progress of the individual, who then oppresses others. Christians have an exaggerated culture of the body. They have an immoderate sex life. They are always interested in the material.

Buddhism has a highly developed and codified system of ethical conduct and Buddhists believe that Christians, especially Protestants, have no such thing. For this reason they feel that Buddhism is a superior way of life. A Buddhist convert to Christianity will hardly find a systematized form of guidance for his spiritual life. It is therefore essential that Christians living in a Buddhist milieu discover a way of life and conduct bearing recognizable marks that make an appeal to the Buddhist mind.

The Rt. Rev. V. G. Shearburn, Bishop of Rangoon, speaking at a Consultation on Buddhist Christian Encounter in Rangoon in 1961, made a plea for a restatement of the classical Christian ascetic theology in the belief that in such a restatement we have something to command the attention of the Buddhist and a way of entering his mind and spirit.

According to the classical teaching of the Saints regarding the spiritual life, there are three ways in the growth of the soul.

There is firstly the purgative way. It is a way of purification by detachment and mortification; it is a way of strict discipline. The aim is the death to self in its narrow individualistic sense. St. Ignatius and St. Sulpice worked out the principles and rules by which the self can be purified.

There is secondly the illuminative way. It is a way of recollection and contemplation, by which one withdraws
attention from the external and dedicates the mind to the object of contemplation. St. Augustine describes his experience of illumination thus: "My mind withdraws its thoughts from experience, leaving the contradictory throng to sensuous images, that it might find out what that light was in which it was bathed... And thus, with the flash of one unhurried glance it attained to the vision of that which is".

There is thirdly the unitive way. This is the stage when the soul enters into intimate and habitual union with God. This is the state described by St. Paul: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me". The saints distinguish four planes in this unitive way: viz., quietude, full union, ecstatic union, transforming union. Beyond that no one can go in this earthly life.

Now what will a Buddhist make of such a picture of spiritual training? Is there anything here that will appeal to the Buddhist ethos?

The Buddhists will recognize that what we call the purgative way is what they call the Vissuddhi Magga, the path of purification. The aim in this stage is much the same—the nullifying of sensory desires and the negation of the self in the egotistic sense of the word. The way to achieve this end is worked out in a far more detailed manner in classical Buddhism than in the Christian classical tradition. There is much that Christians can learn from the Buddhist teaching in this respect, and there is much in the Christian teaching that can mitigate the rigour in the Buddhist teaching.

With regard to the illuminative way, the Buddhists will say that it is illumination they are looking for and samadhi or meditation is directed to this end. They would also see
that there is a close similarity between St. Augustine's experience of illumination and the Buddha's experience of enlightenment. Of course the content of the illumination is not understood by Buddhists and Christians in the same way, but is this not a place where a preliminary surface contact should be made in order to introduce the Buddhists to the deeper and richer Christian experience?

It is in regard to the unitive way that we will have difficulty with the Buddhists, for the Buddhists will not speak of union with God. Nevertheless there is a Christian and Buddhist mysticism which in their psychological aspects bear close comparison. Just as Christianity speaks of the four stages in the unitive way, Buddhism also speaks of four jhanas or raptures. The goal in Buddhism is defined subjectively as peace, the absolute stilling of one's craving. That is Nibbana. From the subjective point of view that is the goal of the Christian too—the peace which passeth all understanding. It is the responsibility of the Christian to lead the agnostic Buddhist to the source of that peace—God.

There are certainly dangers of asceticism becoming self-centred and a form of legalism. But held in the context of the fellowship of the Church asceticism is saved from such perils. The sacramental and liturgical life of the Church is other-centred and outward looking and in that context asceticism can appear in a new form, free from the rigour and legalism into which Buddhist asceticism has fallen, and may very well appeal to the Buddhists whose quest is release from the self. Such an appeal would best come from the practice of Christian asceticism in Ashrams, or by groups of committed clergy or laymen. This would bring a new tone to Christian living, give it a new look, and make it more relevant to the context in which we live.
A Theological Base for Dialogue with Muslims

By Kenneth E. Nolin

Dialogue does not—cannot—exist in the abstract.* Even if the scope of discussion were narrowed to a single religious entity, the same fundamental inadequacy of generalization holds true, since each religion contains within it an almost infinite range of differing spiritual experiences. A dialogue, for example, with 'Ali, a delightfully simple and even wholesomely superstitious mystic, can never be the same as that with Sheikh 'Abdal-Qadir, a trained Azharite Imam in a local mosque, to say nothing of Yusef, a modern secular newspaperman for whom the Qur'an means no more than Shakespeare.

There has been endless debate within Christianity itself about the theological basis for dialogue with other faiths. Key phrases have become the shibboleths of one group or another—continuity or discontinuity, positive values or demonic elements, displacement or fulfilment, the *logos* *spermaticos* and *praeparatio evangelica* concepts, and many others. A flood of books and articles has poured off world presses until one almost despairs of comprehending it all or commenting meaningfully upon it. And yet, despite this debate raging on in the ethereal regions of world opinion and publication, sincere Christians at local levels have made progress toward dialogue and relationship. Refusing to be immobilized by the unsolved questions about dialogue,

*This essay is taken from the report of a consultation held in Kandy, Ceylon, September 28—October 6, 1966, called jointly by the world YWCA and the world Alliance of YMCAs.*
they have entered into it wholeheartedly, taking willing advantage of the growing freedom of a secular world, and moving out into increasingly effective other-faith relationships.

Two conferences held in Lebanon this summer illustrate the contrast between the general and the specific as a context for dialogue. The first, sponsored by the World Council of Churches, had as its purpose the co-ordinating of various study centres for dialogue with Islam, from Indonesia to West Africa. Though it fulfilled its purpose in registering many practical recommendations, it was forced to modify and even omit some statements which implied theological bases, because the delegates differed radically in their points of view. As I described the consultation to a friend later, he cried out in exasperation, “We’ve been hearing all this for years. When will we cut through all this debate and say something really creative”? It also came out in this same consultation that those planning for the coming Assembly of the World Council of Churches have omitted any discussion of inter-religious encounter, partly in order to avoid an open clash about basic principles.

The second conference was about the same size as the first—twenty-five to thirty delegates—but of an entirely different nature. Planned by the Near East Council of Churches for a specific area—Lebanon and Syria—it was conducted in Arabic and had as its main speaker a Christian Syrian who is writing quite extensively about Muslim-Christian relations. In preparation for these meetings he had prepared an entire new book, entitled Qawa’id il-Hiwar il-Islami ‘l-Masihi (Bases for Muslim-Christian Dialogue), from which he took his lectures. Though his approach would not convince all Muslims, nor even all Christians, it was a profoundly creative attempt by a Near
Eastern Christian—the first, to my knowledge—to break out of the arid controversies and mutual suspicions of the past. Being in Arabic, and dealing with one specific area of interfaith thinking, it will very likely not enter very fully into the larger world debate. However, its very specificity makes it that much more meaningful for real Christian dialogue.

I

A Base for Dialogue

A. Possible Alternatives:

Two basic and apparently mutually exclusive principles have been the starting points for the debate about Christian interfaith obligations. These may be represented by a microcosm of the debate, between two of its leading thinkers, Hendrik Kraemer and Kenneth Cragg. Dr. Kraemer's book, *Religion and the Christian Faith*, was analyzed by several writers for the *International Review of Missions*. Many articles were favourable ("...the author is at home in almost every theological discipline" says Wilhelm Anderson, Oct., 1957), but Dr. Cragg wrote a sharply dissenting review entitled "Hearing by the World of God" (July, 1957). This focus of the discussion, between two men who are well known both for their Christian dedication and extensive activity in the field of inter-religious thinking, will demonstrate the two different theological bases from which, as we shall see, all mission theology stems.²

² Other would subdivide the approaches more minutely, as, for example, D. T. Niles, in his book *Upon the Earth* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), but I think these can be described as points along the way between the two larger contrasting starting points.
(1) Incomparability (Kraemer).—Dr. Kraemer, in the book mentioned above, is consciously continuing the discussion aroused by his earlier book, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*.³ Constant references are made to it, and its point of view maintained against many critics. He starts from the intrinsic incomparability of God’s revelation in Christ, from “the basic assumption that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, by whom alone man comes to the Father, and by whose light alone all problems can be seen in their proper perspective.”⁴ Weighed against this absolute, the empirical religions of mankind are not simply inadequate, but of an altogether different nature. Even Christianity, as a human expression of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, is on the same intrinsic level with other religions and is itself under judgment and in constant need of renewal.⁵

This incomparability of the Divine Act to which the Gospel witnesses is further accentuated by the Fall of man, the demonic element to be found in even the best of man’s attempts to meet God. “Man... turns even his great human achievements into instruments for glorifying himself and forgetting, or rebelling against, God who alone is to be glorified and thanked”.⁶ In this Dr. Kraemer is in basic agreement with Karl Barth, that “religion is the enemy of God”, meaning that it has, especially within its best expressions, the tendency to idolatry, to keeping men from a real

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⁴ Ibid., p. 237.
faith experience with the Divine. Dr. Kraemer is endlessly repetitive in his critique of religion, or of comparative religion, as a philosophic discipline—but only by the breaking in of a unique revelation of God's love and judgment. The cosmic solution must be worthy of the cosmic dilemma of man's estrangement.

Thus we find Dr. Kraemer hesitant about using the term "dialogue", or even "apologetic", to describe the Christian obligation to the world. "There is something inherent in the Christian faith which remains dissatisfied with the way of apologetics, even the best. This 'something' lies in the nature of the Christian faith with its claim that Jesus Christ alone is the Truth. It is not—as one might think—its intolerance, but the claim that in Him, who is the Truth, all is laid bare, brought to real self-knowledge. This is more than dialogue". He apparently prefers the more nearly unilateral terms, "manifestation" or "proclamation" of this incomparable message for the world.

In all fairness, it should also be said that Dr. Kraemer does attempt to make room for the "values" of men's religions, by what he calls a "dialectic" point of view. "The divine dialectic can be expressed in the key-words: self-forgetting love—saving wrath; the human dialectic in: rebellion and escape—search for righteousness and groping for truth". But the attempt sounds strangely hollow when this same passage is followed immediately by the qualifying

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9 Ibid., p. 321.
remark, “It must, however, never be forgotten that in this
divine-human drama the demonic has a very significant
place”. Appreciation of other faiths must always be quali-
Fied by the overpowering major premise of incomparability,
and the Christian obligation can only be described as witness
to this unique fact of God in Jesus Christ. “Becoming
a disciple of Christ means always a radical break with the
past. Christ is, as we have repeatedly said, the crisis of
all religion ... Therefore Christ’s ambassadors in the
world, in order to preach the Gospel, can and must stand in
the world of non-Christian religions with downright intre-
pidity and radical humility”.

(2) Communication (Cragg).—The impatience of
Dr. Cragg with this thesis is graphic evidence of his radically
different starting premise. He comments, “Though the
theme is the essential intractability of the Christian faith
(p. 63), there is within (the book) a good deal of ‘the essential
intractability of Dr. Kraemer’ (241)”. True, the reference
is primarily to the writer’s “bewildering effort to come to
sharp verdicts on a variety of authors”, but the words imply
a far deeper dissatisfaction, stemming from the different
point of departure.

Just as “incomparability” characterizes the premise of
Dr. Kraemer, so also the one word “communication” can
be taken as a convenient summary of his reviewer’s primary
emphasis. We read: “Have we not great need of breaking
away, into a new freshness and humility, from some of the
emphases made familiar by the long debate on the Christian
relationship to this multi-religious world? There have
been certain issues about Christian incomparability that

have been allowed to engross the debate and to preoccupy the pattern of discourse, to the compromise of this essential emphasis on expressiveness”.\(^\text{11}\) And again, “Do we sufficiently subject our concept of incomparability to this paramount communicating loyalty”?\(^\text{12}\)

Note that neither writer would dispense with the primary emphasis of the other. Dr. Kraemer has another volume entitled *The Communication of the Christian Faith*,\(^\text{13}\) so surely is not lacking in concern in this direction. His emphasis upon the incomparability of the Gospel has not prevented active involvement in other faith relationships. On the other hand, Dr. Cragg admits, “Incomparable in a deep and mighty sense the Gospel is and will always remain”\(^\text{14}\) and anyone who has followed his writings would never question his conviction about the uniqueness of God in Christ. We are talking about emphasis, about major premises which have a tendency to overwhelm or modify other considerations. Thus incomparability can only mean that all religions are under judgment, and lead therefore to a less than sympathetic attitude toward their values or achievements. Likewise, Dr. Cragg qualifies his words about incomparability quoted above by saying, “But at least as important as the fact of its incomparability is man’s discovery thereof”. Again, he suggests that our very awe of the Gospel may “involve a certain reticence in externally formulated claims about being incomparable”.\(^\text{15}\)


\(^{13}\) (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957).

\(^{14}\) Cragg, *op. cit.*

\(^{15}\) *Ibid.*
The starting premise is also normative for any discussion of man's fallen nature. This assumes a large place in Dr. Kraemer's thinking, because of its importance for demonstrating, by contrast, the uniqueness of the Gospel. Dr. Cragg, while never ignoring this, tends to modify his emphasis upon it by an eternal optimism about the potential of interreligious thinking and presence. "This does not mean, of course, that there is no recalcitrance, no obduracy, in men. Their apprehension of its meaning may well lead to their rejection of its claim. We are not seeking here to neglect or forget the mystery of man's capacity for rejection of light... Nevertheless, this mystery of obduracy must not be allowed to obscure the debt of interpretative travail which is owed, in Christ, to all men who are out of Him".  

B. A Synthesis in Incarnation

According to this analysis, then, mission theologies can be seen to range along a scale between the two poles of contrasting emphasis—incomparability and communication. And yet, is it necessary to assume that these are mutually exclusive? May we not rather avail ourselves of Dr. Kraemer's own terminology, and say this is a dialectical situation, where the apparent opposites are part of the same indefinite unity? Is it possible to cut right through the whole debate—as my friend urged—by insisting that in the very tension lies the deepest reality of our Christian faith and obligation?

As a matter of fact, the synthesis is right at hand, in the concept of Incarnation, that central clue to the meaning of Christianity. For it is in Incarnation that we find the Incomparable in Communication. Note carefully the:

16 Cragg, op. cit.
juxtaposition of these two ideas—the Holy God, the Supreme Creator, the Wholly Other—has entered into communication with his creatures, has taken flesh and dwelt among them, participating in all their normal processes of birth, growth, learning, temptation, misunderstanding, hunger, pain—yes, finally, even death, at the hands of religious men who could not stand the awful holy reality of God’s presence. But death was not the end. Easter triumph is the assertion of divine victory from within human life, the magnificent final word of God’s communication, by which (as C. S. Lewis put it in one of his children’s stories, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe), “Death itself starts working backwards”. The life of the Eternal entered the death of man’s estrangement and brought life; the Light which is the light of every man came into a world which preferred darkness, and granted it the Light of God; the Word of Creation entered the fragmented Babel of men’s strident cries and brought about the symbolic world unity of Pentecost.

**Incarnation and the Islamic Rejection.**—It is significant to note that the Islamic motive for rejecting this very synthesis is its concern for preserving the uniqueness of God. Perhaps by looking at the Incarnation in the light of this rejection we can see anew how truly amazing the Christian affirmation is.

Islam’s basic premise is “There is no god but God”, interpreted as God’s absolute Oneness, the qualitative difference between him and the created world, his incomparability, if you like. A popular Arabic proverb translated by Canon Gairdner in his fine contribution to the Jerusalem Conference Report (1928) is still known today, “Whatever you think of God, I tell you flat, He is not that” (kulli my kharar fi
Islamic theology has always tended, therefore, to absorb the "relational" attributes of God (usually emphasized by Christianity), into God's "separational" qualities—Oneness, Greatness, Knowledge, his essential distinctiveness. All evidence to the contrary is ignored, or at least given only minor consideration.

Thus, for example, though there are some Qur'anic expressions which give virtually the same meaning as the "image of God" in man, and a prophetic tradition explicitly affirms it, the concept has never been a factor in Islamic thought about man, simply because it is not literally affirmed in the Qur'anic creation narratives. Again, despite the fact that the Qur'an presents evidence that Jesus was infinitely more than a Prophet (tantalizingly parallel to that of John's Gospel, though in abbreviated, cryptic form), this is never permitted to speak for itself as evidence for the Incarnation. The unmitigated harshness of a belief in Divine Unity has been persistently modified by popular Islam over the years—by a devotion to the Qur'an, because of which it came to be described in orthodox creeds as the "uncreated" Word of God, at least implying its co-eternity with God; by adulation of the Prophet himself, against all Qur'anic protestations to the contrary; and by the mystic emphasis of Sufism on unity with God. But none of this has shaken the absolute first premise of traditional Islam, its concern for preserving the essential Uniqueness of the Divine.

**Incarnation: A Clue to Dialogue.**—Yet it is this very unthinkable synthesis which is our Christian affirmation—that God *has*, in fact, moved toward His creation, to re-establish a lost relationship, to restore communication. This is the "good news" (Gospel) which is ours for Islam, and for all the world. But note carefully the next step:
the Incarnation can also be taken as a pattern for our relations with the world around us. It could not be central to God’s nature without being at the same time the essence of our nature as believers.

Our Lord said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you”.17 (Granted, the verbs are not the same, and some exegesis would make a qualitative distinction between Christ’s mission and that upon which he sent the disciples. However, parallel verses use the same two verbs in other combination—Jn. 17:18, 13:20, 12:49, 16:5, etc.,—and when all examples are studied, it becomes clear that John used the two words interchangeably, as a stylistic variation, nothing more.) There can be no doubt about Jesus’ intention by this verse: that the Apostles, and symbolically, through them, all believers, are sent out in the same Mission by Incarnation which was His. In the literal sense of the word, this means taking upon ourselves the flesh of the world.

Paul defines this further in these words, “I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew ... To those outside the law I became as one outside the law ... To the weak I became weak ... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”.18 The motive for Paul’s “incarnation” within the various worlds of his day is the same as the Divine compulsion—a yearning to establish a saving, redeeming relationship, yes, in order to communicate the incomparable.

17 Jn. 20:21.

18 I Cor. 9: 19-23.
Both aspects must be held together in a burning tension that compels from within just as it did our heavenly Father first. Because the incomparable One has bridged the gap to his creation by means of Incarnation, even so this incomparable good news (as emphasized by Dr. Kraemer) must compel us in turn to communicate it (as in Dr. Cragg's article), to find at all costs the relationships which will continue God's divine, redeeming presence in the world.

II

The Dimensions of Dialogue

Incarnation, then, is our theological base, but also the measure of our dialogue, the astounding synthesis of God's uniqueness and yearning love, but also the pattern for our communication. Now let me only suggest ways in which Incarnation can define the dimensions of our mission.

A. "As the Father has Sent Me"—The Quality of Dialogue

The term "Father" is normative for Christ's words to his disciples. It describes a quality of being, an overwhelming compulsion which moved the Almighty God to self-communication. A whole cluster of Biblical terms traces this supreme Divine attribute, culminating in the New Testament self-denying agape, love. Jesus' command in the Sermon on the Mount, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" is concerned with a perfection of this kind of love, not of ethical morality. But the same concept is present incipiently throughout

19 Mt. 5: 48.
the Old Testament, through the covenant term hesed ("steadfast love", in the *RSV*). Like the New Testament agape, it describes God’s faithfulness, dependent not upon its recipients, but on the inner springs of his holy love.

A magnificent passage in Exodus\(^ {20} \) sounds out the covenant name of God in trumpet-like announcement, "The LORD ... the LORD" (Yahweh, indicated by capital letters in the *RSV*), then follows this with the rolling thunder of words about love, almost as if it defies language itself. "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (hesed) and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands; forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin ..." True, words about God’s holy righteousness and severity toward sin follow, but the controlling covenant attribute is not these, but a love which insists on transcending and transforming even man’s rejection of the covenant.

Many of these terms have their Qur’anic parallels (as for example, the invocation over every chapter but one, and on the lips of every Muslim on innumerable occasions: "In the name of the Merciful, the Compassionate"), but without the focus of the Incarnation never quite achieve their potential. One twice-repeated phrase even includes the sense of an almost self-obligating quality to God’s mercy: "Your Lord has written against—that is, ordained for himself, obligated himself to—mercy"\(^ {21} \) The ultimate issue of this verse can only be Incarnation, but without its presence the phrase and others like it have only a hollow, unfulfilled ring.

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\(^{20}\) Ex. 34: 6 ff.

\(^{21}\) Qur’an 6: 54, see also vs. 12.
It is this peculiarly Christian concept, summed up in the term for God, "Father", which must also be the quality of our relationship to the world. Of course the Gospel comes also in judgment, but its governing, self-obligatory attribute is saving, redeeming love. This must also be the measure of our presence as disciples among peoples of earth. "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him".\textsuperscript{22} Paul spells this out further in II Cor. 5:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message (or "ministry", in vs. 18) of reconciliation".

But of course the supreme passage for all Christian relationship is Paul's exquisite hymn to love in 1 Cor. 13. Vs. 4-7 are a rising counterpoint of descriptive terms for love (including one which literally means "love does not keep accounts of wrong"), moving out of the negative into a magnificent positive climax, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things".

Here is the quality of our dialogue: "not to condemn", "not counting their trespasses against them", "not keeping accounts of wrong", believing the best interpretation of others, hoping for the highest motive, challenging men to the best in order to share the highest. This may mean an abeyance of judgment, even a "reverent agnosticism" about some of the ultimate questions about the nature of other religions, for the sake of love's communication. Love may well mean no actual "witness" at all, for a time, only a willingness to listen. No communication can ever be effective when unilateral; love recognizes this and modifies its

\textsuperscript{22} Jn. 3:17.
expressions of incomparability for the sake of conversation. It senses that only in this way may friends be led into a deeper mutual discovering of this very incomparable Gospel.

A prayer by Michel Quoist, translated from French in his *Prayers of Life*, under the title "The Telephone", describes the self-centred futility of our relationships, unless informed and guided by the Father’s love.

I have just hung up: why did he telephone?
I don’t know... Oh! I get it...
I talked a lot and listened very little.
Forgive me, Lord, it was a monologue and not a dialogue.
I explained my idea and did not get his;
Since I didn’t listen, I learned nothing,
Since I didn’t listen, I didn’t help,
Since I didn’t listen, we didn’t communicate.
Forgive me, Lord, for we were connected,
And now we are cut off.

B. "...Even so I Have Sent them into the World"—
The Pattern of Dialogue

The ruling phrase here is “sent... into the world”. Our pattern of obedience is that of our Lord, to be sent by Him on a mission of incarnate presence within the world. This has no immediate reference to what is usually called “mission” work. Praise the Lord, we have grown in our understanding of the term. There may be particular functions of God’s Mission to which certain Christians are called in

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23 (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1965), p. 15.
a special way (as were Paul and Barnabas, for example), but ultimately, each Christian is sent on Christ’s Mission—from his home, his church, his knees, to become incarnate in school, factory or mosque, among Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, yes, even secular agnostics or militant atheists. The general pattern is one, its applications infinite. Two further descriptive terms may help us define the particular pattern of obedience to which each one of us is sent.

(1) Specific.—As mentioned briefly in our introduction, dialogue cannot exist in the abstract, but must be specific to the world, wherever and however we find it. The Christian from Syria mentioned earlier was positing an intrinsic unity between Christianity and Islam, especially at the point of their scriptures, and working from this to bases for dialogue which he hoped would be acceptable to both sides. He is seeking for the springs of unity deep within the original contacts of these two Abrahamic faiths, a unity distorted or effaced by centuries of independent and competitive development. All this is possible because in this particular context for dialogue, the two religions concerned are as close as their respective Semitic forefathers—Isaac and Ishmael—and yet as far. Any two traditional followers of these sibling religions are closer together, potentially, than either one of them to a thorough-going secularist of his own religion. (One might add Judaism to this relationship, except for the political overtones which complicate the issues. Indeed, the intensity of the antagonism in the Near East today is only understood within the context of a deep blood relationship between Judaism and Islam). But the specific relationship of dialogue among these Semitic-based religions is entirely different from that of any one of them to the other streams of religious devotion originating in the so-called “Far East”.

This principle of specificity is firmly grounded in Scripture. Paul at Lystra and in the Areopagus at Athens was speaking to the world of polytheism, and though in each case, "his spirit was provoked within him", his message was not primarily condemnatory. True, he did say his hearers were living in the "times of ignorance", and called them to repentance. But far more important than this is that Paul adapted himself specifically to their concepts, their literature, their manner of speaking—all in order that he might "by all means save some".

I realize that some would disqualify the attempt at Athens, on the basis of I Cor. 2: 1–2 ("When I came to you, brethren... I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"). William Barclay notes that at Athens Paul "had one of his very few failures". In answer to this I can only quote another great mission statesman, Max Warren, "Few things are more stupid than the frequently expressed statement that Paul's mission in Athens was a failure, and that when he went to Corinth he changed his message" (quoted by Kenneth Cragg, in a personal letter on this same subject). Besides, a modicum of success was achieved at Athens and any difference of approach at Corinth may have several other possible explanations: the contrast between proud, philosophical Athens, and the crude commercial centre and harbour crossroads called Corinth; or, it may be, the largely Jewish background of Aquila and Priscilla, Crispus and Titius Justus, whose minds, prepared by a knowledge of Jewish sacrifices, were:

26 The Relationship between Christianity and Other World Religions (Prism Pamphlets No. 30), p. 17.
27 See Acts 17: 34.
ready to understand the Crucifixion. Paul's rarified philosophical approach in Athens could hardly have touched the bold sinners described in the Corinthian letters, any more than a direct witness to "Jesus Christ and him crucified" would have had any effect on the Athenian sophisticates.

In the same way, our own form of "incarnation" must be specifically related to the people within whom God has called us to live. Our Christian love must drive us to pay the cost of that adaptation—the years of study, the changes in much-loved and familiar terms, whatever denials or sacrifices may be necessary to make our presence real and effective.

(2) Creative.—The second pattern for our obedience, equally unlimited in scope, is creativity. Our age is one in which old securities are being shattered, old patterns twisted, distorted, or discarded. In only a little more than a decade of traditional "missionary" service, I have personally watched a complete revolution take place. A large, influential Mission, at the end of almost a hundred years of religious semi-colonialism, welcomed us to Egypt; now we are members of a steadily shrinking and often insecure partner to the Evangelical Church which grew out of the Mission's work. No one deplores the change—it has been the aim of the Mission all along. But it does mean that we who remain are being forced to find our securities elsewhere than within the close-knit Mission family. Nor is the loss of security through change felt only by the "missionary" movement. The Church in Egypt is not free from what is taking place in Christianity everywhere in our age, the shaking of its very foundations.

And yet, may it not be, as the writer to the Hebrews put it (in a letter written specifically for times like these), that
we are seeing "the removal of what is shaken ... in order that what cannot be shaken may remain"? This is not the first time God has forced His people out into the wilderness to teach them absolute faith-dependence on Him alone. Of one thing at least we can be sure: that the way of God's leading, even in the shattering of the old ways, can only mean ever more exciting new patterns of obedience.

Secularism, with all its dangers, will provide unprecedented opportunities for religious freedom, dialogue, yes, even conversion. The right to opt out of Christendom, though it may mean the end of the visible, established Church as we have known it, can only mean a deeper realization of the true Church for those who choose of their own free will to stay loyal to it. The passing of "professional" religious missionaries is accompanied today by an unprecedented growth of secular opportunities for Christian service. Surely these can be "infiltrated" for Christ, and could give an infinite potential for dialogue from within the world. Growing pride in nationhood (called "nationalism" or "patriotism", depending on where the speaker stands), has made western religious paternalism suspect, but it has also created strong, independent churches in every country, proud to be links in a total world Christianity. Industrial evangelism, inner-city ministries, the "tent-making" ministry the "house church", study centres, devotional retreat sites—all these and many more are the exciting new areas rising out of the ruins of our shattered world.

We may not want to go as far as van Leeuwen, who virtually equates the spread of Western secularism.

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28 Heb. 12: 27.
with the working of the Gospel in our day. But surely there can be no doubt about the fact that God can and is making use of secularism.\textsuperscript{30} We who believe in God's living presence, as affirmed by Incarnation, must also believe in and confidently follow his guidance into endless creativity. How often in Scripture, or in the history of Christianity, men have tried to bind God to ways familiar to them, only to become suddenly aware...of an Ethiopian eunuch, or Cornelius the Gentile, or the call to Macedonia. As C. S. Lewis has the children say of Aslan the Lion (who represents our Lord) in another of his fascinating children's books, "He's not a tame lion" (The Last Battle). Our part is not to confine, protect, limit, or even fully understand God's working, but rather to follow in joy and never-ending excitement, into the creative and redemptive roles he has for us.

(3) "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies"—The Extent of Dialogue.—A Negro spiritual asks, "What did he come for, my Lord"? then answers, "He came for to die ... my Lord" We can never grasp the measure of his Incarnation, and ours, until we see its climax in the Cross. This event is no coincidental part of our Lord's life, but its very heart. In near exasperation he cries out, on the Emmaus road, "Oh foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory"?\textsuperscript{31} The cross has the same necessary essential, unavoidable place in the life of discipleship. "If

\textsuperscript{30} Dr. Visser't Hooft's excellent article on "Pluralism—Temptation on Opportunity?" The Ecumenical Review, Vol. 18, No. 2, April 1966, can be a guide to many of the opportunities.

\textsuperscript{31} Lk. 24:25.
any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me".\(^{32}\)

The cross of discipleship means exactly what it did for our Lord—sharing so intimately and infinitely in the life of others, that from within we bear the weight of their sin, need, enmity, and are able to mediate God's redeeming presence—through Christ—in their lives. It means a fundamental reversal of the world's ordinary values—to serve, not to be served, to lose one's life, in order to find it, a dying to self in order that all may live "no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised".\(^{33}\)

Thus our Lord's grain of wheat is the ultimate symbol for the extent of our calling. Unless we are willing to see all that is dear to us pass away into the redemption of others, we have not yet followed our Lord.

\(^{32}\) Lk. 9:23.

\(^{33}\) Mk. 10:35; Lk. 9:24; II Cor. 5:14.
Dialogue with Secularism
By Paul Verghese

"Secularism", like the Abominable Snowman, seems hard to locate either in actual instance or in theoretical classification. One attempt to define it occurs in a recent article by Charles West. It is a structure of beliefs, articulate or implied, about nature, man, history and culture, concerned with "this world and no other", optimistic about man and his unlimited possibilities, not necessarily anti-religious, often willing to use religion as a tool in creating culture or promoting group identity.

Do we have an animal like that in India that we can "dialogue" with? If some intellectual biologist could locate the species in some particular form of writing, we could invite the author to a nice dialogue over a cup of tea, and demolish all his favourite assumptions with a quick lash of the whip of our usually arrogant theology.

What we do seem to have is a process brought into our culture not so much through the Gospel as through modern education and contemporary literature. Some of the great moulders of thought in our contemporary culture like Pandit Nehru and Sardar Panikkar have given expression to this new way of facing life in our country. It is an approach that concerns itself directly with this world, that takes the

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view that it is more important for people to be fed than to be pious. One could call this line one that takes this world of time (seculum) seriously and therefore “secular”. But neither Panikkar nor Nehru was a proponent of secularism as an ideology. Nor are even the Communists advocating an ideology called secularism.

Martin Buber says that the first step in dialogue is the recognition of the other in his otherness (alterité) and turning towards him with a view to communication. If the Church cannot find a particular organized entity called “secularism” or “secularists”, then there is no question of a “dialogue with secularism”.

On the other hand, this concern for this world and its real dilemmas belongs just as much to the life of the Church as to anyone else—perhaps more. The Church’s task in relation to the secular cannot therefore be called one of dialogue. Rather, we can say that Church leadership needs to be made aware of the issues that confront men today in order that Christian obedience may become relevant to those issues.

Our problem really is the correction of a dangerous imbalance in our Christian thinking, especially as it has

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2 See e.g., Ronald Segal’s The Crisis of India (Penguin Special, 1955). An admirable summary of Nehru’s secularism is provided in M. M. Thomas, “Nehru’s Secularism—An Interpretation,” in Religion and Society, Vol. IX, No. 1 (March 1962). M. C. Chagla said in a recent address that Nehru’s secularism was only a part of his humanism. But Chagla also says that Gandhiji was a secularist as well, though a religious one. For Chagla, secularism is opposed to Communalism. He defines secularism as “the ideal of a multi-racial, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural society.” (Nehru—2nd death anniversary pamphlet published by External Publicity Division, Government of India, May 1966).
come to us through our contacts with the West. The West, in struggling heroically to come to terms conceptually with reality, developed certain notions, which we have rather uncritically followed.

One of the most pernicious of these notions was a dichotomous view of reality as divided into nature and super-nature. This is an interior problem of the Church, and not a matter of dialogue with non-Christians. In other words, we have to clarify our own Christian understanding of the nature of reality before we can engage in dialogue with non-Christians on topics related to what is happening in the world today. It is not enough for us in India to take the position which some Western Christians assume, namely that all "metaphysical" questions are meaningless.

The nature-supernature distinction is so thorough-going in Western theology, that this medieval notion could serve as the central impulse even of such a recent theology as that of Karl Barth. Nature, according to these Western thinkers, is that which we can experience and understand without revelation. Father Karl Rahner, in his excellent treatise on this subject, summarizes the teaching of the Council of Trent thus:

The sphere of our spiritual and moral actions, within which we are present to ourselves, seems to be identical with 'nature' in the theological sense. And this sphere is even made a definition of what we mean by nature; nature is what we experience of ourselves without revelation, for this is nature and nature only. And vice versa, only nature and its acts constitute that life which we experience as ours.³

In other words, nature as a self-contained realm, which operates by its own principles, and which is therefore open to scientific study and technological control by man, is neatly to be distinguished, according to this way of thinking, from the realm of revelation, grace, or super-nature where God operates through laws of a different order. Of course God is Lord of nature also and so he can "intervene" in the realm of nature, thereby causing super-natural events, of grace and revelation as well as miracles.

Nature and super-nature are thus, so to speak, two parallel layers, the latter laid over the former, and there is a certain knowledge of God possible in each layer, of its own sort, according to these medieval theologians.

When this separation was developed, two deviations in Christian thought became firmly established. First, salvation was now to be limited to man alone, and not to the rest of creation. Secondly, revelation became a field totally independent of all other human knowledge, as we find in its rather extreme form in Karl Barth's thought. This double hiatus—between man and the universe on the one hand, and between nature and super-nature on the other—is in the main responsible for modern secularism. Secularism or secularization is thus not a direct result of the Gospel, but rather a consequence of the obscuring of the Gospel of the Incarnation in Western culture.

The Incarnation bears witness to the salvation of the universe in its entirety. Man is not saved from his materiality but rather in it. His salvation is not a total disruption of all historical processes by a supra-historical intervention, but a radical transformation of the process of history by the transcendent God entering history in an immanent way through the Body of Christ.
The double hiatus became established in "secular" thought through the work of Kant and Hegel. For Kant, what can be known of the time-space universe is to be grasped through the categorical structure of "pure reason", while the transcendent world is to be known by "practical reason" or by ethical conduct according to the categorical imperative. Hegel sought to unify transcendent personal purpose and historical development by making the Spirit or Geist totally immanent in history, thereby paving the way for the denial of the transcendent. The Marxist philosophy carried this process further. Its clearest articulation is perhaps in George Plekhanov’s *The Materialist Conception of History*:

By entirely eliminating teleology from social science and explaining the activity of social man by his needs and by the means and methods of satisfying them, prevailing at the given time, dialectical materialism for the first time imparts to this science the 'strictness' of which her sister—the science of nature—would often boast over her.4

Here in Marxism, the hiatus between man and his universe is bridged by denying any transcendent personal purpose altogether. In other words, Hegel and Marx (and his successors) put together what medieval theology and Kant had set apart. But in that process the transcendent has disappeared, and man has become caged in a self-contained universe.

Sensitive minds like those of Camus and Sartre set to decipher meaning in the universe on the assumption that

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it is a self-contained one, and we know the result—the absurd nausea, non-being. The "dialectical process" which was once conceived to be the meaning of the whole show neither fitted the facts, nor found a place for me to fit in without losing my integrity as a free human being.

The consequence is denial of the possibility of all "ultimate" statements, the denial of ontology and metaphysics, room being left for only functional or practical *ad hoc* statements. This is the true spirit of the secular culture today. Only the restatable is true or false.

The distinction still made between "religious" and "secular" by many theologians in the West shows how difficult it is for people living in a certain culture to move out of its basic assumptions. This distinction also has its origin in the medieval dichotomy of what is in the Church and what is outside (*pro-fanum—profans*). The Church here regarded almost as a building or an enclosure outside which the *profans* or "secular" reality exists. When enthusiastic modern "secular" theologians talk about a "secular" or "religionless" Christianity, they have three things generally in mind:

(1) Real life is lived not by Church people but among people who have no use, except occasionally, for the Church. The Church, therefore, ought to get out there where the action is, in order that it may become "relevant".

(2) The Church has no right to control "secular" affairs like politics, scientific research, free opinion, etc. Man should be emancipated from the control of Church authority both in jurisdiction and in thought.
(3) No institution is sacred, even if it claims to be of divine origin or divine ordinance. Every institution should be subject to the needs of man, to analysis, understanding and control by him, in terms which he creates for dealing with that area of study.

Here, at least in the first two points, we see clearly that the bases for the argument are the assumptions (a) that the Church and the world are two separate entities, the one "religious" and the other "secular", and that one has to get out of the one to get into the other, and (b) that the "authorities" of the Church are the Church. The second assumption also underlies the arguments for the emancipation of all knowledge from the authority of the Church. If the Church is considered as composed of all believers, and proleptically all men, it is hard to see how knowledge can be liberated from the authority of all men, for knowledge itself is subject to man, and has to be controlled by man in a pluralistic community of mutual openness.

If, on the other hand, the hiatus between the Church and the world, which seems to be based on the distinction between super-nature and nature, had not been so strongly reinforced in the culture, these theologians should have been able to see that the Incarnation is a basic affirmation of materiality and of things human. There is no longer an unbridgeable gap between the transcendent God and the created order, because the gap has already been bridged by God who has entered the created order bodily.

In this view the Church is also a "consecrating" presence, not merely an over-against presence, in the world. The Church has to be both immanent and transcendent in the world—it has to be both salt, which is indistinguishable, and light, which is distinguishable and transcendent.
relation between Church and world is thus one of simultaneous solidarity and separation. The meaning of the Incarnation in which God has become man, thus becoming one with creation, and yet not ceasing to be God, thus remaining transcendent from the creation and not totally merged in the creation, has to be kept in mind while considering the Church-world relationship.

When only the separation between Church and world is affirmed, we have the kind of nature-supernature dichotomy with its tragic consequences. But when Church-world solidarity alone is affirmed without awareness of transcendence, we are in danger of developing a liberalism that will lead to the loss of all transcendence.

The distinction between "religious" and "secular", and therefore the plea for a "non-religious" or "secular" Christianity presupposes the first error and the second error in its negative and positive criticisms respectively. Religious and secular, or sacred and secular, are not mutually exclusive terms. Everything is to be made sacred by its consecration to the purposes of God. Everything we experience here is "secular", because "secular" or time-space existence is the inescapable nature of the Church's life here and now.

The expression "dialogue with secularism" presupposes the presence of two entities, one of which is called secularism or the secular. The dialogue really needed is between Christians and non-Christians about our common task in the world. Only part of that task can be common. There are certain elements like the proclamation of the Gospel and the eucharistic worship of God which Christians are unable to share with non-Christians. But our responsibility to transform the world in accordance with the purposes of God is one that we share with all men of goodwill.
Dialogue between two separate organized entities called the Church on the one side and the world on the other is not what is needed. Christians are just as much part of the world as non-Christians.

We should meet as men concerned with the questions and problems faced by humanity, to think and act together as human beings. The initiative for this can come either from Christians or from non-Christians. Where other initiatives do not exist, the Christian should take the initiative, not in his capacity as a Christian, but as a member of humanity. If we are not tempted to regard the clerical authorities in the Church as the Church, then it is clear that criticism of the Church authorities and their indifference to common issues that confront humanity can only be of limited use. What is required today in India seems to this writer to be more initiatives taken by laymen (and clergymen) in their capacity as members of the human community than a great deal of criticism of the Church.

Theologians and teachers in the Church have the responsibility to correct the errors in traditional Christian thought which regard the word as somehow unrelated to the salvation wrought by God in Christ. But the major responsibility is that of the laity, many of whom are already engaged in positions of leadership in society. They need to be helped to rethink their role as leaders in society, to gain Christian perspective on what is going on and to be inspired with Christian courage to take initiatives in the right directions, however personally risky and potentially unpopular these initiatives may be.

The areas where we as the Church must serve India seem to be fourfold:
(a) Understanding.

(b) Hope and courage.

(c) Structures.

(d) Personnel.

Understanding itself requires a kind of transcendence which is not afraid to question pet assumptions. It is a notorious fact that honest criticism of one's own nation and culture offers grave difficulties for ordinary men. Self-criticism can often be construed as disloyalty and treason. Here Christians have been unusually timid. But our faith ought to provide us with the transcendent perspective from which we can evaluate our own situation. The Communist engages in radical criticism, but fails to be critical of the party's own failures, and is often much too dogmatic to be objective. The degree to which Christian social and political criticism transcends group self-interest and penetrates to the core of our problems will be a test of its value. The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society has begun to pioneer significantly in this matter. Wider participation and greater depth need further striving.

In India we are becoming increasingly paralyzed by the feeling of impotence in the face of gigantic problems. Many slip back into a fatalism and indifference which sap the vitality of our nation. The courage to tackle our great issues demands heroic faith and great personal courage and wisdom. We as Christians have to kindle hope, overcome despair, and disseminate courage by our own willingness to swim against the stream in thought and action.

The problems of our nation are simultaneously structural and personal. Our structures stifle the enthusiasm and creativity of persons. They do not provide sufficient
opportunities for keen and able men to use their abilities in the best interests of the people. We as Christians have the responsibility to initiate pioneering structures which can harness the abilities of our people and provide patterns for society as a whole to emulate. We need also to struggle, along with other good men, against structures of injustice both in our own nation and in humanity as a whole.

While the typical personality in India has not been as dehumanized as in the West, we continue to manifest defects of character on a large scale. The sense of responsibility and personal integrity seems in very short supply in our country. The ability to regard public office as a means of serving and not of personal privilege needs to be developed on a large scale. Larger loyalties that transcend family kinship and community boundaries need to be inculcated by example. The discipline of sustained hard work and clear un-emotional thinking seems hard to find among our people. We still show so much caste-mindedness in our churches that the dispossessed castes do not see much honesty in the Gospel we preach.

These are some of the areas in which the Church can enter the stream of history, rather than in any "dialogue with secularism". For this we need not move "out of the Church into the world" or seek a "religionless Christianity" or a "secular meaning of the Gospel". On the other hand when we enter these areas creatively and significantly, our "religion", in the sense of our commitment to God and fellowmen in Christ, will become so much the stronger and more joyful.

The notions of "secular" and "secularism" are likely to go out of currency in a few years, because penetrating thinkers have already discovered that these are reaction-words
which have no positive content. The process of "secularization" is a reality which is going on at an accelerated pace in our time. It consists in the emancipation of human thought and social institutions from priestly or dogmatic control. The process, however, has not come from the gospel directly, but as an expression of fundamental human freedom revolting against clerical control, as happened, for example, in the Buddhist revolt against Hindu sacerdotalism in the 6th to 3rd centuries B.C., or in the Samkhya School of Hinduism. It is the combination of this revolt against authority and against religious domination, on the one hand, with a technologically close-knit world in which values spread rapidly, on the other, that gives secularization as a process its special power in our time.

Christians should take this process quite seriously instead of being alarmed by it, and trying to build dykes against the flood. We ourselves have to clean our own house and get rid of our fear of modernity and our reluctance to change. We have to welcome the process as an opportunity given by God to become spiritually quickened in our churches. We should see it also as a judgment on our ways of life in the Church.

But as a positive philosophy it would not do at all. We need a different basis to build our tentative constructs and draw our sketch-plans for the kind of society we are aiming at in India. We should establish certain minimal axia around the concept of a pluralistic human community, a community in which all religions and no religion can co-exist in mutual dialogue, but with a common commitment to certain principles like the notion of human dignity and freedom, economic, social and spiritual well-being of all, the solidarity of the whole of mankind, and so on.
As a Church we should make clear to ourselves that these notions of community (the *koinonia* in the Trinity), *pluralism* (the Holy Spirit—giver of diverse gifts) and *humanity* (the son of God who became Man) are rooted in the fundamentals of the Christian faith and not optional extras for the interested and the specialist.

While these notions are being sufficiently clarified, we need to move into ordinary society in order to practise the pluralistic human community along with all men. This is not dialogue but participation, not with secularism, but in community. Dialogue is also a reaction-word, which presupposes a state of isolation and individualism from which we are to move.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) See, for example, the origins of the notion “dialogue” in our time in Martin Buber’s questioning of Kierkegardian existentialism in the former’s “Question to the Single One”, in *Between Man and Man* (London: Fontana Books, 1961), pp. 60–108.