

An Approach to **Dialogue**

**HINDUISM**

**CHRISTIANITY**

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**Frank Whaling**



# An Approach to Dialogue with Hinduism

*By*

FRANK WHALING M.A., (Cantab)

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*LUCKNOW PUBLISHING HOUSE*  
*LUCKNOW*

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First Printed, 1966



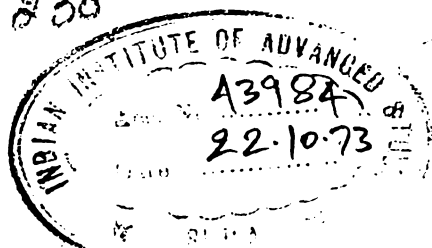
Library IAS, Shimla



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# 1

## The New Dialogue Approach

The subject of "dialogue" has come into great prominence in recent years. Christian thinkers and workers are being drawn into dialogue not only with Hinduism but with the other higher religions also. Bishop Stephen Neill's book, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths*, discusses the relationship of the Gospel with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. It also considers the Christian dialogue with Animism, Marxism, and Existentialism as separate entities. They would not normally be classed as faiths, but Neill's treatment of them points to the desire of the modern Christian to cross the many frontiers separating modern man from the Gospel, and the modern world from Christianity. Whether she likes it or not, the Church of the twentieth century is being thrown into a dialogue with every facet of life which is out of contact with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The coming dialogue will be an all-embracing one, including the secular as well as the non-Christian religious world. Bishop Robinson's recent book, *Honest To God*, is essentially an attempt to engage in dialogue with the existentialist element in western thought and life. Part of this total dialogue, affecting it and being affected by it, is the dialogue with Hinduism.

## What are the Reasons for New Emphasis on Dialogue with Hinduism?

One reason is that since the time of Vasco Da Gama and Columbus, and particularly since the eighteenth century, the world has become one physically. East and West have been brought together through aeroplanes, the wireless, and the economic and political exigencies of modern life. The United Nations and the threat of atomic warfare are not the luxuries of one particular part of the world but of all. Modern science and technology, and the accompanying tendency towards secularism, are becoming the common basis of life in every continent. Accordingly the Hindu world and the Christian world are no longer separate. They are open to each other. They face the same basic problems. Communism is a threat to both faiths. They both have to adapt to the same changing world. It was inevitable that the trend of modern life should lead to the opening of some sort of dialogue.

A second reason lies in the revival of the Hindu religion. There was a time when it seemed that no dialogue would be necessary. Many Hindus were becoming reconciled, during the last century, to the collapse of historic Hinduism before the "superior" claims of the Gospel of Christ. This is no longer so. Since the time of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, the worst abuses of Hindu social life have been reformed. Hinduism became militant under the Arya Samaj of Dayanand Saraswati, and politically militant under the Hindu Mahasabha, the Jana Sangh, and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Hindu doctrine has been adapted to the facts of modern life. Among some Hindus, the assumption is that Hinduism has the highest truth, but that this truth needs purifying,

and other religions can help in achieving this. Neill summarises this development: "Swami Vivekananda lighted the spiritual flame of this ideal; Mr. M. K. Gandhi interpreted it in terms of practical activity; Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has restated it in terms of intellectual activity."<sup>1</sup> At first, Hinduism reacted to Christianity by anxious withdrawal; then Vivekananda established that there was an equality; finally the superiority and potential<sup>1</sup> universality of Vedanta Hinduism is assumed among some Hindus today. Therefore the present dialogue with Hinduism—with Islam and Buddhism also—is with living, new faiths.

A third reason for the emphasis on dialogue is the growth of the ecumenical movement, and the new outlook towards theology engendered by that movement. It has become increasingly realized that only a whole Christ can satisfy a whole world, and that dialogue with Hinduism can aid us to find the real meaning of the Indian Christ. Moreover, Hinduism is the majority religion in a secular state, namely, India. And there is developing, in some quarters, the realization that even deeper than the need to engage in dialogue with Hinduism is the need to engage in dialogue with that society of which Hinduism is a part. Dr. P. D. Devanandan, reacting against Kraemer's emphasis upon revelation from God, is interested rather in revelation for and to the world of man: "The burden of our message to the non-Christian world," he writes, "would then relate, in this generation certainly, to the Christian view of man and his destiny."<sup>2</sup> Neill puts the same thought in another way when he states that the first criterion for judging any religion is whether it is adequate to the context of the total situation in which it finds itself. In other words, the emphasis of the new ecumenical theology is upon man, his destiny and his world. Underlying all this new theological endeavour is a fresh emphasis

upon the Bible. The concept of dialogue has had an influence upon the new ecumenical theology, and the new ecumenical theology has reacted upon the concept of dialogue.

A fourth reason for the coming of dialogue lies in the inter-acting influence of the British Empire upon India. We have seen how there was a time when it seemed as though some Hindus were willing to admit that Christianity had superior claims. They saw the political and economic power of Britain. They saw the advantages to be gained from an English education. They saw the unbounded intellectual confidence and ability of men like Macaulay. So they forecast the supremacy of western culture and of Christianity. But along with this unquestioning acceptance by some Hindus, there was also the reaction on the part of others to the threat of Christian Missions. Parallel with this was the reaction of the Indian spirit to western political dominance. Many Hindus acted aggressively against what they considered to be a twin threat to their religion and their political integrity. And yet, there is certainly another side to the picture.

We see this side in the great work done earlier by the western oriental scholars. Men such as Sir Charles Wilkins and Sir William Jones found that Indian scholarship was in advance of English knowledge in the fields of grammar, law, linguistics and logic, and they set out to interpret the meaning of Indian life and thought through diligent study. It was men like Max Muller who opened up for many Hindus the meaning of their religion. It was western scholars who helped to prepare the way for the Hindu renaissance. Thus there had been contact between Hindus and Christians, whether by attraction or repulsion, during the period of the British Empire; the coming of Independence and the recognition that Christianity is not the same thing

as western culture, have left the field open for dialogue. These are some of the reasons for the present popularity of the idea of dialogue.

### Contacts Between Christianity and Hinduism

Due to lack of evidence, it is difficult to prove much about contacts between Christianity and Hinduism before the modern period. Kabir claims that there was contact between East and West before and after the death of Christ. "After Alexander's death," he writes, "Greek and Indian thought almost certainly met in the market places of Alexandria. Plotinus and later neo-Platonists were obviously influenced by Indian thinking, and Buddhism was responsible for some of the beliefs and legends in the Christian heritage."<sup>3</sup> But where is the concrete proof for the influence of Buddhism upon Christian belief? Likewise, other scholars have claimed that the Syrian Church and the early Roman Catholic Christians had some influence upon *bhakti* Hinduism. Sargant suggests that, "It is not without significance that the three great acharyas, Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhava, all arose there (in the South), and Basava, the founder of the Lingayat or reformed Saivite sect, was believed to have been influenced by Christian teaching at Kalyan in the present Mysore State, once the capital of the Chalukya realm and the seat of a Christian bishop."<sup>4</sup>

Again it would be difficult to give concrete proof for these claims. It would be true to say, however, that Christianity was born and grew up in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, and, during the time of her birth and growth, the Church was influenced by the East. She was influenced by the Hellenistic mysteries, the Gnostic speculations, and the other Eastern religious intuitions that were

part of the background of her life. Although there has been no definite contact between Christianity and Hinduism until recent times—except through the Syrian Church which until recently has not been interested in contact with her neighbouring religions—one can trace a derived contact in the world of ideas. For example, St. Augustine owed a debt to the philosophy of Plotinus, and the philosophy of Plotinus was very similar in many ways to the Vedantic ideas. Recent research has shown that the conversion of St. Augustine took place after he had undergone mystical experiences that were inherited from yogic mysticism through Plotinus. However, although the saint experienced the Vedantic mysticism, he did not adopt the Vedantic doctrine. “Thou Lord,” he witnessed, “was more interior to my innermost and superior to my summit.” In his experience, eastern and western spirituality were mixed.

During the Middle Ages, Europe was like a besieged island cut off from the Eastern world. Contact between Christianity and Hinduism was still only indirect. The influence of Plotinus can be seen upon western mystics such as Tauler, Eckhart and Suso. The influence of the East can be traced in the occult movements among some of the western heretical sects such as the Cathars, the Patarins, and the Illuminados. In these ways, and through the Arabs, eastern interiority became a dimension integrated into European thought. Yet, there was no direct dialogue. The famous journeys of Lull and St. Francis did not initiate any dialogue as such in the East. Meanwhile, the Syrian Church remained separate from the currents of thought around its walls that might have drawn it into dialogue.

When a more vigorous group arrived in India, namely, the Jesuits, they took a negative view of Hinduism. In spite of the great experiment of the Roman Catholic, De Nobili, who was opposed both in India and in Rome, the main view

seems to have been derived from the experience of the Crusades in Europe. The aim of the Crusades had been to fight Islam, not to start a dialogue with her, and a similar outlook was carried over into the Indian situation. Accordingly, in Goa, Hindu and Buddhist temples were demolished. Later, when the early Protestant Tranquebar missionary, Ziegenbalg, sent home a thesis on Hindu beliefs and practices, his Halle professor told him "not to waste his time with studying pagan nonsense."

The control of the West over the East gradually grew. Kraemer sums it up in this way: "A culturally rich and saturated introvert world was confronted with restless dynamism."<sup>5</sup> The result was that, except for men such as Carey and Ward, the eighteenth and nineteenth century missionaries refused to see any spark of divinity in Hinduism. Duff, Wilson, Miller, and other early educational missionaries saw Apologetics as the passing on of western knowledge and culture. It was left to the eighteenth century Enlightenment to welcome the East. Goethe and Schopenhauer had great respect for Indian thought, and with the translation of the Gita and Upanishads into the European languages Idealist philosophers and Romantic poets were now able to study Indian philosophy. But there was still no real dialogue. There was no dialogue between Christians and Hindus in the East; nor was there dialogue between Christians and admirers of Indian philosophy in the West.

Gradually, a more balanced view arose. The appearance of Frazer's *Golden Bough* was followed in 1859 by the first of the 49 volumes of the *Sacred Books of the East*. Then came the work of the French Sanskritists. It was in 1873 that the first Chair in the History of Religions was started at Geneva. Finally, in India, Farquhar began to emphasize "the need for a constructive Christian attitude to Hinduism to replace the old attitude which the spirit of the age has rendered

obsolete and unworkable.”<sup>6</sup> The need was for “a new apologetic which would secure the Indian national heritage, while preserving the supremacy of the Christian Gospel, an apologetic moreover, embodied in high-class literature.”<sup>7</sup> Christianity is the fulfilment of Hinduism, he claimed. The ’twenties and ’thirties saw attempts at even greater sympathy with Hinduism. Chenchiah and his group, following De Nobili, claimed, “If instead of using Christ and Christian experience as a searchlight to discover the defects of Hinduism, we use Hinduism and Hindu experience to the elucidation of the meaning and purpose of Christ, we are at once rewarded with a twofold gain.” His exhortation was to “seek in Hinduism a positive key to the still inaccessible riches of Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, the missionary attitude was becoming almost compromising. At the 1928 Jerusalem Conference, Dr. R. Jones said that men like Dr. Radhakrishnan were “allies in our quest for perfection.” In 1932, the American report on “Re-thinking Missions” described Christianity as a “co-worker with the forces which are making for righteousness in every religious system,” and spoke of “a common search for truth,” and continued in a similar vein. It was in reaction to ideas such as this that Kraemer, as a sequel to the Tambaram Conference of 1938, wrote *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, an epoch-making book. At the time it was written, this book was very valuable and influential. In it, he stressed the discontinuity between Biblical religion and any other religion, the difference between revelation and human thought, and he asserted that all systems of belief cannot be viewed in parts but only as a totality of thought and practice. On the one hand, Kraemer regulated the syncretistic type of approach, but on the other hand he also turned men’s thoughts away from dialogue with Hinduism.

Dr. Devanandan took the lead in attempting to build up a post-Kraemer basis for dialogue which would open the way for communication with Hindus, and offer a Christian contribution to the building up of post-Independence India. The fruits of his work are still in the making. The old superiority approach, Farquhar's fulfilment approach, the syncretistic approach, Kraemer's neo-Barthian approach, have all been and gone; the new Dialogue Approach is in the making.

It will be seen from the above account, that very little actual dialogue with Hinduism has ever been attempted. Theories of contact have been put forward, theological discussions at a high level have considered the relationship of Hinduism to Christianity, but all this has mainly amounted to the study of Hinduism by Christians, rather than a dialogue between Hindus and Christians in any direct sort of confrontation. There has been comparatively little research into actual Hindu situations, such as local beliefs, village religion, or popular religious features. Professor H. H. Presler has begun work in this direction at Jabalpur. The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society at Bangalore has done fine pioneering work, but much of its research has necessarily been restricted to the conference-discussion type of dialogue, and to its research into the state of the Christian communities. The emphasis upon dialogue by high-level Christian leadership has not yet borne a great deal of fruit in actual concrete dialogue with Hindus.

# 2

## The Need for Dialogue

Why is there a need for dialogue with Hinduism? Perhaps three reasons come more immediately to mind. They are: to save the Church from itself and chronic inward-lookingness, to stimulate interest in the Gospel among Hindus; and to help in the formulation of a new theology for the modern situation. We will examine them separately now.

### For Renewal

The greatest need of the Church in India is for a renewal of its spiritual life. A commission appointed by the Church of South India, with Mr. R. D. Paul as chairman, recently produced its report called *Renewal and Advance*, in which it describes very honestly the weakness of the Church in that part of the country. Reports on the churches in Delhi and the Punjab give a similar picture of the state of the Church in those parts. Of the Delhi church, we read, "The parish has in recent years done practically nothing in the way of direct evangelism. Some of the reasons for this . . . are the ingrown state of the parish . . . "• Again, "In view of the size of the congregation and the resources available to it, the programme is surprisingly limited . . . There is also the attitude, which we have recently termed the qualm

mentality, that confines the activities of the Church within the bounds of the Christian community.”<sup>10</sup> Even in the Delhi church, with its wealthy and growing congregations, there is no understanding of or desire for the renewal of the Church. It is merely a favoured variant on the old Syrian community church. And if this is true of the church in Delhi, what are we to say about the other churches of North India? How little concern there is for spiritual values or for the Church’s ministry to the world! Concerning the Church in the Punjab, Ernest Y. Campbell comments, “The Punjab church is very much alive and is growing in many ways . . . the growth is . . . internal and the life is the somewhat introverted life of an army in the trenches rather than the aggressive life of an army on the march.”<sup>11</sup> In other parts of North India, it would be hard to discern much growth even within the life of the Church.

Another distressing weakness is more directly connected with our subject. The Indian Church is widely ignorant about the content and claims of modern Hinduism. The Church is set among Hindus who form about 80% of the population of modern India. Yet she is content with an unsympathetic and outdated view of Hindu beliefs and practices, and this view is often made the basis of missionary education abroad and of evangelistic efforts in India.

Even more disturbing is the resultant cultural isolation of the Church, and a lack of interest in the cultural renaissance and the broad concerns of Independent India. All this accentuates the inward-lookingness of the Church, and makes it difficult to witness or relevantly communicate the Gospel message to the teeming multitudes. Dialogue with Hinduism is essential for the sake of the Church herself.

Another connected factor is the feeling that Christians are “denationalized,” as Gandhi put it. It sometimes seems

that they are not concerned to indigenize the life of the Church, neither are they concerned to take their place in the mainstream of the national life of the country. Of two hundred great figures of Indian life and history mentioned in a popular book selling at the Lucknow railway station, not a single one is Christian. Even allowing for bias in the selection of the figures, what are we to say of that? It is significant that the people who are concerned about this problem are often the converts from Hinduism. "Let the building be ever so simple," said Narayan Vaman Tilak, "but let it be your own. Build a church with your own hands; live on one meal a day, endure privation, but build your own church. How long are you going to drink water from another's hands? How much longer are you to remain like a cat with its nose in the dish? It is a century since you became Christian; are you still to remain children only able to crawl?"<sup>12</sup>

It is now a century and a half, and the problem still remains. "To what a state have these missionaries reduced us!," wrote Tilak in 1895.<sup>13</sup> Seventy years later the full transition of spiritual power has not been fully achieved, and it is an Indian bishop, Bishop Sumitra, who now admits that "there are three devils in the Church: Power, Prestige and Property."<sup>14</sup> The Indian Christian Church, on the whole, has not yet seen the need for an Indian Christian theology, or for indigenous forms of worship, ministry and organizations—or if she has, this vision has not been translated into foreseeable action.

Dr. Devanandan was, characteristically, even more concerned about the Church becoming involved in national life. The kernel of his message was this: Here we are as Christian people in India. Here we are as a Church in the secular state of India. Much of the world is going, in general, in the totalitarian direction. India has chosen

democracy and the way of the secular State. In theory, at any rate, all religions and communities are on an equal footing. Our opportunity is great. A great India is in the making. We, as Christians, have our part to play in making it. Indeed, as Christians, we have a unique contribution to make in the forming of this new India which is toddling somewhat uncertainly along the highway of parliamentary democracy. And yet, look at us! Our "way of life, our introverted social relationships, our lack of civic concern." "What should become part of the environment," he writes, "is not the Gospel but the people who are committed to the claims of the Gospel."<sup>15</sup> He summons the Indian Christian to recover a sense of deep identity with his fellow Indians and to take his rightful place in the mainstream of Indian life.

The argument is sometimes maintained that to contact Hinduism is to invite syncretism. However, Niles's comment on Ceylon, "not syncretism but ghettoism is our chief temptation,"<sup>16</sup> is equally true of India. Moreover, India is not like Ceylon in having been ruled by a dominant religious party. The issue for Indian Christians is, "Where, as convinced Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs, do Indians as Indians find the secular common ground for cooperative endeavour to further the material welfare of all?"<sup>17</sup> "The Indian cultural heritage," Devanandan writes, "should be distinguished from social practices and cultural values enforced by religious sanctions which are acceptedly Hindu by belief and practice."<sup>18</sup> In order to work out this opportunity to determine what is the cultural life of Independent India, and in order to participate in its building up, dialogue with Hinduism is essential.

Another issue which could be seen more clearly in relationship to a dialogue with Hinduism is the unity of the

Church. Quite apart from Niles's comment, "The simple problem is that the demands of the world mission and the unity of the task are becoming too great for divided Christianity,"<sup>19</sup> the views of Hindu enquirers, who know little of the divisions of the Church, are important. So are the comments of men such as Dr. Radhakrishnan, "We start by claiming that Christianity is the only true religion and then affirm that Protestantism is the only true sect of Christianity, Episcopalianism the only true Protestantism, the High Church the only true Episcopal Protestant Christian religion, and our particular standpoint the only true representation of the High Church view."<sup>20</sup> A dialogue with Hinduism would lead to a closer dialogue within Christianity herself, and speed on the process begun in the Church of South India and envisaged for the Church of North India.

Other points of weakness in the Indian Church could be mentioned, such as lack of deep fellowship, lack of the sense of being a pilgrim people, a bias in the seminaries against evangelism in favour of the inward nurture of the Church, and so on. All these would fall into perspective through dialogue with Hinduism. Yet, it is important to remember that in all these points of weakness, the Indian Church is by no means unique. Inwardness, lack of concern for the world around, lack of concern for renewal, spiritual shallowness, and disunity, are features of the Church in many lands. William Stringfellow wrote in 1962, that, "For the Christian faith, the happiest thing to happen in America for a long time is the recession of religion . . . The religious revival was no return to the Gospel anyway, and, though it enriched some churches in both numbers and assets, it was no renewal of the Church."<sup>21</sup> Earlier, in 1946, G.Morgan put it in another way; "the error is the error, which is the curse of modern civilization, of judging men

and institutions not by what they are inwardly but by what they do apparently. Priests are promoted because they are active in good works and have the attributes of an efficient civil servant.”<sup>22</sup> There is need for the renewal of the Church in every land. This could be illustrated over and over again. But the fact remains that these problems are intensified and more obvious in the Indian Church.

Significantly enough, this weakness is paralleled by that of the Church at work in many parts of the Muslim world. Dr. George Carpenter, summing up the conclusions reached by a committee meeting in the Netherlands to consider “Evangelism Among Muslims in Western Nigeria” used these words:

1. It was evident that very little is being done to reach Muslims in Africa with the Gospel . . . The general attitude has been: “Win pagans to Christ before they turn to Mohammed. Once they are Muslims there is little hope of winning them.”
2. This attitude is based partly on lack of knowledge and understanding of Islam, and partly on fear of Islam *because* it is so largely unknown.
3. It is therefore necessary, urgently and without delay, to make genuine contact with Islam. This involves a basic change of strategy. Islam in Africa must be given a high priority.

Although there is no direct parallel between dialogue with Hinduism in India and dialogue with Islam in Africa, it would seem that the basic problems are the same: the feeling that there should be concentration on the animistic peoples; that there is little chance with people who are firmly attached to Hinduism; lack of understanding and knowledge of Hinduism; a real fear of Hinduism; and the

urgency to make genuine contact with Hinduism. In other words, the need for dialogue.

While it is right to point out the weaknesses of the Church—and if the Church does not see her weakness and repent how can she be renewed?—it is also true to say that the Church is lacking in confidence and a sense of security.

Dialogue with Hinduism would reveal that the Hindu religion in India faces as many problems as does the Church. Even now, there is an attempt in Delhi to ban communal parties on the assumption that Hindu communalism is a threat to the integrity of the country, and this is by no means the only problem. Christians would also see that Hindus are men and women, just as Christian people are men and women, beset by anxieties and insecurities. In these, and many other ways, true dialogue would help restore the confidence of the Church in India, and put her in touch with the real situation rather than an ogre of her own imagining.

### For Presenting Christ to Hindus

A second major reason why dialogue with Hinduism is necessary is that many opportunities to show Jesus to Hindus are being lost by default. There is an interest in Christianity among Hindus. Theologically, we believe that Christ is at work already in His own way among the peoples of the world. Niles comments, "This previousness of Jesus in the lives of men and women is the fact of central importance in understanding how He ministers to persons. He comes, He arrives at His own time, in His own way, by His own initiative."<sup>23</sup> Salvation is for all mankind; the image of God is in all men; there is a moral sub-structure known to all. There is a divine preparation in the lives of individuals and often communities for their acceptance of

the Gospel. This has sometimes been described theologically as the presence of a *logos spermatikos*, a germinal form of the Divine Logos, in other religions. Winslow claims that, "we have already to hand one great asset from within Hinduism itself,"<sup>24</sup> namely the desire among many (for example the Bhakti worshippers) for the forgiveness and grace of God. "What is needed," he writes, "is a worthier object of devotion and trust than the blue-throated Shiva, or the black squat image of Vithoba at Pandharpur, or even the awe-inspiring Krishna of the Gita. The one and only wholly satisfying object is the God revealed in Christ."<sup>25</sup> If a man is truly seeking peace, or a personal God in whom he can fully put his trust, an introduction to Jesus would help him satisfy his heart's desire.

Alongside this previousness of Christ within the life of Hinduism, there is also the factor of the inadequacies within Hinduism. The question is arising in the minds of some people as to whether the Hindu solutions are adequate to the needs of modern India. Are the reinterpretations of Hindu doctrine by Dr. Radhakrishnan and others based upon the classic bases of Hinduism, or are they really derived from a new anthropology? Do they really answer the problems raised by practical living in the world? Do they adequately interpret the meaning, role, and destiny of man, and the meaning, role, and destiny of the world and the historical process? Young people, faced by the perplexities of a changing society and a technological world, are questioning the mythologies upon which Hindu belief is based. Does the Hindu religion meet the total situation of Independent India?

K. M. Panikkar, and others too, while admitting that Hinduism is valid in the religious area of life, want to question the right of Hinduism to have any say at all in social and economic life. Caste is being questioned on historical

grounds. "The seers of the early Vedic period know nothing of caste."<sup>26</sup> "The high metaphysics of the Upanishads and the ethics of the Gita have been reduced to mere words by the tyranny of caste."<sup>27</sup> The disproportion between theory and practice is arousing questions in the minds of thoughtful Hindus, both on the spiritual plane (in the case of excesses by sadhus and abuses in the life of temples), and on the political plane (in connection with corruption and its attendant evils). One is reminded of the declaration of President Nasser, at the time of Egyptian independence, that the thing he longed for most of all was an unselfish Egyptian. India's main need is for unselfish people to build up her life. The laws against corruption cannot ultimately be enforced unless the sin of selfishness is not only traced but dealt with. Hinduism does not truly realize or deal with the problem of the corruption of human nature and the remaking of man. What Christ, and therefore the Christian mission, holds in trust is profoundly meaningful for the whole life, aspiration, and future of India.

But India has not yet really seen the true meaning of Christ. It is not so much that she has had Christ and lost Him, as that she has never yet really had Him or really grappled with Him. We will see later that part of the implication of dialogue is to understand the problems and gropings of Hinduism. At the same time, the Christian role is to confront Hinduism with Christ as He really is. There are many Hindus who are now vaguely looking for Christ and, indeed, whom Christ is now calling, who are unable to truly see Him. There are those with longings which could be satisfied by Christ who have not yet met Christ. Part of the reason for this is that the Church has not entered into dialogue with Hinduism, and therefore does not know where these secret seekers are or how to interpret to them the significance of their unrest, or Him in whom is their

rest. There is a great opportunity in India for the Gospel; all that is wanting is the vision to seize it.

## For the World Church

The third reason why dialogue with Hinduism is necessary is that it will be of value to the world Church. The theology of the Church has been cradled, nurtured, and formulated within Western Europe. In spite of contributions from the Eastern churches, the Orthodox communions, and the American theologians, this would still be largely true today. The Eastern contributions mentioned above, in connection with the history of contact between the East and West, were inevitably virtually swamped by the Greek, Roman, and Medieval European elements. The theology and structure of the Church grew up as they did largely by the accident of history. The Gospel was imprisoned in Western Europe during the time of its spread and interpretation, and during its most formative years.

This Western Europe, after the Muslim conquest of North Africa, was besieged from the South by a confident people who bore the flag of Islam. This Western Europe was in constant danger of invasion from the East by the Mongol or Tartar hordes who threatened Eastern Europe *via* Russia. There was danger from the south-east too from the Turks who threatened Vienna as late as 1683. From the North also, the Vikings were, for some time, a predatory drain upon the resources of Europe. Meanwhile, the collapse of the Roman Empire, even in the modified form of Pirenne's thesis, meant that Christianity had to act as the spiritual leaven within the rise of a new civilization. And in this new civilization, Christianity and the barbarians who poured into the Roman Empire from the North (the Germans call this influx of barbarians the *Volkerwanderung*)

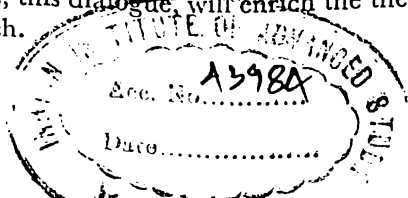
were the new and determining factors. Besieged from without, surrounded by chaos within Western Europe, it is not surprising that the theology and the administration of the Church developed in a Western European way. How else could they have developed? However, the rise of modern science within Western Europe, and the discovery of the rest of the world to which she could introduce her science and revolutionary technology, have brought Western Europe, and with her the Gospel, into contact with different civilizations. The result was that the Gospel presentation and Church structures, that had been built up within and were indigenous to Western Europe, were taken and applied to other countries, including India, where they were not necessarily so relevant.

For some time past, theologians have been aware of the fact that, just as the Church learnt from its environment during the Western European stage of her growth, so too she can now learn from the new surroundings in which she finds herself. This is especially true of India, where the environment includes an ancient and yet still living religion, namely, Hinduism. By dialogue with Hinduism, Christians can come to a deeper understanding of their own Gospel and its nature. Not only will this be of value to Christians in India, in building up an Indian Christian theology, it will also give insights to the whole world Church. Perhaps there may be something in the statement of the President of India, who puts the point very strongly, "Perhaps Christianity, which arose out of an Eastern background and early in its career got wedded to Graeco-Roman culture, may find her rebirth today in the heritage of India."<sup>28</sup>

The limiting factors supplied by the Western European background have been twofold. Firstly, Christian theology has come down to us in the thought-forms of Greek philosophy. The central ideas of Greek philosophy are those of

the importance of the individual, the importance of reason, and the importance of logic. Along with them, we may include the Logos theology, and the Roman insistence upon unity. These are the garments with which the body of Christian theology has been clothed. Now the Gospel itself is always essentially the same. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and for ever. But the thought-forms with which we clothe the Gospel, and by which we communicate Christ, differ; the European expression of Christianity has been in the thought-forms of Greece.

However, the central ideas of Oriental thinking are different. Professor H. C. Jackson, in an article, "The Forthcoming Role of the Non-Christian Religious Systems as Contributory to Christian Theology," makes the point that, in place of the Greek ideas, the Oriental stress is upon community rather than the individual, upon being rather than knowing, upon the keeping together of opposites rather than analysing everything out into logical parts. Therefore the Indian theologian is working against a background of different ideas compared with his counterpart in the West. People may differ about the exact inheritance to Christianity from Greek philosophy, and about the exact ingredients of Hinduism from which the Church might hope to derive new insights. However, the fact remains that Christianity is called to ecumenize her theology by drawing on the resources of the other world cultures, the mind structures of other societies, and the catalyzing agents of hitherto uncontacted civilizations. Kraemer discerns, "Foreshadowings of a still approaching meeting, interpenetration and *Ansein andersetzung* of cultural attitudes and orientations contained in these civilizations, and of inevitable mutual religious influence and stimulus."<sup>29</sup> This mutual religious influence and stimulus, this dialogue, will enrich the theology of the world Church.



However, until the parallel monologues of Christianity with other religions become dialogues, this will not be possible. Devanandan comments, "The Church is not only built by the spirit of God working within it, but also by the spirit of God working outside it."<sup>80</sup> Niles calls for "a theology which is on the frontiers of religions in their mutual existence,"<sup>81</sup> and "a concern to cross with the Gospel every secular frontier between man and man—whether it be the frontier of race or class, caste or culture, tribe or language, nation or country."<sup>82</sup> Niles states, "a doctrine of the Church must, therefore, be always forward-looking, not only in the sense that it looks forward in hope to the final consummation of the ages, but in the sense that it takes account all the time of the unreached, the unaccomplished, the unattempted." This "involves the re-thinking . . . of every other part of Christian doctrine as well . . . we need a new theology adequate to the crises, the opportunities, the unexplored possibilities of the new day."<sup>83</sup>

Needless to say, this new theology will find its roots in a deeper study of the Bible, and a deeper obedience to Christ. It is on this basis that dialogue will help in producing new insights. The World Council of Churches Report on "The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Man" sums up the point thus: "such new theological interpretation must be based on a proper understanding of other faiths in their living forms as experienced in actual encounter with their adherents. We are convinced that this will enrich our understanding of our own calling as Christians."<sup>84</sup> The third reason for dialogue is summed up thus: Dialogue with Hindus will enrich our understanding of our own calling as Christians.

The second limiting factor inherited by Christianity from the Western European background has already been touched upon. All the theological formulation of the

Church was done within one civilization, and with no frame of reference outside the Western European civilization. Christianity built up for herself a dominant position in Europe. She was not only the dominant religion; she was the *only* religion. Therefore the great doctrinal statements, the Arminian-Calvinist discussions, the attitude of the Church to the great themes of the Gospel, were all worked out behind closed doors. They were worked out by dialogue of Christian with Christian. Now the position is very different, for no one religion can claim to be utterly aloof from the rest, or to be in a majority. Dr. Cantwell Smith has stated that, "the Christian community is at the moment theologically unequipped for living in the twentieth century, with its pluralistic mankind."<sup>35</sup> The need, then, as stated above, is to fashion a new theology which will be adequate to the situation in which we live, a situation in which people of different religions have been brought together in a new way. This is part of the point of dialogue.

# 3

## Attitude in Dialogue

What should be the attitude to another religion assumed by those taking part in dialogue with its adherents? There would appear to be five main alternatives. We will look first at those two attitudes which seem to be ruled out *a priori* by the very use of the word "dialogue." By sketching these, and the other possibilities, it will be easier to determine what attitude would be more appropriate.

The first attitude has been historically the dominant one. It assumes that all non-Christians are going to hell; that if Christianity is true, then other religions must be wholly false; that no one can come to the Father, in any way, or to any extent, except through Jesus. In its more modern form, this idea can be seen in Abbé Dubois's description of Hinduism as pure paganism, and in Grant's conviction that the destiny of the Empire was to bring a wholly heathen India to a true knowledge of the Gospel. According to this view, Christianity is quite exclusive; any contact with another religion must be in the form of a defence of the Gospel, or alternatively in the form of downright attack; Eastern spirituality is very inferior. This extreme view is rarely held now and, where it is held, it is obvious that no dialogue could be attempted.

The second attitude lies at the other extreme. This school of thought, seen in Aldous Huxley, A. Guenon, and possibly

the great historian Toynbee, would surrender any particularity in Christianity, and be syncretistic. According to this view, Christianity becomes identified or fused with other religions in order that it may become part of a great, universal religion. But in order to make way for this emphasis upon universal religion, or universality, artificial similarities between Christianity and other religions are magnified out of all proportion. In order to establish that Christianity and other religions equal one another, it is necessary to completely ignore contexts and mind-structures, so that the supposed Christian message that this school describes loses all connection with the Biblical religion. The approach of this school is purely intellectual; it offers no chance for dialogue; and is equally as off-centre as the first approach. The purpose of dialogue is not to co-operate in the forming of a new religion in which all the others will be incorporated. The living religions are not, as Dr. Bhagwan Das would claim, "really identical in their essential teachings and injunctions."<sup>36</sup>

The other possible attitudes lie in a state of tension between these two extremes. They neither condemn Hinduism; nor do they suppose that there is no difference between the two faiths.

The first of these—our third attitude—we have hinted at already. J. N. Farquhar, for evangelistic purposes, and also following the lead given many centuries before by Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, asserted that God, who is the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, has spoken to all men, whether they have heard of Christ or not. At the same time, he disapproved of some elements in the Hinduism of his experience, and his aim was to get rid of them, and to crown the good elements with the Gospel, so that Hinduism might become fulfilled in Christianity. The proof text here might have been Acts 17:23, "What you worship but do

not know—this is what I now proclaim,” just as the proof text of the first school might have been John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.” The snag with the Farquhar approach was that it involved taking isolated doctrines of Hinduism from the whole corpus of that religion, and showing that they are fulfilled in Christ. Not only is this a very subjective approach, it misses the point that a religion can only be seen as a whole, not by reference to its isolated parts.

The fourth attitude is that pronounced by Kraemer. This school stresses the importance of revelation. According to them, there is a difference between religion, which is man's upward striving to find God, and revelation, which is God's downward coming to seek out man. All religions, including Christianity, are under the judgment of God. To find God, there is a need for radical repentance. Accordingly, there is no continuity between “religious life,” and the life of faith shown in the Gospel. Following Schleiermacher's fifth “Discourse on Religion,” and Otto's research into *bhakti*, Kraemer also emphasized, in *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, the fact that each religion must be seen as a whole.

It is obvious that if we take Kraemer's thesis at its face value, dialogue would be very difficult. Tillich has tried to modify this view by keeping Kraemer's theological approach but allying it to a sort of neo-Platonic philosophical approach. Dialogue then becomes possible in the philosophical circle, although it still remains irrelevant in the theological circle. Kraemer also, in his later work, modified his outlook slightly, later admitted that signs can be found, in non-Christian religions, of a positive though partial response to the Word of God. Perhaps the valuable part of his approach is that he restates the

problem as involving not how far Christianity is related to Hinduism, but how far any religion relates to God's revelation in Christ. However, even with Kraemer's modified approach, his views do not give a real basis for dialogue.

## Giving and Receiving

The final main attitude assumes that in all religions there is the possibility of faith between man and God, and in Christianity this has become a gift to all men. This idea does involve a method of dialogue whereby the Christian, having listened to the other faith in order to understand and acknowledge it, then addresses the Gospel to it. The scriptural justification for this view might be found in Romans 10, verses 1 and following, where Paul is considering a right attitude towards Judaism.

"My heart's desire is that they should be saved," says Paul in verse one. The aim is not attack, or polemic, or the desire to emerge victorious in argument, but the desire that others should share the Christian experience of the grace of God.

"They have a zeal for God," said Paul in verse two. Hindu brethren are serving God in the way known to them. They are to be fully respected as such. Sympathetic understanding and knowledge of Hindu belief and way of life is essential.

"But not according to knowledge," continues verse two. This indicates an absence of the knowledge of the Gospel. Knowledge of this Gospel is to be conveyed by means of dialogue.

This approach, at its best, intends to both give and receive. It seeks to find out what message is conveyed to us by the Hindu, and what is our message to the Hindu? Cuttat talks of men, "Whose biblical faith did not close . . .

but opened their eyes to all spiritual values of the Orient, and whose loving knowledge of the East did not weaken. . . . but deepened their biblical spirituality.”<sup>37</sup> This approach does not involve total intolerance of the other religion, or utter surrender to it, “But a real answer, arising out of more, not of less faith and love, a full monotheistic reply.”<sup>38</sup> The concern here is not to demonstrate the absolute validity of Christianity, but rather the uniqueness of Christianity.

Accordingly, there is, in this approach, an element of tension. It is far different from the view expressed by Reinhold Niebhuur that Christianity and Judaism, “despite differences, are sufficiently alike for the Jew to find God more easily in terms of his own religious heritage than by subjecting himself to the hazards of guilty feeling involved in conversion.”<sup>39</sup> As Neill puts it, “Dialogue is not the same thing as dispassionate and academic discussion; it implies an element of engagement, of rival claims to certain common territory, of perhaps unexpressed hostility, of the desire to win. All this, of course, can be carried through in the truest spirit of friendship and mutual respect.”<sup>40</sup> Devanandan expresses the same idea in yet another way when he states that, “Conviction about one’s own religious beliefs does not necessarily involve condemnation of the faith of others. True, it does mean being sure of one’s own faith . . .”<sup>41</sup> Dialogue, he states, “if it is to be genuine and fruitful, will of course start with the understanding that we agree to differ.”<sup>42</sup>

The method of dialogue need not weaken the missionary claim. Far from it. Christian zeal does not grow out of intellectual beliefs, nor out of theological arguments, although they have their place, but out of love. Or perhaps we should say, out of Love. It is the completeness of our commitment to the Lord, and the extent to which He has apprehended us, that are the determining factors of our

zeal—not whether we believe that God is, or is not, at work within other religions.

We have looked at the five main attitudes that can be adopted towards other religions. In fact, in the practical implementation of dialogue, it would be possible to work with a flexible doctrine of God's activity within other religions. The important thing is that the work should go on. Although it is necessary to start with some presuppositions, these need not be inflexible. They can be made open to reasonable change as a result of the actual experience of dialogue.

Elements of the third, fourth, and fifth attitudes we have examined would all be relevant.

Farquhar's recalling of the Alexandrine Fathers' doctrine of God's initiative is relevant. God seeks all men. He speaks in some way to all men at all times. He is the God of truth, and truth may be found, in different degrees, in other religions. "God is no respecter of persons." "He has not left Himself without a witness." "In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." There is ample Biblical backing for such a view.

Kraemer's view that all religions must be seen as a whole is also relevant. Part of the task of dialogue is to illuminate the difference between different faiths, and to understand Hinduism from the inside, so that we know what it really means to be a Hindu. Along with this, there is also value in studying isolated doctrines, if we keep in mind the fact that there are fundamental differences.

Kraemer's insistence upon the importance of revelation is also valuable, because it is a salutary reminder that, within flexible limits, the Christian must have a clear idea of what are the fundamentals of his faith, and that he must refuse any compromise of Christ. Kraemer drives the Christian back to the Bible. The old comparisons based

upon general and special revelation, continuity and discontinuity, falsehood and truthfulness, natural and supernatural, are theoretical deductions. "It has become evident," says the World Council of Churches' statement, "that a fresh attempt at a theological statement of the relation of the Gospel to the living faiths of men should not remain entangled in theoretical alternatives . . . It should rather start from the Biblical message that as God is the Creator of all men, so is His salvation in Jesus Christ offered to all men, and that in Him there is a new Creation."<sup>43</sup>

The fifth and final attitude described above, based upon dialogue, is obviously the most relevant view to accommodate the method of dialogue. But this does not make it an exclusive one.

In addition to what has been mentioned above, the elements of another approach are emerging. This approach too will be relevant, especially in India. This method stresses not what is right or wrong in other religions, but rather the world of which they are all a part. "The hope rather is," comments Niles, "so to open up the whole question that future discussion of it will move away from the world of religions as such and become lodged in that reality of human life in which God's sovereign mercy and man's blundering faith are in mutual relation, informing that life in all its parts and informing its every activity."<sup>44</sup> The plea is for an approach which will concentrate more upon the nature and destiny of man and the world, than the differences between religions as such.

These, then, are some of the theological factors which will prove to be important as a background to the concept and practice of dialogue.

## The Common Basis for Dialogue

At this point, it may be opportune to ask, "What is the common basis for the dialogue?" There must be a basis, and this basis must be acceptable to both sides, because dialogue is very much the activity of two parties, and requires the involvement of them both.

Cuttat mentions the "awareness of the sacred" as the common spiritual ground of West and East. For him, this is the point of contact.

H. H. Farmer, in his book *Revelation and Reason*, offers a cluster of ideas as forming the basis of an intelligent dialogue. They include: worship as an experience of God as totally other; God as other in the perfection of all values; some sort of I-Thou meeting; God as one who demands all; God as the giver of all; God present in man's own being through the Spirit; a feeling of awe, joy, and exaltation. It is significant that Farmer also seems to be pointing to the "awareness of the sacred" as a basis for dialogue, although some of his categories raise grave doubts as to whether they would form any ground for dialogue with Vedanta Hinduism. The awareness of the sacred, then, could be a real basis in relation to the more spiritually inclined section of Hinduism, the more traditional section perhaps.

Kraemer would say that the only basis for any discussion is faith. But surely faith would be the summit of dialogue, and its basis may be found in an awareness of the sacred. Sincere followers can start from this point where they are united.

A more particular starting point for dialogue is being utilized by Paul Sudhakar, namely, the Gita. He begins with the Gita, and the concepts in it that are common to Hindus and Christians, and ends with Christ. Dr. A. V.

Mathew remarks, "It is helpful to take into consideration those views regarding God which we find in the Gita and which we as Christians also may accept on the whole, in spite of the differences in emphases and the inevitable differences in phrascology."<sup>46</sup>

Yet another starting point has been mentioned already, namely, the *world* of which both Christians and Hindus are members.

It would seem that the basis for dialogue would vary from person to person, and from particular section of Hinduism to particular section of Hinduism. The nature, role, and destiny of man, or the meaning of community, might be the basis of dialogue in connection with the modern secularized Hindu; the awareness of the sacred the basis for dialogue with the Vedanta Hindu; the Gita the basis for dialogue with the Bhakti Hindu; Christ Himself might be the basis for dialogue with the seeking Hindu; or perhaps even more relevant than these bases or others we might mention would be the basis suggested by the Hindu himself.

One who is dedicated to his Lord, and open to the Hindu, and zealous to do this work, will find by experience the right basis. And this basis will not be a stable one. It will vary according to the previousness of Christ in the life of the people concerned.

# 4

## Requisites for Dialogue

### Knowledge of Hinduism

What are the requisites for this work of dialogue?

Perhaps the first is a knowledge of Hinduism. If a man comes seeking peace, his desire may be satisfied from a knowledge of Christianity alone. But this would not be dialogue, it would involve the technique for dealing with enquirers which is roughly common the world over. If a man comes, conversant with and apprehended by Hinduism, in order to engage in discussion, it is essential that the Christian have a good knowledge of Hinduism. It would not be any handicap for the evangelist who deals with enquirers to have a knowledge of Hinduism, as this would help him in his work as well. In order to engage in dialogue with Hindus, it is vital that we know the main facts about the Hindu religion, its life, belief, and worship. In order to engage in dialogue with learned Hindus, it will be necessary to have a deep knowledge of Hinduism.

The basic knowledge required would include a rough history of the evolution of Hinduism; an outline knowledge of the Vedas, Upanishads, and the Gita; an awareness of the modern developments in Hinduism; recognition of the basic ideas underlying the different sections of Hinduism;

also knowledge of the differences within that religion, and of their social implications. This analytical knowledge can be learned by scientific means through a study of comparative religion. However, it is obvious that mere clinical knowledge will not advance one far along the path of dialogue. What is needed is an understanding of Hinduism so that it becomes possible to share the inner aspirations of the Hindu, to sympathise with his anxieties, and to see his religion in some way as he sees it.

Yet the two are linked. Knowledge without understanding, and understanding without knowledge are equally lacking. The one supplements the other. The man with knowledge is more likely to understand; and the man with understanding is more likely to want to know. Let us, then, investigate more closely what a knowledge of Hinduism really involves.

It has sometimes been claimed that studying Hinduism is like diving into the sea—it is so vast and complex. Even Hindu leaders are seeing the need to be more analytical concerning the fundamental question of all, “What is Hinduism?” While keeping in mind the depth and diversity of Hinduism, it is possible to be more analytical and specific about its nature than some might suppose. Knowledge is the first essential for understanding. Cragg comments in another context, “the Christian Church is in tremendous need of recognizing and knowing the meaning of Islam. For long centuries there has been a kind of immunity.”<sup>16</sup> There is the same need for recognizing and knowing the meaning of Hinduism. Although Hinduism is more diffuse than Islam, there is, among Hindus, that sense of “being a Hindu” which it is necessary to know and understand. Although there are many different sections of Hinduism, *very* different sections of Hinduism, there are also some basic things that bind Hindus together.

What, then, are the basic features of Hinduism? Perhaps there are three fundamental characteristics. Firstly, there is the caste system. It has been questioned by many, including men of the ilk of the great historian Panikkar.<sup>47</sup> It has been modified by legislation. Yet Gita commentators and various Hindu leaders would defend it on the plea that "the *chaturvarna* scheme of society should not be discarded as it is based on Hindu conceptions of man and creation." In practice, the caste system is still a dominant feature in the life of India. Legislation cannot change the whole way of life of a society overnight. The Communists are finding this in Tibet, backed as they are by the ruthless apparatus of a totalitarian society. In the democratic, secular state of India, the caste system bequeathed by the centuries continues its hallowed way.

The second fundamental of Hinduism is the idea of the validity of the law of retribution. All life is based upon the principles of *karma* and *samsara*; the importance of the actions that we do, and the theory of reincarnation according to the merits of what we have done. Each man builds up his character at every stage of his life according to the actions he performs. He suffers, in this life and the next, according to what he has done, and the way he has lived. He continues to be re-born upon this basis, and this basis is thought to be a very just basis.

Thirdly, within Hinduism, there is a characteristic outlook upon religion. There is a sense of the invisible and supernatural. These three features have remained, throughout the development of Hinduism, in some form or another. As this is not a text-book of Hinduism, there is no need to go into them in further detail. The challenge is that we should be clearly aware of them.

The story of this development has been long and complex. In fact, it has extended over 4,000 years, from the Age of

the Vedas to the Age of Gandhi and onwards. It is unnecessary to know this development in detail, and there will be no attempt here to do more than sketch the essential outlines: Perhaps this progression can best be seen by referring to the growth of the Hindu scriptures. It is generally held that the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavad Gita are the formative books of Hindu scripture. On this reckoning, the foundation of Hinduism is found in the Vedas; the Upanishads draw out the implications of the Vedas in a manner similar to that in which the New Testament of the Christians fulfils the Old Testament; and the Gita summarises in manageable form the essence of the Upanishads.

In the *mantras*, or hymns, of the Rigveda, the early poets progressed from the idea of the worship of fire, wind and rain, to the idea of the worship of powerful gods, such as Indra and Varuna. And finally they attempted to point to the idea of the worship of an Absolute God. They also sang of the gods as the preservers of the cosmic order, and even of the moral order of things.

After the Age of the Poets, came the Age of the Priests who wrote the Brahmanas. Now ritual and sacrifice rose in importance. Moreover, the four-ashrama theory took root, and Vishnu and Shiva came into the picture as gods to be worshipped.

The tendencies of these first two Vedic periods were summed up in the Upanishads. In the Upanishads, the significant ideas hinted at in the Vedas were given definite shape. The wood was separated from the trees. The relevant was given clearer emphasis, and the irrelevant was discarded. The master Vedantic conceptions of the Absolute, the Self, salvation, *karma*, re-birth, and the way of self-realization, all come into play. As Sharma puts it, "the gods recede into the background, the priests are subordina-

ted, sacrifices are looked down upon, contemplation takes the place of worship, and the acquisition of divine knowledge takes precedence over the performance of rites and ceremonies."<sup>48</sup> Yet, Upanishadic Hinduism was still intellectual and for the few. Up to that time, there was no emphasis on *yoga* or *bhakti*, on temples or images. There was nothing for the masses.

This situation was largely remedied during the Epic Age, which gave birth to the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, and hence to the Gita. In the Gita, the development becomes complete. The Age of the Gita followed the old tradition, but also extended it in such a way that the Hindu religion could be taken up by the common man. The temples were thrown open; the subject matter of the epics was intelligible to the ordinary man; the gods of the common man were taken into the Hindu pantheon; the cultures of the Dravidians, who were the original inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent, and the Aryans, who invaded India from outside, became fused; active life was extolled as being useful, and in no way inferior to asceticism;—and thus Hinduism became popular. The idea of a personal god, Ishwara, became popular at that time and, with it, the idea of devotion to a personal god through *bhakti*—love and faith. Moreover, the new doctrine of the *Avatara*, or incarnation, brought in the idea that god himself came down into the world to help man. Accordingly, worship of the incarnations arose; worship of Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti arose; and pilgrimages, temples, processions, and images became popular. The process was all but complete.

The foundations of Hinduism were now laid. "Subsequent ages only added a few details here and there and systematized the ideals that lay scattered before."<sup>49</sup> The process of popularizing was continued in the Puranas, Tantras

and Agamas. With the rise of the sects, separate bodies of sacred writings were built up by the Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti disciples. These were sometimes in local languages, and sometimes not of Brahmin origin. Another trend arose as well, in which the aim was to emphasize the basic Vedanta doctrines. The six schools of philosophy were variants on this theme according to their particular emphases. Later Sankara and Ramanuja came into conflict concerning the basis of the meaning of God. The medieval and modern periods have seen the rise of the other *bhakti* sects, and the reforming movements.

But throughout this development, the teaching of the Gita that there is no fundamental difference between these forms, has been remembered. Underlying them all are basic Hindu axioms: that ultimate reality is essentially unknowable; that no one theological doctrine about God is absolutely valid; that selective grouping of religious fundamentals is valid; but that every Hindu has the right and privilege of accepting and using whatever way of life happens to be suitable to his own nature, ideas, and circumstances. Devanandan claims, "the basic Hindu doctrine about the essential nature of Reality as unknowable has never been laid in question."<sup>50</sup> Radhakrishnan claims, "The differences among the sects of the Hindus are more or less on the surface, and the Hindus as such remain a distinct cultural unit, with a common history, a common literature, and a common civilization."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps this statement glosses over too much, yet it makes the point that there is unity as well as diversity in Hinduism.

It is necessary to realize that there is diversity within the unity of Hinduism, both in order to understand Hinduism, and because a different type of dialogue may be necessary for each type of Hinduism. We will therefore analyze the different sections within the Hindu community.

The first section is the Animistic community. Neill separates this group out as a distinct entity under the title of Animism, but, at least since Independence, it has been claimed for Hinduism. McGavran, in his books *The Bridges of God* and *How Churches Grow*, emphasizes the opinion that there is a great opportunity for the Church among these animistic peoples. During the next fifty years or so, these people will enter the mainstream of civilization. This will happen not only in India but throughout the world. They will give their allegiance to some faith or cause. What faith or cause will that be? McGavran comments, "To work out a statement of the Gospel acceptable to Hindus is not so much needed as to work out a statement acceptable to those varieties of Hindus who are showing themselves approachable."<sup>52</sup> This may or may not be true absolutely, but it is true to this extent—that the greatest potential growth of the Church is likely to occur among these animistic brethren. It is important to work out the correct "dialogue" with them, just as it is important to work out the dialogue with all varieties of Hinduism. Moreover, although the term animistic is usually applied to aboriginal peoples who live in forest areas outside the more conventional village life of the plains, it would also be true to say that some of the conventional village religion is really animism. The ideas of Allen and McGavran may well be relevant in engaging in dialogue with both aboriginal peoples and village animists.

The second type may be described as the polytheistic type of popular Hinduism. This has developed in its own way throughout the centuries, and it differs from place to place. Its growth has been largely uncharted. We have much information about the schools of philosophy, and the religious systems, but surprisingly little about the development of popular Hinduism. How and why did it become

what it has become? In fact, the development and practices vary according to background, caste, sex, age, and sect, and the proliferation of popular Hinduism has been in different directions. Apart from the gods and goddesses of the villager, it is often true that, "Rocks, stocks, and stones, pools, and rivers, his own implements of trade, the animals he finds most useful, the noxious reptiles he fears, men remarkable for any extraordinary qualities—for great valour, sanctity, virtue or even vice—good and evil demons, ghosts and goblins, the spirits of departed ancestors, and infinite number of semi-human, semi-divine existences . . . each and all of these come in for a share of divine honour or a tribute of more or less adoration."<sup>53</sup> There need be no connection between popular religion and moral life. "In the minds of the ordinary villager there is no direct connection between religion and the moral code. The gods do not come within the moral category. The function of the gods is not the direction of morals but the distribution of blessings and, if not duly propitiated, of curses."<sup>54</sup>

Different parts of India have different annual festivals connected with different gods and goddesses. Other festivals are family or economic affairs. The variety of festivals is terrific.

There are certain differences between the popular Hinduism of North and South India. In the South, the village priests are often not Brahmins; the village deity there is often a goddess rather than a god; the deity of that region is often worshipped with animal sacrifices. Although the Indian village deity has a sphere of interest usually restricted only to the immediate district, there are these broad contrasts between North and South.

But, though the particular deities and circumstances of village Hinduism may be separate, there is a general resemblance between these manifestations of popular Hindu-

ism. What is the best method of dialogue that would be appropriate in contacting them?

The third type is more sophisticated and, in many ways, the nearest to Christianity. It is the theistic type of *bhakti* religion adopted by a number of sects. This group of Hindus worships a personal god through devotion and love. To that extent dialogue with this group is easier because the common ground is already there. Otto describes it as "India's religion of grace." "In this Indian *bhakti* religion," he writes, "there is presented without doubt, a real saving God, believed, received, and—can we doubt it—experienced."<sup>55</sup> Of one of its early influential figures, Ramanuja, Otto can write, "he belongs among the most impressive figures of the entire history of religion on account of the great element of his life. That element was something immense. It was in fact a struggle for God himself."<sup>56</sup> Even though Indian *bhakti* religion and Christianity have the same approach to a personal God through faith and love and forgiveness, there are also deep differences between them. But the way of dialogue can be mapped out with this group on the basis of this search and devotion to a personal God, although again we must recognize, that for the Hindu in different regions, the identity of the god and other things too may be different.

The fourth type is the philosophic type of Hindu intellectual religion. This school is restricted to the educated minority of Indians. But it is quite influential, perpetuated as it has been, by a long tradition. It is significant that Hindus refer to the history of Hinduism as the history of Hindu philosophy. They do not refer to Hindu theology. Philosophy has played an important part in the development and growth of Hinduism. "Philosophy in India had its origin and inspiration in, and aimed to serve the interests of, religion,"<sup>57</sup> writes S. R. Shastri. All the schools of Indian

philosophy have attempted to erect their ideas upon the foundation of the Upanishads. Indian philosophy and Hinduism are intertwined. Again there is the problem that there is more than one type of Indian philosophy, but it would be true to say that the dominant philosophy would be some form of Vedanta.

So far, the Gospel has been presented to India in western philosophical clothes. It is necessary that the Gospel be related to the Indian philosophies in some way before the dialogue of Christ with India can take place at any deep level. This would involve grappling with Sanskrit and the classical texts, including the Vedas, the Gita and Upanishads.

The fifth type is a modern development in Hinduism which may be described as neo-Hinduism. Some Hindus have begun to realize that the old orthodox conventional Hinduism is becoming irrelevant to the life of the modern world. Accordingly they use freedom in interpreting the old ideas in the light of modern thought. This movement is associated above all with the name of Radhakrishnan. Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi are other names that come to mind in connection with this upsurge of thought in modern Hinduism. In spite of their reaction against the old ideas, these thinkers do not absolutely repudiate the old bases of dogma. "The basic Hindu doctrine about the essential nature of Reality as unknowable has never been laid in question," claims Devanandan.<sup>58</sup> And although some conservatives would scorn the thought of this new movement as demythologizing or worse, the leaders of the new Hinduism are regarded with respect as being in the mainstream of Hindu thought by the majority.

A symbol of one aspect of this movement was created when the followers of the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and later Gandhi reacted against idol worship, and stres-

sed a theistic interpretation of the nature of God. Though even then they were chary of saying outright that there is personality as such in God. Today the field belongs, for this group, to the Gandhians.

Ramakrishna was the pioneer among this group who took the first steps to reinterpret the Vedantic ideas. His disciple, Vivekananda, went a step further by emphasizing the spirituality of the East at the expense of the supposed materialism of the West. The spiritual, he stressed, is ultimately real, whereas the material is only a passing show. Moreover, he made popular the idea that social service to the community is part of the duty of Hinduism.

Aurobindo used his western training to advantage by setting about the task of bringing Hinduism to grips with the challenge put by modern science. He sought to integrate the western material ideas and the eastern spiritual ideas. He claimed that his elaborate system of "integral yoga" and his "synthetic philosophy" marked an advanced stage in the evolving religious experience and potentiality of man.

Radhakrishnan has gone the farthest in making this neo-Vedanta thought respectable. He has written a series of books in which he expounds the nature of this modern Hinduism. He foresees a future world community in which all religions will have a part to play. He reinterprets the traditional doctrines of Maya, salvation, and Lila, and also the conventional view of Hindu morality in terms more in keeping with a world in which Darwin, Freud, Einstein and Marx have lived and died. Dr. S. J. Samartha summarises his influence in this way:

"The march of events, both in the world and in the national life of the country, has undoubtedly affected the very core of Hinduism, which is seeking to adjust itself to the national awakening in all areas of life. Radhakrishnan is not merely a product of this national awakening, but has

also in a real measure contributed to its movement, character, and direction."<sup>59</sup>

What is the way of dialogue to be with this group of neo-Hindus?

In addition to these five groups already mentioned, it is only fair to make mention of some other features that illustrate the diversity in unity of modern Hinduism. Not all those who call themselves Hindus are so ready as the members of the groups mentioned above to stress the religious factor in Hinduism. Other "Hindus" would be more inclined to play up the non-religious factors.

One example of this is found in the Hindu communalists. Some political and non-political groups such as the Jana Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha, and also the Arya Samaj, are attempting, albeit not very successfully, to have Hinduism proclaimed as the national religion of India, as Islam is the national religion of Pakistan.

In addition to this Hindu communalism, there is also a Hindu secularism which may be expected to grow even stronger. This group has existed in Hindu history from the time of the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, which were in themselves anti-sacerdotal and anti-Brahmin protests, and it has continued since. Its features are today, "indifference to classical scriptures and to all speculation about God and Reality, opposition to religious rites and priestcraft, and active effort to promote what may be called social justice and self-respect."<sup>60</sup>

A variant on this is to be found in the thought of men such as K. M. Panikkar. Panikkar was a firm upholder of the Hindu religion, almost to the point of bias, but he was an equally firm critic of Indian social life. He advocated the divorce of the institutions of the Hindu people from their religion. What was needed, he claimed, was "a rethinking of social values, a reorganization of social institutions and

a divorce between law and custom on the one hand and religion on the other.”<sup>61</sup> This separation is of course being put into effect in the Indian secular state. As western secularism insinuates itself into India, this general viewpoint of Hindu secularism may be expected to grow in strength.

A third view, that may be termed Hindu nationalism, stresses the *de facto* situation that the majority of the inhabitants of India are in fact Hindu, and tends to look upon Indian culture as in some way equivalent to the religious practices of Hinduism. For the Hindu nationalist, the crux of the matter hinges upon national unity. Any group, including the Hindu communalists, who threaten the unity of India, are anathema. “Three preconditions of nationhood, geographical and economic unity and a common history, exist in India to a higher degree than in many countries of the world; in the cultural field there is under the surface of local and communal variety, a deep basic unity. On the other hand, the spirit of “tribalism,” linguistic parochialism and the so-called religious communalism are acting as dividing forces . . . What is required is a conscious effort to promote the forces of unity and to put down those of division and disunity.”<sup>62</sup>

Hindu communalism, secularism, and nationalism are confined for the most part to the educated, and they tend to put non-religious factors firmly first.

One more allied view may be mentioned, namely that of the Sarvodaya movement. This ideal, started by Gandhi, aided by J.P. Narayan, and catapulted by Vinoba Bhave, stresses the worth and dignity of life on this earth; it proclaims the necessity for social justice; and it condemns the evil of covetousness. Bhave’s great influence stems from the fact that he puts his ideals into practice. He is justly famous, and he has become famous in his own right, and not just as a follower of Gandhi.

Finally, it is necessary to mention one more continuing element in Hindu life that also attracts even now profound admiration on the part of many Hindus. The reason for this admiration lies not so much in the fact that the advocates of this school enter into the life and grief of the world as Bhava does. Rather the reason is just the opposite. Asceticism has kept a hold upon the mind of India because its devotees exhibit their unconcern for the world and its pleasures. Harcourt Butler claimed in 1931 that the reputation enjoyed by eminent Indian men of the world, "cannot be compared with the veneration given to the religious teacher who renounces the world, with its ambitions, riches and honours, and devotes himself entirely to a religious life."<sup>63</sup> Independence may have altered things slightly, but true and genuine self-sacrifice for the things of the spirit, and true holiness, will always attract attention and admiration wherever they may be found.

In spite of the large beggar element among Indian *sadhus*, in spite of the fakes and worse who pose as *sanyasis*, there are those holy men who now, as in former times, have entered deeply into the life of the spirit, and whose peace and calm is contagious. It was said of the Maharshi of Arunachala that, "a spotless purity, love for all, and a wise understanding of our imperfections and shortcomings, all this and far more, was contained in his smile, something which no words can convey."<sup>64</sup> Quite apart from the Maharshi, Aurobindo, Ramakrishna, Anandamayee, and those who are famous to a wide public, there are others too who are less well known but who have their effect among a more restricted circle. "Asceticism and monastic organization are two unique contributions which Indian civilization has made to the common stock of culture,"<sup>65</sup> writes Ghurye. And this remains true.

What is the way of dialogue with the world-renouncing school who willingly sacrifice everything in order to seek the peace which is offered to all freely as a gift in Christ? What is the way of dialogue with the complementary groups, the world-accepting modern schools of Hindu thought?

Cragg's comment on the relations of the Church with Islam would be valid too for her attitude to Hinduism. "The Christian Church is in tremendous need of recognizing and knowing its meaning. For long centuries there has been a kind of immunity. If we talk at all, we tend to shout through the windows as we pass by in the street; we do not sit and talk across the hearth or over the table as man to man. We keep within our communal securities."<sup>66</sup> The first need is to have some knowledge of Hinduism.

### Understanding, Conviction, Love

Along with this need, there is another requisite hinted at by Cragg in the above passage. It is the need to understand and sympathize with the Hindu. Knowledge is needed, and along with it there is the subtler need for understanding. Han Suyin in *A Many Splendoured Thing* comments, "How difficult it must be to become a missionary. In order to convince others, one must be so completely indoctrinated with the superiority of one's own brand of belief. To understand, to tolerate, to condone is incompatible with the very idea of being in possession of a higher truth, a better explanation of the spiritual life." This is the conventional picture of the missionary held by many people, and understanding has not been one of the noticeable features of Indian Church life. And yet understanding is necessary for dialogue.

Understanding Hinduism involves a willingness to be exposed to Hinduism; a sensitive awareness of its tensions

and its being. It means meeting Hinduism at its best as well as at its worst; and rejoicing in what it possesses of beauty and inspiration. It requires a basic humility; and a readiness to go to school with Hinduism. It calls for the ability to listen and to sympathize, which is by no means the same as the readiness to condone everything. Devanandan asks, concerning the new Hinduism, "Can Christian faith discern in such renewal the inner working of the Spirit of God, guiding men of other faiths than ours, as well as men of no faith, into a new understanding of God's ways with the world of today?"<sup>67</sup> "Understanding" is a key word in the idea of dialogue, and its importance cannot be overstressed. The old methods of controversy and argument, apart from the fact that they caused retaliation and bitterness of spirit, did not produce spiritual Christians but rather intellectual Christians. Part of the point of dialogue is not to come to a final victory nor, as Cuttat puts it, "to come to a final agreement, the point is to understand the other as other, more and more, which is love."<sup>68</sup>

And this understanding is no easy achievement. It involves reckoning with that "sense of being a Hindu" that unites Hindus of differing views. It involves acknowledging the fact that the Hindu world of 1965 is no static society, but a people in a state of flux. A people forced, by the times, sometimes into deep perplexity, sometimes into extravagant claims. This understanding is not only an attribute of the mind, it is also a quality of the heart.

Along with knowledge and understanding of Hinduism, there is the need for deep Christian conviction. If dialogue begins with real Christian conviction, that conviction will grow and blossom; if at the start there is no deep conviction there is the danger that the glimmer of conviction that is there may even be taken away. The reason for dialogue is the Christian's deep conviction. It is not a mere matter of

intellectual exchange. It is not even a mere matter of propagandizing others. It is obedience to the Lordship of Christ himself in the life of the Christian. And this obedience is "radically different from being primarily the upholder of a set of dogmatic tenets."<sup>69</sup> It is a personal faith in Christ; it is a personal apprehension of Christ; it is a continual practising of the presence of Christ. The third need in the one who would undertake dialogue is basic Christian conviction.

Fourth—it is also desirable that the Christian be genuine and saintly. The test of dialogue with Hinduism is the ability of the Christian to live and speak according to the mind of Christ. It would be simple, during the course of dialogue, to become involved in fruitless exchanges. It would be easy, "to be manœuvred . . . into some posture of spirit or into some area of debate which disserves the Gospel even while it claims to champion it."<sup>70</sup> The motives and character of the Christian should be above suspicion. Henry Martyn's comment of long ago is still relevant today in the approach of dialogue, "Zeal for making converts they are used to, and generally attribute to a false motive; but a tender concern manifested for their souls is certainly new to them and seems to produce the same kind of seriousness in their minds." Saintliness and genuineness are desirable qualities. Hindus who observe these qualities in the Christian who is willing to listen to them and be patient with them will surely be influenced. They will banish from their minds, once and for all, the notion that Christianity is only an economic inducement; or the religion of outcastes; or a purely sociological phenomenon. It may even be that their observation of these qualities will bring them to an apprehension of the One who gave these qualities.

Fifth is the need that has been hinted at in the preceding pages, and the need that sums up at all the others—the

need for love. It is genuine love for the Hindu that will win through at the end. "Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude; never selfish, not quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs; does not gloat over other men's sins, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance."<sup>71</sup> To ask for love is not to discount the need to know and understand Hinduism. Knowledge and understanding are part of love. It is because we love that we desire to know and understand. The doctor who loves will be a better doctor, but he must first know his medicine. The psycho-therapist who loves will be a better healer of the mind, but he must first know something about the mind. The Christian who loves will be more effective in dialogue, but first he must know something about his Hinduism. Yet this love is not just an extra ingredient added on at the end; it is, in a sense, the most vital ingredient of all. Even if we know everything there is to be known about Hinduism, but have not love, we will be but a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

And so, to sum it up, knowledge and understanding of Hinduism, allied to genuine Christian love and conviction, are the attributes necessary for dialogue.

# 5

## Doctrinal Implications of Dialogue

Now we will look at some of the doctrinal implications of this dialogue in more detail.

In the past, Christians and Hindus have often seriously misunderstood each other's doctrines. "All the things you have heard about this religion are completely false," Tilak told his wife concerning the new Christian faith he had adopted. "You will be married off to no one. You will never have to cook meat . . ." <sup>72</sup> Gandhi himself wrote of how he had thought that, "to be a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other." <sup>73</sup> Every day acquaintance with ordinary life in India brings the realization that such notions still persist even now, along with other wrong ideas. Equally Hinduism has often been represented as mere idol worship and superstition. Part of the point of dialogue is to bring the real issues clearly before the minds of thinking Hindus and the Hindu world. If a man's mind is filled with outlandish ideas about another religion, how can he begin to think about it soberly and consider its claims? Doctrinal discussion must inevitably form some part of the discussion with Hinduism, so that the real nature of both Christianity and Hinduism can be made manifest.

When the real nature of both is made manifest, it is not to be supposed that they are the same. There are some basic differences in Christian and Hindu doctrine, some important, some less important. It is easy to exaggerate these differences, or to draw attention to them, and in other ways to mar the dialogue by setting up an iron curtain which will block any fellowship,—an iron curtain which will remove the dialogue from the arena of witness to that of polemic. It is also easy to ignore the differences completely, and pretend that they do not exist. Before considering the fruitful areas of agreement and discussion, we will first of all consider the basic differences between the two sets of doctrines. These basic differences exist whether we speak with a liberal or conservative Christian voice or with a progressive or conservative Hindu voice.

In spite of the rise of neo-Hinduism, Otto's words are still true, "the religion of the Bible turns upon an altogether different axis from the religion of India, and the two cannot be regarded as preparation and fulfilment, or as the preparatory stage and the stage of completion, as is the case with the Prophets and the Psalms in relation to the Gospel, but the passage from the one to the other religion involves a complete displacement of the axis . . ." <sup>74</sup> This is not to say that one religion is valid absolutely but the other is not. But it is to say that they are unique and different. It is within the context of agreeing to differ that doctrinal examination is possible. In outlining these differences, it will be understood that they are not ammunition for shooting down the opponent, they are food for the sustenance of the soul and the stimulation of the mind. The purpose of dialogue is not argument. The aim is not to bring men to Christianity but to bring them to Christ. After all, "We are to bring men to God in Christ before we can justify to them what credally we believe about Him." <sup>75</sup> Let us then examine some of the

differences in doctrine, keeping in mind that this exercise is for the sake of the one engaged in dialogue not for the sake of the dialogue.

## Doctrine of God

Both Christianity and Hinduism have a doctrine of God. One strand of the Hindu tradition running through Jainism, Buddhism, and the materialistic philosophers, casts doubt upon the very existence of God. But the main stream places great emphasis upon God.

At this point the difficulty starts. What kind of a God does the Hindu emphasize? Radhakrishnan states, "It is a sound religious agnosticism which bids us hold our peace regarding the nature of the supreme spirit."<sup>76</sup> According to the main school of thought, God may be regarded as supreme knower, great lover and perfect will, in other words as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, who are three sides of the complex personality of God. But, in fact, not one of the many ideas of God, or about God, are wholly true although all are partially true. They tell us not what God is in Himself, but only what He is to us. Radhakrishnan grades the various ideas of God according to his supposed order of importance. "The worshippers of the Absolute are the highest in rank; second to them are the worshippers of the personal God; then come the worshippers of the incarnations like Rama, Krishna, Buddha; below them are those who worship ancestors, deities and sages; and lowest of all are the worshippers of the petty forces and spirits."<sup>77</sup>

On this understanding, the main school of Hindu thought, the Vedantic, considers that the Christian conception of a personal God is inferior to the doctrine of God as Absolute. In the Bhagavadgita, there are glimpses of the doctrine of

a personal God, although, even then, the dominant interpretation of the Gita is still more in terms of a *nirguna* Supreme Reality than a personal God. We may ask the Hindu to explain his very assumptions that God as Absolute must be necessarily higher than God as Personal. Why must this be so? What grounds of experience, theology and philosophy does he put forward for this claim? Are they valid? And if so, to what extent, and under what conditions may they be valid?

Alongside the Vedantic tradition and, in the case of the *bhakti* thinkers such as Ramanuja, in reaction to the Vedantic tradition, there has grown up within Hinduism the doctrine of a personal God. The teacher of the Gita puts into the mouth of Lord Krishna sayings such as the following: "I support this entire universe pervading it with a fraction of myself;"<sup>78</sup> "There is nothing in the three worlds for me to do, nor is anything worth attaining which has not been attained by me. Yet I am engaged in work.;"<sup>79</sup> "Whenever there is a decline of *dharma*, and unrighteousness is on the ascendant then I bring myself forth. For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of evil-doers, and for the establishment of *dharma* on a firm footing I am born from age to age."<sup>80</sup> These are descriptions of the activity of a God who is involved in some way in the world and is therefore in some way Personal. The famous *bhakti* poets are even more specific about God as Personal. Kabir, for example, sings, "Since the day when I met with my Lord, there has been no end to the sport of our love." And yet, even when we take the Hindu descriptions of God as Personal, there are still differences from the Christian doctrine.

In the Hindu doctrine, there is no stress on the seeking love of God. According to the Gita, God will receive all those who go to him in the right attitude of trust, but there is no sense of God seeking out men first. "Even if the vilest sinner

worships me with undistracted devotion he should be considered a *sadhu*, for he has rightly resolved. Speedily he becomes virtuous and secures lasting peace. Know it for certain, Arjuna, that my *bhakta* never perishes.”<sup>81</sup> The Christian doctrine is that God not only receives sinners, He takes the initiative in going out to find them.

Equally in Hindu doctrine, there is no stress on the holiness or majesty of God. God is everywhere; the world is a manifestation of God; and man is part of God. Nature is identical with God. The Spirit of God lives in all men. “He abideth in the holy and pure man, and also in the man of vice.”<sup>82</sup> There is no sense, as in Christianity, of God as the Creator, or God as the High and Holy One who inhabits eternity. There is no sense of the Love of God which is a consuming fire.

Perhaps the crux of the matter lies in what we mean by a personal God. Buber has stressed the basic fact that religious truth is relational rather than propositional. To be a Christian is to be involved in a personal relationship with God—an I-Thou relationship. The danger in this understanding of God is that we are apt to describe God by what we know in terms of human personality, and therefore to make an idol out of God. Barth has pointed out this danger which is also felt by the Vedantic philosophers, “God is personal, but personal in an incomprehensible way in so far as the conception of His personality surpasses, all our views of personality. This is so, just because He and He alone is a true, real and genuine person. Were we to overlook this and try to conceive God in our own strength according to our own conception of personality, we should make an idol out of God.”<sup>83</sup> The idea of personal relationship between man and God, confrontation between man and God, distance between man and God, is strange to the Hindu. “*Bhakti* aims at the final fusion with God, whereas

Christian *agape* does not wish to abolish the distance from man to God . . . it intends on the contrary to deepen this infinite interpersonal distance because it is the very breathing space of a more infinite Love.”<sup>84</sup>

We have seen then that there are differences between the Vedantic idea of God as Impersonal Absolute beyond all attributes, and the Christian doctrine of a Personal God. There are differences also between the Christian and *bhakti* ideas of the Person of God. The Hindu thinkers stress what God is whereas the Christian theologians stress what God is from what God does.

## The Doctrine of Christ

The basic difference between Hindu and Christian doctrine lies in what Chenchiah would call “the raw fact of Christ.” Christianity has Christ, Hinduism has not. The primary task of the Christian is to patiently and honestly show forth Jesus Christ, to ask the Hindu to study the record of the life of Jesus Christ as shown in the Scripture and to ask him to reflect upon its implications. So few Hindus in fact do this, and many who are knowledgeable about Christianity have gained their knowledge from books about Christianity rather than from the Gospel record itself. Christ is the centre of the Christian message. “What make ye of Christ?” this is the basic question.

Hinduism has not got Christ. But there could be some connection in the Hindu philosophical world between the Hindu “Om” and the Christian Logos doctrine. More particularly, there could be a connection between Christ and Ishwara. “The postulation of Ishwara for a role which the philosophical mind finds necessary in order to explain the world and connect God and the world, without compromising the Absoluteness of the former and the Rela-

tivity of the latter, that place is filled by Christ in Christian philosophy.”<sup>85</sup> Accordingly Panikkar states, “In so far as Christ can be intelligent to Indian Philosophy, as such, it is there He may find an introductory place.”<sup>86</sup> Yet, although there is benefit in this, the fact remains that Christ lived and was crucified under Pontius Pilate in the realm of history, Ishwara is a philosophical idea.

A nearer comparison comes when we look at the Hindu doctrine of the *avatar*. The *avatars* are mainly incarnations of Lord Vishnu. And this in itself is interesting. Sen puts the interest of the rise of Vishnu in this way, “The rise of Vishnu from an unacceptable non-Aryan god to the position of the absolute Supreme, with Rama and Krishna, and even Buddha as his incarnations, is an interesting story of mythological evolution.”<sup>87</sup> There is a move among some Hindus to continue the mythological evolution, and incorporate Christ himself as a last incarnation of Vishnu, and include him in the pantheon of Hindu gods.

But the comparison between Christ and the *avatars* is nothing more than a superficial one. The Christian claim for Christ is that He really lived in this world of history; that He was truly man with human emotions, experiences and temptations; yet that He was the Son of God who not only reveals himself to us but saves us and redeems us. He was not just one out of many incarnations, or divine in the way that other men can be said to be the sons of God, He was the only Son of God whose incarnation is the central event of all history, whose incarnation explains history and the facts of all life. “In Jesus account has been taken of the whole human situation in every aspect of it; nothing has been overlooked or ignored. No situation can ever arise in the future which cannot be interpreted in the light of the central event of human history.”<sup>88</sup> Christ’s Incarnation was not just an intervention in human affairs,

like that of a Hindu *avatar*, Jesus is God Incarnate continuously at work in human history.

Moreover, Christ was not merely an incarnation, nor even a mere mediator, He is the propitiator of our sins. He offers effective forgiveness of their sins to men. The forgiveness that the *bhakta* finds from the *avatar* is a kind of indulgence, "an overlooking of the fault, out of compassion for the suffering . . . which the faulty one has drawn upon himself."<sup>89</sup> The best of the *avatars* are impressive indeed. For example it was said of Rama that, "From the love that he bore his followers, Rama took the form of a man, and by himself enduring misery secured their happiness."<sup>90</sup> But with even the best of the Hindu *avatars* there is no cross, no Golgotha, no expiation. There is no sense of their suffering, or dying, or agonizing for man. They neither offer full salvation to man, nor do they fully reveal God. They have arisen in order to fill a vacuum in the soul of Hinduism that could not be satisfied in other ways. "Hinduism has not given sufficient thought to the revolutionary significance for the world of the fact that God became Man, because the traffic of *avatars* is so common as to convey no challenge such as we encounter in the Follow me of Jesus Christ."<sup>91</sup> The Hindu *avatar* is a temporary intervention in the affairs of mankind on the part of the divine that can be repeated in different forms when it becomes necessary.

In fact, there are doubts about the actual historicity of the two most popular *avataras*, namely, Krishna and Rama. They are popular in India. It is significant that they are popular because they represent the desire of mortal man to see God come down from the top of His castle in eternity in order to share in the common life of the human race. Yet we know little about them apart from the fact that they probably did live in history.

Even if we accept the historical legends, there is still no comparison between the life of Christ and the life of Krishna and Rama. We see the beauty of the life of Christ, and then we see the acts of aggression committed by Krishna his advice to Arjuna to abduct Subhadra, his dallying with the milkmaids and his many marriages, his contriving of the deaths of the enemy in the Mahabharata war by treacherous means, and we wonder how these tally with the high morality of the Gita, and even more so with the beautifully consistent life of Christ. In fact, it seems that Krishna and Rama were probably historical figures who made no claim to divinity, and were not claimed to be divine until a long time after their death. As mythological legends slowly grew around them, in the process of time they came to be worshipped as divine. Professor D. D. Kosambi sums this idea up, "Krishna, then, is not a single historical figure but compounded of many semi-legendary heroes who helped in the formation of a new food-producing society. The work was done from 800 B.C. onwards. When Heliiodorus dedicated his pillar, Balarama and other Yadu heroes still received equal honour with Krishna in Shunga sculptures. But by the fourth century B.C. the Gita had been composed and Krishna grew to new heights as the fountain-head of religious philosophy, inspiration to leading Indian thinkers from Samkara to Mahatma Gandhi."<sup>92</sup> Christianity then has Christ, but Hinduism has not, and this is a basic difference.

### Doctrine of Salvation

This leads us to a consideration of the doctrine of salvation, and here again there is a basic difference. Followers of the Hindu religion may differ in their beliefs about God. One cannot believe in God and be a Hindu; we

may believe in one God and still be a Hindu; we may believe in a personal or impersonal Supreme Being and still be a Hindu; we may believe in many deities and still be a Hindu. But in one thing almost all schools of Hinduism are agreed. Salvation for the Hindu is from the round of reincarnations. This salvation from the round of reincarnations is salvation from having to be born again into the world. It is salvation from the cycle of rebirths. This salvation comes through our *karma*, our actions. All our actions, whether good or bad, will find us out, says the Hindu. They will affect what happens to us in our next life. This salvation for which the Hindu strives is an individual thing, and it is up to the individual to work out his own salvation. When it is finally received, this salvation is stillness—the stillness of absorption into Brahma, the Absolute. As Otto puts it, “The axis of the search for salvation in ancient India was as it is given in its old prayer: “Lead me from non-being to being, Lead me from darkness to light, Lead me from death to the superdeath.”<sup>93</sup>

Salvation for the Christian is from sin, not from the cords of rebirth and wandering and *samsara*. It is the richness of salvation in Christ. Ishwara is a Saviour of those who suffer the torments of *samsara*, and are strangers to their true home. The Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the hearts broken by guilt, and of the consciences smitten by God’s holiness.”<sup>94</sup> In Hinduism, there is no original sin, no corruption of human nature, no conversion by redemption from above, no salvation by faith in the Incarnate God, no atonement. Even in modern Hindu thinking, sin is lightly glossed over. “Sin is not so much a denial of God as a denial of soul, not so much a violation of law as a betrayal of self”<sup>95</sup> writes Radhakrishnan. For Aurobindo evil is a thing of no great consequence but a passing thing that is there because of our ignorance, and which will dis-

appear when Supermind is come. In Dr. Radhakrishnan's index of his edition of the *Brahma Sutra* there is no mention of the word "Forgiveness."

By contrast to this aspect of Hindu thinking, for the Christian forgiveness is an essential. The phrase from the Lord's Prayer "Forgive us our trespasses" is at the very heart of the Gospel. This forgiveness is received, through the grace of God, by faith in Christ, and it is a vital factor in Christian religious experience. The aim, for the Christian, is not so much to be enlightened (although this is part of it) but to be saved.

In fact, sin has no great place in Hindu theology because the Hindu does not allow that sin presses hard either upon the life of man, or upon the life of God. Hogg summarises the first view very neatly, "If my sin is really to find me out, I must perceive that it is MY sin and how horribly sinful it is. But according to the *karma*-transmigration concept the sin that is finding me out is always the sin the nature of which I have no knowledge because it was committed by me in an unremembered previous incarnation. Such an experience is no moral searching of the conscience."<sup>96</sup> And if sin is not a burden to the conscience of man, neither, in Hinduism, is it a great burden to the tranquillity of God. Hinduism has the idea of a gracious God. But this grace of God is not costly. It is God's ordinary attitude towards man. Even when He is gracious, God stays outside the problems of human life, and the sin of man does not press hard upon the grace of God or upon the life of God. In contrast, the grace of Jesus Christ is a costly grace. Christ agonized for the predicament of man; He wept for the disobedience of man; He suffered for the selfishness of man; and in the end, He died for the sin of man. The emblems of His grace are some nails and some pieces of wood shaped in the form of a cross.

## Suffering and Immortality

Another area of difference in doctrine, stemming from this difference between salvation from rebirths and salvation from sin, lies in the attitude of the two faiths towards suffering and immortality. Hinduism claims that all our actions find us out, therefore there is no such thing as undeserved suffering because our suffering stems from our past actions. This solves the tangled problem of suffering very neatly at the superficial level, and yet it also raises other problems. Modern Hinduism has modified this simplified view somewhat. "In a reform," says Gandhi, "the Satyagrahi seeks to convert his opponent by sheer force of character and suffering."<sup>97</sup> But the basic Hindu view remains roughly the same. Was the assassination of Gandhi, then, the result of his bad *karma*? Was the suffering of Christ upon the cross the result of His bad *karma*? It is philosophically neat to say that every person, by his actions, builds up a character which at every stage leads him to suffer exactly what is just according to what he has done and the way he has lived—but is it true to the facts of life?

Christianity tackles the problem of suffering by saying that it is right that there should be undeserved suffering. It is morally necessary for the just to suffer with the unjust. The Suffering Servant of Israel suffered vicariously for the people of Israel; Christ suffered vicariously for His people. Their suffering was not deserved, but God used it to help and to heal others. The true Christian, in all ages, suffers vicariously for his world, the world in which he lives.

Equally, the Gospel claims that for the Christian there is personal immortality. Personality is not merely soul, it is a soul-body-spirit entity, and it will survive in a different and yet recognizable form. For the Christian, the Kingdom of God begins in this life when he enters into a personal

relationship with Christ, and this relationship will grow both in this life and in the life to come. The ultimate goal for the Hindu is not personal immortality. Hinduism claims that the soul is reborn many different times. Aurobindo said that *karma* is a kind of storehouse of past earthly experiences from which the soul can draw for its future growth as it continues through the cycles of rebirths. When, at the end of these rebirths, the soul attains salvation, this salvation is not in the form of personal immortality, but in the form of absorption into the Absolute, Brahma.

## Mysticism

We have already noted the basic differences of doctrine, and the other points of difference between Hinduism and Christianity arise from the fundamental dissimilarities we have already noticed.

Another crucial area of debate is likely to be that of mysticism. Mysticism has a valued place in the record of Hinduism. Hindu thought places a lot of weight upon religious experience. Many of the impressive figures have had an outstanding religious experience. It is upon this topic, namely, the nature of religious experience, that discussion is likely to take place.

Followers of every religion have their own subjective religious experience. When these experiences are described by those who have known them from within they often seem to be of a similar nature. Therefore the claim is often made that they are in essence the same, exactly the same. For example, Ramakrishna had separate visions of Christ, Mohammed, and Buddha, as well as of Hindu gods, and he claimed that, in all these cases, his experience was the same. This supposed similarity of religious experience is often given as a reason for what is claimed to be the essential unity

of all religions. The way is open for dialogue concerning the nature of mysticism and religious experience.

R. C. Zaehner has shown that even within Hinduism there are different kinds of mystical experience. There is the experience of nature, or cosmic consciousness, that often finds expression in poetic writings. This has been made famous especially in the works of Wordsworth among western poets. Through drinking in the beauty of daffodils and flowers, birds and clouds, through enjoying communion with nature, he underwent a mystical experience of being at one with that nature.

Secondly, there is the experience by means of which a man finds himself at one with the depths of his own being. This is seen for example in *yoga* or psycho-analysis. Hindu mysticism has concentrated especially upon this one aspect of mysticism. The famous *sadhus*, *sanyasis*, ascetics and *yogis* delve into their spiritual selves and enjoy the experience of being at one with themselves, and realizing themselves. The famous holy man who helped Paul Brunton, the Maharishi, said, "There is no reincarnation; there is no Ishwara (personal God); there is nothing; you have only to be."<sup>98</sup> "All that we have to do is to remove the illusion (*maya*) and the Self will light up within us"<sup>99</sup> "Your own Self-Realization is the greatest form of service you can render to the world."<sup>100</sup> "God can be known only subjectively, never as something outside ourselves, but rather as our own real self, our own innermost core or being."<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, Brunton said of Yogi Ramiah, "He has taken me into the benign presence of my spiritual self and helped me . . . to translate a meaningless term into a living and blissful experience."<sup>102</sup> The second mystical experience is not our oneness with nature, but our oneness with ourself.

Thirdly, there is the experience, through love and devotion, of ecstatic union with a personal God. This is some

times the present experience of the *bhakti* Hindu, and it is his future aim, that he should be absorbed into the being of God.

The aim of Christian mysticism is not to realize something that we essentially are by a process of self-effort; nor does it involve realization of our own being; nor does it involve absorption into the being of God. The aim of Christian mysticism is to grow in the Christian life. It is achieved not only by self-effort but mainly through the grace of God. It involves, not union with God but communion with Him. There is, of course, more similarity between Christian and *bhakti* mysticism than between Christian and Vedantic mysticism. However, even as between Christian and *bhakti* mysticism, there are differences over the objects of devotion, and differences too in the fundamental aims.

Underlying the whole discussion of mysticism, there is another basic difference. The aim of the Hindu mystic is to "see God." This is central to Hindu mysticism. Radhakrishnan claims, "Judged by the characteristic religious experience, St. John and St. Paul have not any material advantage over Plotinus and Samkara."<sup>103</sup> But the point is whether the mystical experience is in fact the "characteristic" one? Many Hindus in Banaras Hindu University would claim that "only mystical religion, which eminently combines the unity of Ultimate Being with the freedom of different paths for realizing it, can hope to unite the world."<sup>104</sup> And this appears to be a strong argument. But, by assuming that all mystical experience is more or less the same, it begs the question. For we have seen that, even within Hinduism, there are at least three different varieties; and, as far as Christianity is concerned, holiness rather than mysticism is central to the Christian thought of God.

Hindu salvation is separate from and superior to morals, ethics, culture. Christian salvation involves all of them. As Otto puts it, "The fundamental motive of the religion of Palestine is given in the ancient word of the holy writ: "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy".<sup>105</sup> The idea of the holy, rather than perfection of spirit, is the central axis of Christianity. Mysticism is only a part of the path. Perhaps it is a greater part than Christians have sometimes realized. But, at any rate, it is only part of the path. It is not the whole way.

### Doctrines of Man, History, Creation, the World

Another main area of disagreement is that concerned with man, his world, his history, his destiny, his relationship with others, his creation, his nature. There is a deep difference within Hinduism in this area between the old school and the modern thinkers. We have seen already that the neo-orthodox Hindus have seen the need to come to terms with the modern world. This desire to be relevant finds its expression in the way they restate the Hindu beliefs, especially in respect of man, his world, and the history of that world.

In olden times, Hinduism had no interest in history. The early literature of India is great in many respects. But it has one weak spot. In it there is only very scanty reference to history. In fact, "the total lack of historical sense is so characteristic that the whole course of Sanskrit literature is darkened by the shadow of this defect suffering as it does from an entire absence of chronology."<sup>106</sup> History was merely a part of the cosmic process which was cyclical and had its source and meaning in Brahma, and therefore history had no meaning in itself. According to this view, there is no progress within the record of history; history as an independent thing has no significance.

In modern times, historians such as K. M. Panikkar, J. Sircar and others, have redressed the balance. They have seen the need to put ideas into their context in time, to give importance to facts and chronology, and to erect a philosophy of history for India. However, it is impossible for them to supply facts where the written records do not give any historical facts. The real lives of Rama and Krishna, insofar as they were real, are shrouded for ever in obscurity due to lack of reliable historical evidence. Hinduism *has* to emphasize philosophy and mythology at the expense of history because of the very nature of the scriptures she has inherited.

Christianity, by contrast, gives great emphasis to history, and less to philosophy. At first the emphasis on history was less. Christianity inherited from Greece a cyclical philosophy of history that was similar in some ways to the ancient Indian view. During the Middle Ages proper, theology was the "queen of the sciences." Everything else, including history, was subordinated to theology, just as, in India, everything was subordinated to philosophy. However, for sixteen hundred years the leaven of Christianity worked within European civilization, and in the end it gave birth to the idea of progress within history. Indeed, in the end, it gave birth to modern science.

From the beginning, Christianity has given significance to history. The Gospel was based upon facts. The early Church preached about the life, death and resurrection of Christ. They emphasized the facts of the Gospel that had happened in history. "We have heard it; we have seen it with our own eyes; we looked upon it, and felt it with our own hands; and it is of this we tell."<sup>107</sup> In spite of the efforts of Bultmann and others to demythologize some of these facts, Christianity remains very much a historical religion which places emphasis upon history. In this it

differs from Hinduism, for it claims that events are purposefully controlled and unified by God.

When we turn to the various ideas about the world, again we see the difference between the Hindu classical, Hindu modern and Christian views.

The classical Hindu view of the world—expressed in the doctrine of *maya*—while it does not relegate the world to the status of utter illusion, neither does it give to it any ultimate significance. The world, “remains ever what it is, a *lila*, a sport of the Deity, a concatenation without goal or end—true, not without objective existence, but eternally worthless, never arriving at a fullness of worth, never glorified and made an abode of the kingdom and of the final dominion of God Himself.”<sup>108</sup> According to the classical view, Brahma alone is real and therefore the world does not have any separate existence in its own right.

Modern Hindu thinkers are concerned to preserve the reality of the world. Aurobindo's view of *maya* and the world illustrates this. He talks of, “a real universe reposing on a Reality at once universal and transcendent or absolute.”<sup>109</sup> Radhakrishnan interprets *maya*, “so as to save the world and give it real meaning.”<sup>110</sup> Elsewhere he writes, “Human experience is neither ultimately real nor completely illusory . . . the world is not a phantom, though it is not (ultimately) real.”<sup>111</sup> This thinking often gives the impression the modern Hindu doctrine of the world is not taken from the Hindu scriptures but from the new anthropology. “The real problem in Hindu India is to effect a synthesis between the traditional world-view and contemporary secularism,” writes Devanandan.<sup>112</sup> And this problem has not yet been worked out.

Christianity, by contrast, gives real significance not only to history, but also to the realm of history, namely, the world. Many examples could be given of this, and in this it differs from Hinduism.

There is a similar difference when we analyze the goal of history and the values of history according to Christianity and Hinduism. The classical Hindu view is expressed by Samartha: "the possibility of values being realized either fully or partially in history is discounted. Since the end of the world eras is *pralaya* which destroys both the good and the bad in history and since the end of the cosmic cycle is only a return to the beginning, there is no room for judgment or the consummation of history."<sup>113</sup> The modern thinkers have tried to change this somewhat pessimistic view. For example, Radhakrishnan writes, "history is neither a chapter of accidents, nor a determined drift. It is a pattern of absolute significance."<sup>114</sup> However, these modern attempts seem to be built on sand insofar as they are formulated without reference to a doctrine of creation.

In Christianity, there are values in history. The history of the universe had a beginning. The history of the world had a beginning when God created it. The history of the world has a goal and end in view too. For in the beginning God created the world, and in the end all things will be summed up in Christ. The history of the world has value and significance because it is God's world which He so loved that He gave his only Son on behalf of the people who live in it.

The doctrine of creation is something of a stumbling block for Hinduism. It poses a dilemma. For Hinduism, "to accept the doctrine of creation would be to do violence to the nature of God as Absolute Being, who cannot be involved in any way in world-life."<sup>115</sup> And yet without it, it is difficult for her to give a doctrinal basis to the values of history or to the goal of history. Otto sums this up thus: "Affirmation of the world is not what he (the Hindu) lacks, but he does lack entirely the positive evaluation of the world, which . . . belongs inseparably to the essence of

Christianity. India gives no genuine worth to the world because it knows nothing of a goal for the world."<sup>116</sup> Later he writes, "in Christianity the creation by God is not derived from the mere idea of absolute dependence, but from the purpose of the creation, that it should become the place and scene of the honour of God in "His kingdom."<sup>117</sup> This area of the fact and purpose of creation is, then, a key one of divergence.

We have looked at some of the main doctrines of Hinduism and Christianity, and noted the assumptions underlying both sets of doctrines. Other doctrines could be compared and contrasted. But this book is an approach to dialogue with Hinduism; it is not the full treatment. This full treatment will be opened up during the actual process of dialogue.

Again we must stress that this analysis of doctrine is a background for the work of dialogue. It is impossible to emphasize too much that the purpose and method of dialogue is not that of polemic, or even of heated discussion, it is that of love, sympathy, and understanding. These differences of doctrine have been noted not as ammunition for attack, but as substance for the soul, as background, as recognition of the fact that the two faiths are not the same. The Christian will not attack the Hindu where he is weak, rather he will help him to see his weakness. The Christian will learn also where he is weak in his own faith. The idea is not to win a victory by argument at the level of the rational, conscious part of the mind. This is never effective anyway because it is limited to the conscious part of the mind, and its effect may be to deepen the unconscious resistance. The idea is to make effective contact, and so witness to Christ, by dialogue and empathy based on love and understanding of the Hindu, that Christ may make His own entrance into the imagination and deep mind of the brother with whom our dialogue is.

# 6

## Points of Contact

There are basic differences between Hinduism and Christianity, but there are also points of contact which bring them together. We have seen many of them already.

When looking at the *bhakti* beliefs, we saw the *bhakti* stress upon certain things that are emphasized in Christianity also. For example, there is the need for singleness of aim and desire in trusting Vishnu; this can only be found through the grace of God; the reason for our weakness and poverty of spirit is the original defect of the soul; salvation is through surrender of the heart not by works. These have their parallels in the Christian doctrines.

We have seen the attempt of Panikkar to link Christ with the Ishwara of philosophical Hinduism. The whole subject of terminology opens up a new field of enquiry and dialogue, and raises the question of the possibility of baptizing Hindu terms into Christianity.

There is also the work of those Christian mystics who have conceived of God in transcendent terms. There are the experiments in prayer, renunciation, and interior living found in the Christian monasteries and in the modern Protestant community experiments. There is the mutual admiration of saintliness.

Another point of contact is in the Sarvodaya movement associated with the name of Vinoba Bhave. It is on the

same wavelength as that section of Christianity which is concerned about the growing materialism of modern life. Sarvodaya takes two "spiritual" ideas, namely, *ahimsa* (non-violence) and non-acquisitiveness (*aparigraha*) and brings them into the life of the everyday world. It seeks the answer to its difficulties not in the temple but in the rough and tumble of everyday life, and in this it fires a spark that is latent in recent Christian thinking.

There is, in Hinduism, the stress on spiritual experience and the necessity for living what we preach found in Wesley and others.

There is, in Hinduism, a true aspect of *karma* that has been stressed in Christian history by Arminius, Wesley, Fletcher, Bonhoeffer and others, especially in their attacks upon antinomianism. They have made the point that what we do and the way we live is important. Because a Christian puts his faith in Christ, this does not mean that he can do what he likes and that he is bound for salvation whatever he does.

There is the stress on stewardship of money, gifts and time found in both the teaching of Vinoba Bhawe and the teaching of Christianity.

We have seen that the "awareness of the sacred" is another point of contact that would provide a basis for dialogue.

The world, of which both the Christian faith in India and the Hindu religion of India are both a part, is another point of contact that brings the two together. Both exist within the wider life of the secular state. Both face the challenge of Communism and materialism. Both face the pressures of the modern world. Both stand over against the wider life of the world. They exist within it, and are part of it.

We have seen too that the Bhagavad Gita and other such books can provide points of contact. From the Christian

side St. John's Gospel has often been the vehicle of contact.

In all these points, as in other ways, Christianity and Hinduism hold out hands to one another. As we have stressed already, the ways of expression of dialogue are not so much dogmas and doctrines, but rather the instincts and impulses of life itself. The job is not so much to struggle with theologies and philosophies, although they are important, but to make the Holy Spirit our Guide and to go out with Him and put forth His power in the actualities of life. The job is to go out as Christians talking to Hindus, and yet still more important as men talking to men. For in this way, as we do this, there is the scope for love to do its work, and love is God. "This spirit of love on both sides, which sees the beauty in each and calls for manliness and saintliness, may achieve more conversions, true conversions in a decade where sanctioned instruments of evangelism may not even touch the skin in a century. Love that smiles and weeps with fellowmen is far better than zeal that consumes and fire that scorches and burns."<sup>118</sup> And so, while it is good to know where Christianity and Hinduism differ, and also where they come together, the weapons of dialogue are not primarily intellectual, they are the spiritual ones of sympathy, love and concern.

# 7

## Learning from Hinduism

Chenchiah has claimed that, "If instead of using Christ and Christian experience as a searchlight to discover the defects of Hinduism, we use Hinduism and Hindu experience to the elucidation of the meaning and purpose of Christ, we are at once rewarded with a twofold gain."<sup>119</sup> Accepting that there is truth in this, let us then ask the question—in what ways may Christianity be expected to learn from Hinduism?

Firstly, we may mention the realm of interior values and spirituality. To meet Indian *sadhus* who are genuine is a deep experience and a humbling one. To talk with them about spiritual matters when we know that they spend four hours in deep meditation every morning is a soul-searching experience because we know that our own time of devotion is much less and perhaps also less concentrated. This does not mean that the Christian has nothing to say to a Hindu *sadhu*, but it does challenge the Christian to put his approach to God on a more interior level. The Christian approach is so often a dwelling upon action, and confined to the relatively superficial level of consciousness, and we are challenged to combine the Christian relevance and activism with Indian spirituality. It is true that the value of meditation and prayer is not confined to the time spent. It depends

upon the motive, method and object of prayer, and a short but really genuine meditation may have more real spiritual value than a long time spent on "meditation" that has no object beyond itself. The eastern saints challenge us very directly to examine the laws of prayer, to explore more deeply the depths of the ocean of the love of God, and to put our prayer life upon a more interior basis.

In connection with this, it may be said that *yoga* is capable of being utilized for the Christian life. It is a method of disciplining and purifying the body and mind, which has been taken up by some Indian Christians and kept on by some converts. It could well be taken up by other Christians. When we look at men such as Sadhu Sundar Singh we realize that there is within the Indian soul this "spiritual gift" which, if sparked into flame by Christ, would perhaps show to the world what the life of Christ is really like. Perhaps Christ Himself was, in fact, more like an Indian *sadhu* than the activist type of western Christian. And it is not unfair to suppose that there are some Hindus who, if they become Christians, would reveal to us some of the hidden dimensions of the meaning of the life of Christ for the world. Already, Gandhi and others have brought out with new relevance some facets of Christ's non-violence, His non-acquisitiveness and His non-reliance upon wealth that have been somewhat overlooked. Perhaps India will show to us a new significance in the miracles of Christ. Westcott said long ago that the definitive commentary upon St. John's Gospel would come from an Indian.

### The Resurrection Life

We may expect that Hinduism will teach us by dialogue and interaction more about the meaning of the resurrection

life. Western thinking has often placed the starting point of the Christian faith in the original sin of man, and the main stress has therefore been upon the cross of Christ where the problem of sin was met. And it is obvious that, in any thinking and experience that is Christian thinking and experience, an awareness of sin and the forgiveness of the cross must find a prominent place. But it is possible to look exclusively at the cross and remain there instead of going on. The Christian not only dies with Christ, he also rises again with Christ into a new resurrection life. The starting point in Indian thinking may be not so much the original sin of man and the cross of Christ as the resurrection life of the Christian and the Lordship of the Risen Christ over life.

Sadhu Sundar Singh, for example, did not minimize the effects of sin and the meaning of sin, but his emphasis was mainly upon the presence of Christ in the believer's life. He saw more clearly the deeper and more mystical aspects of Christ's teaching. He experimented with prayer at depth. He was not afraid to claim miracles because he seemed to have inherited the Indian familiarity with the unseen world attained after many years and centuries of practice of *yoga*. They were not something he boasted about, he just accepted them as belonging to the natural order of things given a certain coming together of circumstances. His desire was to grow in the likeness of Christ and in the practice of the presence of Christ. We may expect that India will teach us some of the inner meaning of the resurrection life, the indwelling of the Spirit, eternal life, and "being in Christ."

Christianity can also learn from the Sarvodaya Movement. Bhavé's movement is not religious as such, but because it stems from the work of Gandhi it is inevitably an expression of a kind of Hinduism. It is more a social and

economic movement which emphasizes the simple life—an insight it has gained from Jainism. Like Christianity, this movement stresses service; like Christianity, it stresses sacrifice; following the Sermon on the Mount, it stresses non-violence; following the life of Christ, it stresses simplicity. It is an attempt to work out what the right relationship of the individual with society ought to be and, like Christianity, it neither overstresses the individual, nor does it overstress the state. Its touchstones are high thinking and simple living. Sarvodaya attacks modern society on three sides, “its competitive warring side” clashes “with *ahimsa*, its economic and acquisitive side with *aparigraha*, and its ethics of opulence with simplicity (not severity or austerity).”<sup>120</sup> Sarvodaya is an attempt to find an answer to the growing materialism of modern life, not by running away from it but by trying to find a practical solution. It is an attempt to find an answer at grassroots to the economic, social and political problems that the changing life of India is throwing up. The challenge is, What is the Christian Gospel for the social order, the economic order, the world of education, and for democracy? It challenges the Christian to find the answer for India, as indeed for the western world too. Sarvodaya has brought into the practical life of the country some of the theories hitherto bound in the textbooks of the planners. Christianity is seeing the need to do this. House churches, industrial missions, holy worldliness, a desire for relevance are the order of the day in the West. Christians are coming to see that the world is bigger than the institutional Church and that the real battles of the Church are fought outside its walls. Sarvodaya challenges Christians to make their stewardship of time, money and talents real in the life of the world. It challenges Christians to become involved in the economic, social and political problems of the world.

## The New Life

The writings of Chenchiah in particular have focussed attention upon two aspects of doctrine that have perhaps been neglected, namely, the New Creation and the Kingdom of God. "The real uniqueness of Christianity," he claims "consists in the doctrine, or rather in the fact, of new creation and new birth." Again he writes, "God wants us to be God-men, His children, the first-born of a new creation." This new creation comes in through Jesus, and it is Jesus who points us to the Kingdom of God. "Jesus," he goes on, "was the normalized human formulation of God . . . There are some who bring heaven to earth to change earth into heaven permanently. They do not embody forces of our age. They bring powers of a glorious age in the future . . . In them we see the beginning of a new order. Of such I know only Jesus of Nazareth."<sup>121</sup> There will be those who will want to question whether Chenchiah is giving full weight to the depths of the corruption of human nature and to the precise way in which we are called to imitate Christ. But this matter of man and his future is clearly coming into prominence in the writings of western Christians as well as in those of Indian Christians such as Chenchiah. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in his book *The Phenomenon of Man*, has blazed the trail, and others also are thinking about this subject. Whether their work is a compromise with the Hindu view of sin or a genuine new insight into the potentialities of man is yet to be seen.

Stemming from Chenchiah, Hinduism puts another challenge to Christianity, the perennial one, namely, that of putting one's faith into practice. "When we have Christians in name with little of the spirit of Christ, why should we not have Hindus in name but possessing the spirit of Christ in reality?" he asked. It is the challenge of Hinduism

that Christianity is good on theory and attractive in theory, but that the barrier of theory rarely seems to be crossed, and the fine theology of Christianity is rarely put into practice. "Show us Christ in your lives," implored Gandhi, "and we will consider whether He might be relevant for our lives." Hinduism challenges the Christian to put his theology into action by practising the presence of Christ, and to add the spark of religious experience to the fuel of his theory. It is significant that the Sikh religion has two separate orders for saints and preachers, as though it can be assumed that the preacher will be so busy in organization, preaching and other work that he will have no time to develop deeply his inner life. Unfortunately, this is often the case with Christianity. The challenge is, at this point, not so much to re-think the meaning of the Gospel for the present age as simply to show, by our practice, that the Gospel is alive in us.

In Hinduism, claims Radhakrishnan, "Intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outer expression to inner realization. Religion is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience." There is no need to accept the bait thrown out by Radhakrishnan to undervalue theology. Theology is important. Neither is there any need to accept the bait of concentrating so much upon inner realization that we ignore the world and the need to cross the frontiers of its secular life in order to claim them for Christ. But there is the challenge to restore Christian practice and spiritual inner values to the personal life of Christians.

### Help in Bible Study

This strain of eastern spirituality will be relevant in other ways. It will help the Christian in his Bible study by opening up new meanings. The western method of Bible study has

often been based upon exegesis, and historical and literary criticism. The eastern method is not bound by these tools. "The method of the Eastern commentators is likely to be rather the method of the fourth evangelist—to weave facts and ideas together, to make history serve metaphysics."<sup>122</sup> This kind of Bible reading and criticism may have its dangers, but it works with a more helpful atmosphere, and it is open to a receiving of "what the Spirit is saying." It involves a greater emphasis upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Appasamy describes with great interest how his father interpreted John's words that God is Light in a semi-literal fashion, a thing no non-Asian Christian would think of doing. By this insight, he transformed the meaning of the evangelist's words that God is Light and Life. This insight came from his practice of *yoga*, which can itself be a vehicle for the working of the Holy Spirit. Appasamy says, "No one can attempt to understand or explain Christian theology unless he first lives close to Christ, following day by day the guidance which the Holy Spirit gives from within the depths of the soul."<sup>123</sup> This approach to the Bible and theology takes the emphasis away from mere knowledge of the subject (although this is important) and puts it upon knowledge plus spiritual insight and experience.

Panikkar has claimed, in his various pamphlets and works, that Christianity can learn from Indian philosophy. It has been argued that we can learn more about say the Trinity by studying Hindu terms such as *chit*, *sat* and *anand* which could be used for the Logos, God as Reality, and the Spirit. If this is so, then much can be learnt by an adaptation of Hindu terms into Christian theology. It has also been claimed recently that a study of Vedanta can help Christianity to grapple with some of the problems raised by the *Honest To God* debate. Suffice it to say that the exactly opposite argument could also be used!

Another way of learning from Hinduism is to study Hindu interpretations of key Christian texts. The Christian will not agree with them, but he will learn from them. Hindus have said that the saying of Jesus, "I and My Father are one," is similar to one of the key verses of Sankara's philosophy, namely, *Tat tvam asi*, which means "that art thou." The saying of Jesus is a key one. The Christian interpretation will be different from the Hindu one, and the effort of interpretation will involve the Christian in thought about the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of the fellowship between God and man. Hindus claim that the meaning of the verses, "be ye therefore perfect," and "I and my Father are one" is that Christ was metaphysically identical with the Divine Soul, and that it is the purpose of life that every individual should make it his aim to become identical with the Divine Soul. "The nearer we approach to God," writes Radhakrishnan, "the greater is the community of nature between man and God, and he who lives in God, not intermittently but constantly can say, 'I am He'."<sup>124</sup> Indian Christianity may well give us new insights into verses such as these. They will be based not on the idea of metaphysical oneness but on the idea of moral oneness. Jesus was in a beautiful way morally one with the Father because He was Love, and the aim of the Christian life is that the Christian should love perfectly just as God is perfect Love. Dialogue with Hinduism will serve to explore this point.

Another key verse is from John 15, namely, "Abide in Me, and I in you." This points us to a deeper study of mysticism. There has been a mystical succession in the Christian Church down the centuries, and the Christian faith has not been lacking in great mystics. But Appasamy's words would be generally accepted by honest Christians, "The bulk of Christian people regard Christianity as fundamentally a way of ethical life; that Christianity is primarily life with

God, and that prayer and meditation of advanced types are quite necessary, is not generally recognized in the West."<sup>125</sup>

There is no need to fall into the traps set by Hindu mysticism, the assumption that all mystics are more or less the same, their experience is the same, and all religion is essentially the same. But the coming Indian Christianity will give a new emphasis to the mystical aspects of the Gospel of Christ. It will bring out the meaning for experience of the indwelling God who enters our life when we ask him to, and transforms it. It will develop the theme of how far the God who created the world is also immanent in the world. In what ways, in what different degrees, and under what conditions, if any, does God abide in man, nature, history and the universe? Hinduism fails to differentiate clearly between God in man and God in nature, between God in the saint and God in the sinner. Christianity does this, and Indian Christianity will help her to do it more clearly. But at the same time she will preserve and develop the mystical values inherent in the Gospel.

Another feature of Hinduism may be helpful to Christianity. Hindus have given much attention to the female aspect of the godhead. From the Rigveda to Ramakrishna the idea of God as Mother as well as Father has been expressed in Hinduism. Gods are often worshipped together with their consorts. Brahma has his consort Saraswati; Vishnu has Lakshmi; Shiva has Uma, or Parvati, or Durga; or Kali; Rama has Sita; and so on. Sometimes the god and goddess are worshipped separately; sometimes they are worshipped as expressing together the dual nature of the deity. Occasionally, the goddess is even given greater honour. From the Christian side, Roman Catholics have seen the necessity to fulfil this need; but, in doing so, they have given exaggerated importance to the Virgin Mary. Along with this, there is the danger hinted at in modern

psychology according to which mother love can sometimes be jealous and selfish, and nothing more than a form of self-love. Moreover, goddess worship has often been connected with fertility rites. However, in spite of all this, Hinduism has an insight for Christianity. "Probably as Christianity becomes naturalized in India the idea of God as Mother will find a rapid entrance into Christian thought, as it is so deeply rooted in the soil of India. Provided we realize some of the dangers to which the doctrine has led in the past and are on guard against them, there is no reason why we should not think of God as Mother."<sup>126</sup>

## The Guru and the Teaching Method

Another feature of Hinduism is the *Guru* system. According to this, a *guru* gathers round him a number of disciples and instructs them in meditation by his example and teaching. Again there are dangers in this. The *guru* can be given undue pre-eminence so that he almost takes the place of the god. Again the impression is sometimes given that it is impossible to know god except through the mediation of the *guru*. Also the temptation is there for individuals and individualism to be overstressed, so that "He is of this *guru*," "She is of that *guru*," and "I am of the other *guru*," and the god behind all the *gurus* is neglected. Yet there are spiritual advantages in the system. Can we doubt that the Indian Church would be stronger today if her pastors had been trained to be Christian *gurus* rather than Christian organizers? In the West also there is a vacuum left by the scarcity of *guru*-pastors who can help people to find themselves, who can bring people to Christ, who can train in prayer and the practice of the presence of God. This vacuum is being taken over by psychiatrists and others. Provided we avoid the dangers of the *guru* system,

its advantages are real in the Indian context. For the Christian, Christ is the only *Guru*. But spiritual directors who are in Christ can bring others to the True *Guru*. What is true of the *guru* is also true of the ashram system.

Another area neglected by Christian thinkers is that of the life of the soul after death. Some thinkers have developed the ideas of purgatory and paradise as intermediate stages between this world and the next, but most have remained content with the idea of one life on earth as the total experience of the personality without exploring the question, "what happens after death?" Will the personality sleep and then be resurrected? If so, will the personality grow after that resurrection? Or is the personality immortal? And if so, will it grow immortally? What is the meaning of the life of heaven? Appasamy claims, "the idea that the soul passes through different stages of growth after the death of the body may play an important part in the Christian thinking of India. The doctrine of many births and deaths, extending over an infinitely long period, makes the Indian mind naturally inclined to accept it."<sup>127</sup>

Hinduism, rather than Christianity, has followed Jesus in other respects. The teaching method of Jesus was mainly that of parable and picture language. The Hindu religious teacher has used this method also. Sometimes it has been abused so that doctrine was utterly neglected for the sake of narrating stories out of the epics. Jesus did not fall into this trap. His parables had stings in their tail, and he also offered straight teaching. In recent times, Ramakrishna has used the same kind of method with success. The modern Church could use it with advantage to make contact with the people.

## Psychic Aspects

Jesus also performed miracles, and had what we would call a kind of extra-sensory perception. Hinduism has also supported the exploration of miracle and extra-sensory perception on a spiritual basis. Patanjali sums up the spiritual essence of the *yoga* system in this way, "One whose whole nature is surrendered to the Isvara has perfection of concentration." Accordingly he knows, "all that he desires to know, in other places and in other bodies, and in other times. Thereafter his insight sees into things as they are."<sup>218</sup> The experiments of Professor Rhine and others, and the sheer weight of evidence, are showing us that telepathy, psychic powers of healing, and other psychic phenomena are real. Perhaps the Indian Church will show us how to harness them for the spiritual good of mankind.

We have already noticed some of the weaknesses of the Hindu doctrine of *karma*. For example, the moral uselessness of suffering for the actions of past lives of which we have no memory, the fatalism this often produces, the sense of depression about the future, the lack of incentive to help others if they are also determined by their *karma*. However, the doctrine also has its values. It is helpful to the Christian as a reminder that every believer is responsible for his actions. The history of the Church is filled with the record of those who have abused the doctrine of the free grace of God. They have emphasized the freeness of the grace while forgetting its great cost; they have received the privileges of faith without facing the cost of discipleship; they have talked about the imputed righteousness of Christ in such a loose way as to imperil morality; they have claimed that the believer must be saved whatever he does because the hand of God is upon him. The insidious antinomianism of the hyper-Calvinists and others has set at nought the high moral

teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, and reduced the relevance of the actions of the Christian to a minimum. But the *karma* of the Christian is important. It is only through the *karma* of repentance that a man can receive forgiveness. After receiving forgiveness—and this in itself is a form of *karma*—it is only through the sublimated *karma* of love that the Christian can advance. In this way also the Christian can learn from the Hindu.

Other potential trends will be developed during dialogue. To develop them now will be to anticipate the whole work of dialogue. Perhaps most important of all, thoughts, doctrines and inspirations about which at present we do not know will be evolved through the actual process of dialogue. So far little actual dialogue, as opposed to theoretical dialogue, has been attempted. This book, and most other books written by Christians about Hinduism, are based more upon the work of other Christians who have thought about Hinduism, and upon principles derived from reading about, thinking about and attempting to understand Hinduism from the outside, rather than from an extensive experience of dialogue itself. Some of the things written here will almost certainly have to be modified through the continued and prolonged experience of dialogue. Like Abraham, we go out into a far country armed not with a map of where we are going but with the faith that our journey will be significant.

# 8

## Tolerance and Some Sociological Matters

Our final task is to consider briefly some practical matters that soon become evident to anyone living in India as being important. These matters include conversion, baptism, toleration and the place of the community in the life of faith. These matters come together as much under the heading of sociology as of theology.

There is a deep misunderstanding in India of Christianity which admits change from one faith to another, and which places a certain amount of stress upon conversion. This is the cause sometimes of real tragedies when a man who has truly found Christ is sometimes turned out of his family and community as an outcaste, and the Church is accused without any justification at all, of attempting forcible conversion. This kind of comment is wholly unfair, and yet very widespread, and it is a vital aim of dialogue to remove this kind of unfair misunderstanding.

Let us try and see the matter from the Hindu point of view. Radhakrishnan sums up the Hindu attitude in his book, *Hindu View of Life*. "The differences among the sects of the Hindus," he claims, "are more or less on the surface, and the Hindus as such remain a distinct cultural unit, with a common history, a common literature, and a com-

mon civilization."<sup>129</sup> This view is so much taken for granted that the present writer, who is studying asceticism for a Ph.D. at Banaras Hindu University, finds that little work has been done on this important subject. It is doubtful whether Hindu scholars have ever attempted to really compare and contrast the different teachings of the Hindu sects, and to analyze the points of difference between the Saivites who worship Shiva, the Vaishnavites who worship Vishnu, the followers of Sankara who emphasize Vedanta, the Yogis, the Nagas, and so on. When we consider the amount of ink that has been spilled in spelling out the differences between Protestant and Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist, Lutheran and Calvinist, and so on, it will be seen how very different are the Christian and Hindu climates of thought at this point. "Hinduism," Radhakrishnan continues, "is therefore not a dogmatic creed, but a vast, complex, subtly unified mass of spiritual thought and realization."<sup>130</sup> He goes on, "Religion is not correct belief but righteous living."<sup>131</sup>

In other words, he is saying that the touchstone of religion is not so much dogma as experience or conduct. If this is so, he can go on to claim, "it is not fair to God or man to assume, that one people are the chosen of God."<sup>132</sup> And therefore "the more religious we become the more tolerant of diversity we shall become."<sup>133</sup> This being so, if another deity comes into the field against Hinduism, Hinduism does not try to fight it but rather to absorb it into Hinduism. "Every God accepted by Hinduism is elevated and ultimately identified with the central Reality which is one with the deeper self of man."<sup>134</sup> It is easy to see how, from the superficial point of view, the Christian position would seem intolerant to one holding opinions such as these. In fact, there are deep-rooted conflicts within Hinduism itself that are scatted over or ignored by Dr. Radhakrishnan. Even

so, this stress upon tolerance and liberty is characteristic of Hinduism.

### Social Objection to Conversion

However, let us examine this tolerance and liberty very carefully. In fact, from the Hindu point of view, religious liberty does not mean the freedom to change one's religion from Hinduism to something else, it means freedom of opinion within Hinduism. In fact, the Hindu is intolerant of a person leaving Hinduism in order to put his faith in Some One Else. The Hindu is allowed no freedom of will to turn from his Hinduism and entrust his life to another faith.

There are social reasons for this attitude. Some Hindus are likely to be against conversion because they accuse the evangelist of trying to denationalize the would-be converts. "The Hindu desire to elucidate for us the meaning of conversion is with a view to easing communal tension and establishing harmonious relationship among the adherents of various religions in India."<sup>135</sup> Others will be against conversion on caste grounds. Although untouchability has been put aside by the secular state of India, the caste system still holds sway among the majority of Hindus, and to change one's religion is the same to them as betraying one's caste. There is complete freedom of personal interpretation within Hinduism, providing it does not violate caste, and if a Hindu becomes a Christian what is feared is not so much the change in religious opinion as the social exclusion which comes from losing caste.

Accordingly, the opposition to conversion is both social and religious. It is social from the point of view of the caste system. It is religious from the principle of *sarvagamapramanya*. This is, "the truth and authority of all religions," which "is

at the root and basis of Hindu convictions; thus it can serve as a unifying factor for them all, since it calls all to work together, and to find the unity of religion, not in a common creed but in a common quest."<sup>136</sup> The Hindu, then, stresses religious intellectual enlightenment, but not conversion; individual spiritual experience, but not the transforming community; Christian social work, but not the Christian desire to elicit faith in Christ. After all, if the essential features of the truths of all religion, the Sanatana Dharma, are included in Hinduism, what is the point of becoming a Christian when the essentials of Christianity are included in the Sanatana Dharma?

Christian exclusiveness is therefore said to be wrong. The theological principle which allows this exclusiveness is wrong. The converts are thought to be a loss to the nation. The methods of conversion are said to be questionable. There is said to be no real change of character in the so-called converts. The social superstructure is said to be destroyed. This is the background against which the evangelist does his work, and with which the one who would engage in dialogue has to grapple. The fact that very occasionally some of the facts justify the accusation intensify the Hindu suspicion. Here obviously is a fruitful field for dialogue.

## Securing Hindu's Understanding

The first need is to stress to the Hindu that the motive for conversion is genuine. If the Church has promoted itself as a superior, boastful institution, or tried to get converts by any means, let Her repent of this. It is essential that the motive be right. Proselytism and conversion are all right if they proceed from a change of heart that is genuine and a true love for and apprehension of Jesus Christ. In a genuine case, the invitation to join the Christian community comes

from Christ Himself. It is not a human invitation to join a human institution, it is the call of Christ to the individual to become part of His Body. If a person hears the call of Christ, if he freely, willingly, gladly offers himself to become a Christian, if he finds peace and joy through Christ, if he himself requests that he might be admitted into the Christian fellowship, if the motive is right, why should he be refused? If the Hindu denies this kind of conversion, he should be asked to consider whether he is not, in fact, infringing religious liberty.

The second need, as we have already seen, is to give a true picture of Christianity, so that the Hindu may see its real nature. So often, for one reason or another, Hindus do not find a true understanding of Christianity. When they criticize what they think to be Christianity, what they are really criticizing is a Hinduized version of Christianity which has been altered to fit their own approach and religious emphasis. Ramakrishna claimed to know Christianity but apart from his knowledge of a few proof texts, his vision of Christ, and some acquaintance with the New Testament, he was ignorant of the basic facts of the faith of Christ because he was ignorant about Christian literature, Church history and Biblical theology.

Gandhi also claimed to know Christianity. According to him, Christianity has distorted the message of the Gospel; it is only one religion among others; Jesus is a great world teacher, no more; the essential Christian faith is the Sermon on the Mount; ethics is the basis of all religion; non-violence and his other theories are basic to the Gospel. Gandhi advocated the study of other scriptures. In fact, what he did was not to study other scriptures as they are in themselves. He interpreted other scriptures according to the standards of his own faith. This was Gandhi's criterion. But it is unfair to expect Christianity to interpret its own ethos, faith and

life according to what Gandhi felt, just as it is unfair to ask Hinduism to interpret her own ethos, faith and life according to what Christians feel. Each religion is an entity in itself, "Men of faith look at the fundamentals of their creed, the axioms of their beliefs, from within the circumference of their creed."<sup>137</sup> It is important, not only to understand what Hinduism is to a Hindu, but also to convey to the Hindu what Christianity is from the inside to a Christian. So far India has not really seen Christ, she has seen a Hinduized version of Christ. It is the function of dialogue to present Christ as He really is so that He may be judged for what He is, and seen for what He is.

The third need is to use linguistic analysis upon the word "exclusive." This word has two separate meanings. It can mean, "to cut oneself off from others so that they have no chance of joining your organization." Christianity is not exclusive in this way. Quite the opposite! The good news about Christ is for everyone who will accept it. In fact, the other meaning of the word "exclusive" is contained just here. It is the very eagerness of Christianity to welcome other people in that has brought down upon its followers the label, "exclusive." It is necessary to explain lovingly to the Hindu that Jesus Himself said to His followers that they were to go out into all the world and preach the Gospel. This urge is part of the basic message of Christianity. The mission to evangelize is built into the heart of the Christian message and Gospel, it is the will of Christ Himself.

### Meaning of Religious Liberty

The fourth need is to examine closely the meaning of religious liberty, and to ask the Hindu whether in fact it exists in India. Is it not true that, "as long as religious communi-

ties have an exclusive prerogative over matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance, relating to their members, there will be a serious infraction of religious liberty?"<sup>138</sup> If this could be dealt with "Inquirers would no longer be intimidated by family consequences; the convert would no longer be under inappropriate difficulties as to marriage, nor would he have to face disinheritance. Considerations of legal status would not inhibit the free pursuit of religious inquiry. The convert would not be worried or persecuted into mental instability, nor become a rootless protege of some alien friend."<sup>139</sup> As Cragg puts it for Muslims, and it applies equally to our Hindu brothers, "Our Christian duty is to serve this situation as patiently and sympathetically as we can, trying to uphold the ideal of a religious allegiance which is not even indirectly compelled."<sup>140</sup>

At the moment, religious allegiance in India is indirectly compelled, and more than that, as we have already seen. The barriers in the way of a high-caste Hindu who wants to become a Christian are very great. But real religious liberty involves the freedom to believe, and also the freedom not to believe. It involves the freedom to convince others about one's own belief, and also the freedom to be convinced by others concerning their belief. And if a person is convinced by another belief, religious liberty involves his freedom to accept that belief. India is a secular state with a constitution guaranteeing religious liberty. Yet, although in India there is the dogma of religious tolerance, there is not, as yet, real religious freedom. As Devanandan puts it, "it is not sufficiently realized that to find support for religious tolerance on the plea that all religions lead to the same goal is to enforce a dogma as the price of religious freedom."<sup>141</sup> The function of dialogue is to point this out in love to the Hindu. If a faith is to be self-respecting, it must keep its followers on the sole

authority of their own convictions. Has the Hindu really examined the meaning of religious liberty in this light? This must be put to him in love.

## Examination of Baptism

Fifthly, there needs to be a new examination of the question of baptism. Dialogue on the inner meaning of baptism is very necessary because it has become an emotive word that can rarely be viewed in true perspective because of its associations in the mind of the Hindu. It is often taken for granted that when a convert is baptized into the Church then he must cease to be a member of his own society. But this is not necessarily true. Baptism certainly is the sign of a person coming into the fellowship of the Church, but when it is properly understood, it is certainly not the sign of that person leaving his own culture. It is a positive thing, not a negative thing. It does not take away, it adds. It brings a man into the Church, but it need not take him away from his own society. This needs to be explained to both the Christian and the Hindu communities.

In view of the difficulties so often encountered in baptism, some have argued that it can be right for a person who has accepted Christ in his heart, and is fully Christian in the matter of faith, to defer or omit baptism in order to remain within his own society and act as leaven there. They argue that the only way to win a community is from within and not from without. This argument needs careful consideration. But so do the words of Cragg. "Baptism, after proper safeguards have been met, should never positively and permanently be withheld from one who has responsibly sought it in good faith and of his own volition."<sup>142</sup> Dialogue on the real meaning of baptism is called for, both within and without the Christian community, so that its real significance—

not its imagined significance—might be made known, and so that the subject might be viewed in a clear light.

## Meaning of Christian Community

Sixth—there must be a new investigation into the meaning of the Christian community. The situation in India is complicated by the fact that the Christian community contains both those who own their Lord in an active way by attending Church, etc., and those who were born into the Christian community by birth but do not attend worship. This situation is very different from that of the Christian community in a country such as England. There, although all are supposed to belong to a Christian country, in fact the Christian community is known and recognized as consisting of those people who attend Church. There are nominal Christians in England, who attend worship but know none of the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, but they do not constitute so grave a problem as the nominal Christians of India. These people are bound to the other Indian Christians in matters of marriages, status, social life, etc. but they are not bound to one another in the service of the Lord.

There is a real need for teaching about the Church both within and without the Christian community. The Christian community in India is so often looked upon by Indians as another social organism along with the Hindu community, the Muslim community, and the other communities. Sometimes, it is even looked upon as another caste. But membership of the Church is not primarily a social matter. It is a recognition of the fact that faith is not merely a private matter; it is recognition of the fact that there is need for spiritual fellowship with others; it is recognition of the fact that there is need for communal worship with others.

But so often Christian fellowship in India is not so much *koinonia*—spiritual fellowship—it is rather the social fellowship of those who live together in compounds or semi-closed communities. Yet spiritual fellowship does not necessarily entail that Christians should live with other Christians in compounds and be restricted to them for social intercourse.

Serious thinking is called for on the vital question, "What is the Church?" Is it possible to be a Christian and not go to Church? Why is it the duty of a convert to join the Church? How can the Church of Christian doctrine be made real in the life of the actual Church of an Indian village or town? How can the theological understanding of the nature of the Church be applied to the actual Church that we know in India so that the latter may be transformed and allowed to BE the Church? All these questions and others too call for close examination and informed teaching to both Christian and non-Christian so that it may be seen that the Church is not just another social unit but the very Body of Christ.

Dialogue with Hinduism will serve not only to explain these practical matters to the Hindu, but also to bring them into focus within the life of the Christian community as well.

## God is the Promoter of Dialogue

In the last resort, God himself is the author of dialogue with Hinduism. This is no clever human technique worked out by the brilliance of the human imagination. It is the call of God and the work of God. As Devanandan puts it, "In a real sense God Himself is the Missionary."<sup>143</sup> Dialogue will involve a great dependence upon the Holy Spirit, for it knows no detailed rules and regulations that can be put into practice at every stage of the journey, it knows only

principles that are lived out as we live our lives with a Person. It will involve all that has been discussed here and more. It will evolve some of its own methods in the practice.

This book has been merely a discussion of an approach to dialogue with Hinduism; the dialogue itself has yet to come in its maturity and actuality. But this dialogue, as well as being necessary for itself in India, will enrich the whole Church not only of this land but of other lands as well. Devanandan has written, "Effective communication of the Gospel to non-Christian men of faith depends on the effective use made of the religious vocabulary with which he is familiar, and of the cultural pattern of life in which he finds self-expression and community being. In our task of missionary preaching we have yet to take the dominant philosophical and religious concepts of the non-Christian faiths and make them into instruments of the interpretation of the Gospel."<sup>144</sup> In the accomplishing of this, and the other work of dialogue, the theology and life of the whole Church will be enriched.



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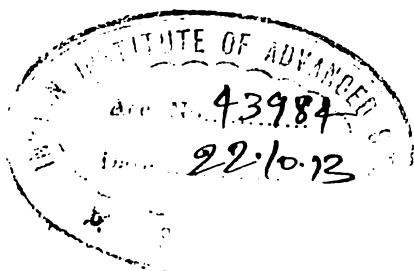
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