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The Scope of Dialogue

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in India. At the time of his death Dick Taylor was hard at work to finish his long awaited book on *Ashrams*, an update on the ashram movement in India. Molly, Dick's wife, is now at work finishing the book.

Dick served on and contributed significantly to the work of several Church and other Christian committees and commissions, notably one on the Churches' fulfilment of responsibility in society, and the other which did a national survey of theological education in India. Indeed, Dick Taylor's contribution to Christian socio-economic and cultural thought and action in India is exceptional and it will take much study and space to fully gauge the value of his work. His sudden passing leaves a vacuum in these fields.

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The Prospect for Hindu-Christian Interaction

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I take as a starting point the last sentence of the Editorial in Vol. I of the new Bulletin: "With a few notable exceptions...contemporary Hindu thinkers do not seem to be engaged with Christianity in the way their predecessors were at the turn of the century (e.g. Roy, Sen, Dayananda and Radhakrishnan)". This is a very insightful observation and it is worth dwelling on. Let us begin from the "Christian side" first. What considerations are encouraging some Christians to "take an interest" in Hinduism. Listing some of these may be convenient although probably too schematic, for combinations of the following are often to be found:

1. The "colonial cloud" having passed over, the way is free for Hindus and Christians to meet on equal terms. Some Christians, especially those with long connections with India, find in this an opportunity for closer contact. The religious component may sometimes be a part of this contact.
2. Indian Christians still feel the need to inculturate their faith. This cannot be done unless Hinduism is studied in the seminaries, liturgical innovations are made, and "new Christians" are made to feel at home". Why parallel efforts to inculturate vis à vis Islam or Sikhism are not made so seriously is worth

exploring.

3. People in some western countries show a new interest in meditation, whether of the Buddhist or Hindu varieties. Some churches/spiritual instructors/ are seeking to adopt some of the exercises/practices in a Christian context. Probably even more are experimenting with meditative techniques outside any such "religious" setting. What this involves needs to be looked into. Is meditation necessarily a species of prayer? Can it be extracted from its cultural package?
4. A few rare souls, through some kind of mystic route, seem to have gained entry into Hindu religious experience of a particular kind (whether Advaitin, Vaishnava, etc.). Such cases are no doubt exceptional.
5. A few theologians, who are sensitive to what strikes them as the inappropriateness of the "unique" claims made by certain types of Christian theology, are seeking to get over this in diverse ways including selective appropriation/experiential ingress/intellectual formulation, etc.
6. Religious Studies departments (outside India) provide a cognitive base for further exploration and contact. Comparative studies involve both scholarly work and "dialogue".

Let us now see how each point fares, so to say, from the Hindu point of view.

1. Even though Hindus and Christians meet on equal terms, thanks to the franchise, absence of the colonial power, etc. the original parallel presence of colonizers and missionaries is something that lives on in Hindu memory. The "inculturation" of Christianity in India has been greatly accelerated in recent years. This notwithstanding, from a Hindu point of view the Indian Christian has to validate himself first of all as a nationalist. Hindu activists these days are revivalists rather than reformers (using an earlier distinction). The *swadharma* idea, moreover, operates to discourage basic curiosity about what Christians believe. I have gone into this elsewhere.¹
2. Returning the "compliment" of assimilation (which is what inculturation is rather like) does not bring the Christian any closer. The insider/outsider distinction prevails. Since Hinduism is not institutionalized, there is nothing parallel to the study of Hinduism by Christian seminarians to be found

among Hindus.

3. There is likewise nothing parallel to this point either.
4. Here again there is scarcely anything parallel to what a few exceptional (mainly) Catholic "religieux" have been able to accomplish. "Conversions" would not serve as examples.
5. The interest in Christianity showed by some of the nineteenth and early twentieth century reformers has not continued into the twentieth century. The question of formulating a "theology" in the Hindu context does not arise today.
6. "Religious Studies" has scarcely got off the ground as a subject for academic studies in Indian Universities. The reasons for this can be spelled out.

The above very brief comments do not do more than present a viewpoint based on contemporary experience, an experience of feeling the pulse, as it were, of the situation in India just now. The idea is by no means to discourage the studies planned. There is all the more need for such a project, precisely *because* Hindu thinkers today are "not engaged with Christianity in the way their predecessors were".

Notes

1. Vide my *The Religious Spectrum*, Allied publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1984.

The Scope of Dialogue

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India has been the land of intense curiosity for others for many centuries and continues to be so. One can trace the history of relationship between India and the outside world as a fruitful study to gain some insight into the Indian attitude towards outsiders. In the first issue of this Bulletin the editor presented a succinct survey of dialogical movements in Indian History. Obviously in a brief essay of this type one cannot expect a comprehensive report covering all the historical events and persons who have contributed to the dialogical movements between the Hindu and the Christian world. In fact some of our perceptive readers have pointed out some omissions and we appreciate their keen interest in this venture by responding to us enthusiastically to the format and the content of the first Bulletin.

In fact the present issue contains a review of Wilhelm Halbfass' book *India and Europe* and we intend to draw the

attention of our readers to this detailed and thorough delineation of the characteristic aspects of the encounter between Europe and India so that the dialogue venture today does not appear historically naïve. Apart from the details of the historical development what is significant is that this work highlights the attitude of the European mind towards India. For Europe the relationship took the form of a quest. The search was not only for exotic and curious data but a subjective disquieting and a rethinking of its own basic assumptions and conceptions.

To the Greek, India appears to be pristine and parental, the guardian of the keys of primordial wisdom. To the Christian, it appears to have preserved in the midst of many adulterating accretions pure fragments of a primitive divine revelation. To many a philosopher, it seems to be in possession of large stretches of *philosophia perennis*. To the Romantic, it is an Urvolk with its Ursprache and its Urreligion. To the European, India is the object of a promising search; he hopes to find in it hidden pieces of his self-identity, prototypes of his concepts, complementing his aspirations.

On the Indian side there is no such parallel of searching towards the West. There is indeed only a stance of incuriosity and self-satisfaction. Halbfass points out that there is no search for alternatives and challenges, after foreign shores or sources of one's own identity, after objects of exotic curiosity and goals of learning or transformation. India has discovered the West in the process of its being discovered by the West and confronted the West through European search and disclosure. The discovery of the West and the encounter with it appear not as a result and fulfilment of historical development but as a sudden burst of rupture that has been brought about from without.¹

Though this insulation was broken by the leaders of the "Indian Renaissance" at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the above remark about the self-involved attitude of India calls for reflection in the context of the present-day dialogue initiative in India, where the process seems to be the same. Apart from a completely negative approach, a definite "no" to dialogue by some,² the gradual acceptance of dialogue by many well-meaning people is to be recognized. Whatever might have been the causes for the Indian insularity of yesteryears, the reluctance and even misgivings about the dialogue by the committed Hindus today have to be taken for serious consideration. The obvious reasons for such an attitude are to be located in the colonial past of the Christian

presence in India such as the sociological mobility of the communities through conversion as seen by the Hindus.

The missionary motivation of great thinkers colours their contribution to science, literature or social work, though one might argue that the scholars even when motivated by their religious commitment could go beyond the narrow confines of the Christianity of their time. In spite of the fact for example that Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) is acknowledged for his talent and scholarship as "Father of Tamil Prose", as "first European Sanskrit Scholar" and so on, he remains a controversial figure in the mission history and even suspected of incompetence, forgery and charlatanism.³ The difference between al-Biruni and De Nobili, remarks Halbfass, is that al-Biruni is a scholar without missionary motive while De Nobili on the contrary learns in order to be able to teach his Christian message. He is a missionary and not a theoretical universalist.

Another great scholar Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1683-1719) is taken by and large as a missionary and not so much for his scholarly contribution to the study of Indian languages. Thus the "scholars in cassock"⁴ are acknowledged but not without reference to their missionary motivation. One cannot easily forget the historical events of the past in East-West relationship nor could one expect memories to be healed all of a sudden. So one need not be surprised by the reluctance of some for dialogue with fears of "hidden agenda", when the initiative is coming from a particular religious community.

What is important is that today we could at least dialogue on this very issue, and expose the real or imaginary "hidden agenda" of the other, in coming closer to one another through "inter-faith live-together" which is a growing phenomenon in a number of dialogue centres in India.

And that is an encouraging sign that both Hindus and Christians could live together and experience the concern and commitment of each other, unlearning the prejudices of the past.

Looking back on the dialogue venture during the past decade, the type of discussions that took place and the varied understanding of dialogue operative in the dialogue-organisers, one could also perceive the growth in the attitude of dialogue-partners. There is a rethinking on the dialogue-approach itself,⁵ trying to analyse the causes for the lack of enthusiasm for dialogue on the part of some and even questioning the motivations and presuppositions of some

dialogue commissions and organisers. This has brought into focus the goal of dialogue once again. The question is posed differently. The purpose of dialogue is seen not as a forum to deliver the good to the other but as a way of living together.

For the Christians in India the focus would be how they could live here adapting and adjusting to the Hindu world-view in India. At the first stage it was always starting with one model and study similar concepts in Hinduism. Though hermeneutically that is how we begin the process, this stage should lead us to a further stage: how do I make myself understood by the neighbouring religionists, to make myself intelligible to the other, and to express my identity in a world of varied vision. Otherwise I remain a stranger unable to insert myself in a world-community which thinks and speaks in another idiom than my own. My challenge depends on my ability to assess the situation of world-religions and find a way of communicating myself to the other, rephrasing my expressions, thus finding my identity. The question is not that others are not able to understand me or that they are wrong; it is not even the question of my eagerness to communicate something to others which they do not have, but simply it is a process of growth for me in so far as I begin to appropriate my own tradition by reinterpreting it within my context of pluralism and assimilating it in the process of articulating myself, my commitment, my faith-tradition and the world-view that I have inherited. This puts the dialogue in a different perspective and some of the traditional questions regarding earlier discussions could be obviated.

The same thing is true of Eastern Religions. Hinduism and Buddhism for example feel quite secure regarding their religion and culture within their geographical confines and do not see any need for dialogue. But with all the East-West communications they are drawn into the modern secular problems rather unconsciously. Such an involvement is forcing them to rethink and reformulate their religious and cultural values in order to converse meaningfully with the West. Today they ask seriously what is Indian about Indian Philosophy. Such a search is a sign of personal assimilation of one's own tradition in the process of mediating it to the others. This sort of dialogue is already taking place though in limited circles.

Secondly dialogue is to be located at the existential level and not at the level of identifying our areas of agreements and disagreements, specificity versus commonality. Our goal should determine the scope of dialogue today. Concretely it means to

Jacques-Albert Cuttat, a Pioneer of Hindu-Christian Dialogue

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work for the cosmic welfare, the welfare of all beings, which is the concern of all religions. Taking inspiration and motivation from one's faith tradition we could work together for building up a community which is based on certain values—human dignity, justice, equality, communal harmony, respect for one another and so on. Here the emphasis is shifted because of the task-oriented approach. In a world of today either we hang together as a human community or we destroy ourselves in various ways. No human problem is so unique to one particular community alone and no one community can solve it without reference to the other in a country like India or for that matter anywhere in the world.

In that process we discover one another, we discover ourselves first in the presence of the other in such a new venture and the world of others with their mystery of life that eludes clear conceptualisation but still is mediated through a set of symbols and myths, though each one may not be able to articulate what they mean to oneself or one's own community. We begin to realize that it is not always the questions of who is right and who is wrong, not always an either/or. Sometimes both truth and error are present without eliminating error. Opposites do co-exist and in life things do not neatly arrange themselves as contradiction and convergence. One cannot eradicate what is "false". To perceive this mystery of reality is a sign of maturity. To let oneself be shaped by the reality and not trying to force reality to be what we would like them to be is a sign of wisdom.

References

1. Cf. Wilhelm Halbfass: *Indien und Europa* Schwabe & Co. AG Verlag, Basel/Stuttgart. 1981, p. 191.
2. Sita Ram Goel's book *Catholic Ashrams* is an attack on dialogue as sponsored by all the ashrams. Actually it is a collection of material from the West and from Madras.
3. Halbfass, p. 54.
4. It is the title of chapter in *India and the Germans* by Walter Leifer, Shakuntala Publishing House, Bombay, 1977 (second edition).
5. Cf. Felix Wilfred: "Dialogue Gasping for Breath?" in *Vidyajyoti*, Journal of Theological Reflection. Vol. LI. No.10, 1987, pp. 449-466.

The name Cuttat does not seem to appear often in current dialogue literature in spite of the key role which he played in getting Hindu-Christian dialogue in India on the way. Dr. J.A. Cuttat, son of a wealthy Swiss banker, had been professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne before being called to serve as Ambassador of Switzerland to India. His appointment had much to do with his own interests. He had been an avid student of Indian thought for many years and quickly established a personal friendship with Jawaharlal Nehru and, to a lesser degree, with Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. As he told it, it was the study of Indian philosophy, especially of Vedanta, which brought him, after a period of agnosticism, to a deepened understanding and appreciation of Christianity. His Christianity was ecumenical in the widest possible sense. Soon after his arrival in India he began contacting Christian clergy interested in an encounter with Indian religions and held a first meeting in Almora in 1961 with a group of about fifteen Christians from a variety of denominations. Already before his arrival in India he had published a book *Le recontre des religions* (Paris 1957), later translated into English under the title *The Encounter of Religions* (1960) which served as the focus of the discussions. As Ambassador in New Delhi he must have had a fairly busy life; during his tenure Switzerland got involved in a great many development projects which he personally supervised. His deepest interest and his most sincere intellectual love, however, belonged to Hindu-Christian dialogue. He personally funded what later became known as the "Cuttat group", which held several memorable meetings until a tragic accident ended his career as Ambassador and his involvement in dialogue. While the agenda for the meetings of the group were always planned by the whole group, Dr. Cuttat's intellectual contributions were always a major factor. In spite of his social status and his recognized intellectual standing he never tried to dominate the meetings but came as a student who engaged with fellow-students in the study of a new subject. From the very beginning the group worked with a document prepared by Dr. Cuttat, which, enlarged and refined over the years, became a kind of basic text to ponder and live with. It eventually appeared in an expanded form as a booklength essay: "l'expérience Chrétienne est-elle capable d'assumer la

spiritualité orientale?" in a volume *La mystiques et les mystiques* ed. by A. Ravier (Desclee 1965). One of the key elements which the group learned from Dr. Cuttat was the notion of the "inner dialogue" which must precede "external dialogue". It was Dr. Cuttat again, who gently but firmly steered the meetings away from being scholarly conferences about dialogue, to actual exercises in dialogue, and who impressed upon all the need to develop methods for an encounter of spiritualities rather than to merely engage in comparative religion. Already in the early sixties Dr. Cuttat used his ambassadorial contacts to urge the Vatican to establish an official Dialogue-Secretariate. In India itself, he persuaded Cardinal Gracias of Bombay to initiate a process of consultation among Catholic bishops and other clergy interested in Hindu-Christian dialogue. He tirelessly pursued these concerns, which were crowned with some measure of success. In 1964 Pope Paul VI opened a "Secretariate for Non-Christians" and Cardinal Gracias began taking some personal interest in Hindu-Christian dialogue. Just when Hindu-Christian dialogue seemed to take off in India Dr. Cuttat was tragically removed from the scene. What actually happened has not yet been fully explained. Dr. Cuttat was on official business in Colombo/Sri Lanka, which was part of his ambassadorial jurisdiction. One morning he was found lying on the ground below his first story hotel room, unconscious, with a severe head injury. It appeared that he had fallen down from his room, possibly while pushing open a glass door, to get some fresh air into the room. While falling he must have struck a concrete flower pot on the ground. For months he was in a sort of coma. He had suffered a severe brain injury. Brought back to Switzerland, he spent years in a sanatorium. Friends who visited him found him reminiscing about the years in India and the dialogue-group meetings, but otherwise not fully in possession of his once formidable intellectual powers. Dr. Cuttat now lives in retirement in Switzerland. Sooner or later someone will write a book about this remarkable man and his crucial contribution to the development of Hindu-Christian dialogue. Hopefully someone will continue the line of profound thought which he initiated and address the depth-dimensions of the Hindu-Christian encounter which often appear to be left out in the more practical and foreground issues dealt with today.