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symptomatic for an era of increasing physical and mental mobility of intellectuals. If, for instance, I were asked to describe my cultural or religious identity to an outsider I would be hard pressed to come up with an answer that would make sense to a person who has never left his or her hometown and never been to a church but the one s/he was baptized in.

For many of us there are no longer any clear boundaries between East and West, between this tradition and that, between—in our case—Christianity and Hinduism. We recognize, of course, the existence of legal and physical bodies that carry certain labels, the attempts in either camp make humans conform to these labels, the efforts to give socio-political meaning to Christianity and Hinduism so as to polarize and set off people against each other. The Calgary Conference on Hindu-Christian Dialogue may have been the first such major meeting in Western Canada—it certainly is no longer an unheard-of or wildly daring thing to do. Many such dialogue meetings have taken place in India, in Europe, in North-America and many more will take place in the years to come.

Hindu-Christian dialogue—or for that purpose, interreligious dialogue as such, may not be as much in the news today as it was twenty years ago, when it was a fairly risky and controversial matter. But it continues, on a broader basis perhaps, than ever before. One of the reasons for this state of affairs is the existence of programmes for the study of religions in many countries, especially in North America.

Whether they explicitly advocate dialogue or not, the teachers of History and Religions prepare for it in numerous ways by informing their students about different religious traditions, inviting them to reflect and compare. Courses like "Introduction to World Religions" have become quite popular over the past twenty years and by now there must be hundreds of thousands of men and women who possess some understanding of, and some sympathy for, religions other than their own. In contrast to the generation of their parents, today's American or European visitors to India are no longer horrified by images of Hindu gods and goddesses and they feel no longer that they are

compromising their Christian faith by visiting a temple, by participating in a Hindu ceremony or by listening to the exposition of a Hindu scripture by a Hindu guru. Certain cultural barriers remain, of course, and probably will never be totally overcome. But on a basic human and religious level many barriers between Hindus and Christians have disappeared.

By now many millions of Hindus live in the West. Some have become totally absorbed by their surrounding culture, others have maintained large parts of their traditions. Hindus have built temples in Europe and North-America, they maintain religious associations, they are represented through a variety of Hindu missions and organizations. Departments of Religious Studies have quite frequently teachers with Hindu-background on their staff who would, often without calling it that way, engage in a Hindu-Christian dialogue with students coming from a Christian background.

Ours is not a particularly virtuous age and by comparison with former ages we may appear as not only less religious but also less moral and less disciplined. But we may take some pride in one thing which sets us off from previous ages in a more positive way: there is greater openness and honesty today in matters where formerly dissimulation and hypocrisy were the rule. We dare to admit that we disagree with authorities—secular as well as religious—and we dare to express our disagreement. We have the courage to use our own eyes to see for ourselves and our own minds to think for ourselves also in matters of religion and morals. We need this independence of mind and heart if we want to meet in dialogue with people from other traditions, who may have had to fight equally hard against prejudice and pretense, against petrified tradition and vested religious interest.

In spite of the all too evident decline of the influence of the Churches in the West and the disaffection of the younger generation with traditional religion in the East, it may not be too bold an assertion to say that at no time has religion been taken so seriously by so many students at universities. The theological faculties of the past (and many of the present as well) were closed institutions which appealed to, and catered for, only a very small number

of people who wanted to enter into a ministerial career. Quite often it was not the large human concerns and the great religious issues which were at the center of attention in these institutions but the specifics of a particular tradition, the rules and regulations which held the profession together. Both by inclination and by training most of the products of these institutions would be ill equipped for and ill disposed towards interreligious dialogue.

Things are different with students in programmes of religious studies. Not all are deep thinkers, but all are interested in a variety of religions. Not all share the same concerns, but many are open for dialogue and for a kind of religious universalism. While I am fully aware that the real world is larger than the university, I would maintain that it would be a grave mistake to consider the university today as an ivory tower and to believe that the things that go on within its classrooms would not be relevant for the population at large. What is done in departments of religious studies today will, sooner or later, have its repercussions also on the way religion is seen and practiced in society at large. I tend to think that this is a good thing. It will not only facilitate Hindu-Christian dialogue by making it appear natural that Hindus and Christians meet and talk to each other but it will likely also change the direction of the Hindu-Christian dialogue in ways we can only speculate about.

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NEWS:

Three Dialogue Centres In India

Maitri Bhavan (Varanasi)

Maitri Bhavan is a small "Dialogue Centre" or "Interreligious Meeting House" in Varanasi, the holy pilgrimage and cultural centre of the Hindus. It was started in 1980. In the beginning the centre was housed in a small apartment in the city. Since January 1988, it has its own house close to the Benares Hindu University and the holy river Ganges.

Varanasi or Benares is a city sacred to the Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. About 12% of the city's population are Muslims,

Christians and Sikhs are few in number. The cultural and religious importance of Benares and the very religious composition of the city's population and the perennial inter-religious and communal problems facing the people demand fraternal dialogue, understanding and cooperation between the adherents of different faiths.

Today many thoughtful Christians feel the need to change the course of traditional, aggressive evangelism and conversion movements. Into a land divided by castes, religious sectarianism, languages and even regional and cultural differences, religions like Christianity and Islam have brought their own brand of divisions, colour and cultural bias and mutually exclusive claims and counter claims. The socio-religious conversion movements with political and economic implications have brought in bitterness and rivalries. Christians are going back to Jesus and are discovering the implications of the Kingdom of God. Today we understand the religious beliefs and practices of people much better than before. Each religion is experiencing its own inability to face the challenges of these times. A small group of men and women all over the world feel the need of an inter-religious ecumenism. In a country like India this need is more urgent than anywhere else.

The awareness that Benares, Jerusalem, Mecca, Amritsar and Sarnath (in Benares) should sit together in friendly dialogue and exchange their great riches is the starting point of Maitri Bhavan. The conviction that it is more important to build bridges of friendship and understanding between the followers of different religions, ideologies and cultures than to convert a few individuals from one socio-religious group to another is the driving force of this centre. As regards the future of mankind, what do the signs of the times tell us? Maitri Bhavan has been holding regular monthly meetings. The participants are mostly professors, sannyasis and journalists. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains and Christians come for the meetings. We usually take a theme which affects our people. Modernisation, the problems faced by women in N. India, and communalism were discussed thoroughly. We always look for the religious roots and

implications of these themes. This year we have taken the significance of Dialogue in our Indian context as the theme of study. We have also conducted 3 two-day seminars. The need of an undergirding philosophy for the development of the country, the political philosophy and programmes of some of the parties contesting the elections, the meaning and importance of values in the present situation of the country, were the themes we took for our inter-religious study and discussion.

In 1988-89 we are planning to study the subject of Inter-religious Dialogue. We had already a seminar on Christology which attempted to formulate the mystery of Christ in the total context of India. In December or in January 1989 we will have a seminar on the philosophical basis of such movements like R.S.S. Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Liberation Theology, D.K. D.M.K., A.I.A.D.M.K. and such religio-political and social movements.

Together with this type of work we publish the "Dialogue Series" of books. "Liberated Life"; "The Meeting of Religions"; "God in the Thought of St. Th. Aquinas and Madhvacharya", "The Hope We Share", "Visnu The Ever Free" are the titles of the books we have published. By the end of this year two more books will be published. In a country like India inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue should take on a social dimension. Maitri Bhavan is involved in the education of about 100 children and in eight tailoring schools run by the sisters.

We are drawing up plans to start "dialogue groups" in three district headquarters, and to open a bigger centre in Gorakhpur. Moreover together with our friends we want to do more for the uplift of the poor.

As a matter of fact real religious dialogue, genuine exchange of religious experience, and mutual growth happens not in and through meetings and discussions, but in our intimate personal meetings. This dialogue of life and intimacy we want to foster in the future.

Dr. I. Puthiadam

Aikiya Alayam (Madras)

Aikiya Alayam, an inter-faith dialogue centre in Madras, had its official beginning in 1968. This was the result of the

initiative taken by Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam to work among the Hindu brethren of the city. The objectives of Aikiya Alayam are interfaith dialogue and inculturation in liturgy, theology and spirituality which flow from its ashramic life.

It is an open house to those who would like to share its ashram life and spend time in prayer and retreats individually or in groups. It provides facilities for religious study and research through seminars and short courses. It has a small library of about 13,000 volumes.

Aikiya Alayam conducts regular inter-faith dialogue meetings at least once a month. Inter-religious Live-together, inter-religious pilgrimages, inter-religious celebration of feasts of Light (Karthikai, Deepavali, Christmas) are regular annual features of this centre.

Dialogue goes always with research and reflection. Aikiya Alayam has a few major publications in Tamil apart from a number of pamphlets. Its major contributions are *A Study of Grace in Christianity and Hinduism* (1982) and *Spirituality Christian and Indian* (1987). Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam is the author of both these books.

This centre has kept up the dialogue initiative for the past twenty years now in Madras in spite of the ups and downs in its life-history. It looks forward to newer horizons of initiatives from all seekers of truth to carry on this pioneering spirit as partners in dialogue.

Dialogue-In-Life (Adyar)

Ishalaya is a community of four Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, living at 42/2 IVth Main Road, Gandhinagar, Adyar, Madras-20. The Community was inaugurated on 29th June 1986. The purpose of this community is to evolve an ashram way of life within the charism of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, incorporating into our way of life the cultural and religious values found in the Indian tradition. Our set-up and life-style bring us into dialogue with our Hindu brothers and sisters through our day-to-day interactions with them, through participation in common prayer and through periodic dialogue meetings.

We have occasions for mutual

exchange of greetings, sharing of meals, etc. with our Hindu brethren on feast days such as Christmas, Diwali, Pongal, etc. Christmas of '87 was a joyous experience when poor Hindu women of our neighbourhood decorated our house with traditional 'kolams' (decorative designs formed out of lines and dots) and also shared our lunch prepared mainly out of the provisions gifted by our friends. We get invitations to participate in events such as the celebration of the seventh month of pregnancy, naming ceremony, weddings, deaths, funerals, etc. On such occasions our two sisters specialized in Carnatic music sing devotional hymns based on Hindu as well as Christian Scriptures. Lately these two sisters were given a place on the podium of a wedding hall, and along with the Hindu priests and were invited to sing appropriate pieces in Carnatic music. We also attend the dialogue meetings conducted at Aikiya Alayam, the Inter-Religious Centre run by the Jesuits. Our studies, reflections and togetherness at these sessions have mutually enriched us. In a common search of that type there is no barrier between one seeker and another. At the same time, these meetings have helped us to grow in appreciation of and a desire to deepen our own faith.

Ashramites Meet At Varanasi

Ashram Aikiyam, a federation of all the Catholic ashrams in India, had its biennial fellowship meeting for five days in November, 1987 at Varanasi. Thirty-two ashramites from all over India participated in it.

The first day was devoted to sharing of

the experiences of the ashramites, the developments of their ashrams, their problems, etc. Reflection and sharing on an important activity in the life of the ashrams, namely inter-faith dialogue, took up the whole of the second day. Participants noted that the chief obstacle to dialogue was fundamentalism. It was pointed out that great patience and a spirit of understanding should be brought to bear in our relationship with fundamentalists.

The theologizing activity of the ashrams was considered on the third day. Contemplation and its place in the life of an ashram formed the subject of reflection the next day. A Hindu scholar, a Buddhist monk and a Jain professor shared their idea and practice of contemplation. The last day was spent in administrative activities such as election of office-bearers of Ashram Aikiyam for the next four years.

Hindu-Christian Dialogue Conference in Calgary

From September 23-27, 1987, by a lake at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, a Conference took place focused on the exploration of Hindu-Christian Dialogue as it occurs today and as it has occurred down through the centuries. The results of the Conference have been edited into a book by Harold Coward with an Introduction by Raimundo Panikkar. The chapters in the book are as follows: "Dialogue between Hindus and the St. Thomas Christians", Anand Amaladass; "The Response of the Hindu Renaissance to Christianity", Ronald Neufeldt; "Triologue: The Context of Hindu-Christian Dialogue in Kerala", Roland

Miller; "Francis Xavier in the Perspective of the Saivite Brahmins of Tiruchendur Temple", Richard Young; "Gandhi and the Christians: Dialogue in the Nationalist Era", John Webster; "Hindu-Christian Dialogue in Europe", Eric Sharpe; "Current Hindu-Christian Dialogue in India", Richard Taylor; "Hindu-Christian Dialogue in Canada", David Goa; "ISKCON as an Example of Hindu-Christian Dialogue in America", Steven Gelberg; "Hindu Views of Christ", Ronald Neufeldt; "Christian Views of Hindu Bhakti", A. Frank Thompson; "Hindu/Christian Workshop Settings in South India", Paul Younger; "Hindu Influence on Christian Spiritual Practice", Murray Rogers; "Christian Influence on Hindu Spiritual Practice in Trinidad", Anantanand Rambachan; "Hindu-Christian Dialogue and the Academic Study of Religion", Robert Baird; "The Experience of Scripture in Hinduism and Christianity", Harold Coward; "A World Council of Churches Perspective on the Future of Hindu-Christian Dialogue", S. Wesley Ariarajah; "The Future of Hindu-Christian Dialogue", Klaus Klostermaier.

The book is currently in press with Orbis Books, Maryknoll, N.Y. Publication is expected early in 1989.

Future Issues

The next issue of the Bulletin will be published in June 1989. Brief articles, book reviews, publication information, news items, etc. should be submitted to the Editors no later than February 1989. Names of individuals and institutions to be added to our mailing list should also be sent to the Editors.