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REPORTS

Statement of Hindu-Christian Dialogue,

Varanasi, February 1992

WE A GROUP of 60 Hindus and Christians met at Nav Sadhana, Varanasi from February 9 to 12, 1992, to live, pray and dialogue together on the theme "Our Heritage and Our Commitment to Harmony and Integration – Human Community." This dialogical event was jointly sponsored by the dialogue units of Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and the National Council of Churches in India.

It is but appropriate that we met in Varanasi, which has been not only one of the centres of the rich Hindu traditions of the past, but also a catalyst and centre of Hindu renaissance movements. Our meeting together here in Varanasi is the expression of our earnest desire for, and sincere commitment to Hindu-Christian dialogue.

There has been a movement from religious isolation to religious encounters between Hindus and Christians, giving rise to a variety of responses ranging from aggressively negative to dialogically positive ones. Among the latter mention must be made of dialogical Christian theologies, Hindu movements influenced by the Christian faith, ecumenical discussions and documents, formal inter-religious dialogues at spiritual, theological and devotional levels, co-operation in social concerns, and formation of inter-religious councils and bodies.

We reiterate that dialogue is a spontaneous attitude of love from the heart reaching out to fellow human beings. It establishes '*maitri*' or friendship effecting mutual enrichment and provides an opportunity for a deeper mutual understanding of Truth or God. Interpersonal edification and commitment to concerns of humanity flow from it. Thus new communities transcending denominational religious frontiers come into existence. Dialogue does not dilute the integrity of one's faith. Rather it strengthens that integrity in the pro-

cess of interaction with people of other faiths. Commitment to one's faith and openness to that of others leads to an on-going reflection and reformulation of one's faith and its practice.

In spite of several Hindu Christian dialogues we regret to note that many people in India continue to live in religious isolation from one another. Illiteracy, lack of adequate knowledge of one another's traditions, negative stereo-types of one another, identification of these distorted views or of the external forms of one religion with the essential core of that tradition, and a mis-representation of the Christian Commitment to evangelization or mission, coupled with a Hindu misunderstanding of the same, are important reasons for this religious isolation. Besides, religious fundamentalism, the politicization of religions, and the disregard for religion brought about by the impact of science and technology or contemporary culture, have added to religious isolation not only from other traditions but even from one's own. All these above mentioned reasons also act as barriers to genuine inter-religious dialogue. Further obstacles to dialogue are: fear of the hidden motives of the partner in dialogue; fear of the dilution of one's faith or of the loss of one's identity; restrictions placed by religious traditions on the participation of a person in the rites and rituals of people of other faiths, and in inter-religious marriages.

Nevertheless, there are positive values in Hindu and Christian traditions that contribute to integration and national human community: the advaitic spirit of oneness, the person and work of Jesus Christ who breaks all barriers, the Hindu spirit of tolerance; the Christian way of service, Hindu bhakti and Christian spirit of devotion; and Hindu and Christian reverence for life. The bonds that unite us are stronger

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than the barriers that separate us. Hence the future prospects of inter-religious dialogue are still bright.

In order to promote creative dialogue we suggest:

1. New Methods of inter-religious dialogue be initiated which will reach the rural masses, students in schools and colleges, and different audiences of children.
2. Deeper and mature understanding of the core vision, theology and practices of the different religious traditions be facilitated and encouraged through dialogue meetings and interfaith study groups.
3. Each religious community should reformulate its faith in the context of religious pluralism. Relevant scriptural hermeneutics, reconception of 'uniqueness' claims, and reinterpretation of 'mission' and 'conversion' are necessary.
4. Inter-religious dialogue must address the problems of poverty and suffering. Religious traditions should be purged of elements of oppression and exploitation, particularly of women and weaker sections of society. Liberative resources from all religious traditions should be harnessed

together. All out efforts must be made to counter the politicization of religions.

5. Gandhiji's views on Truth, human society, and amity among people of different faiths, should be the object of special study at different levels.

Finally we recommend:

1. Along with other interested groups' initiatives be taken establishing inter-faith forums at district, state and national levels in order to promote inter-religious understanding and to be agents of peace in times of communal tensions and conflicts.
2. The CBCI, NCCI, and similar Hindu bodies plan to establish training centres for developing leaders in inter-faith dialogue.

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CBCI Commission for Eccumenism & Dialogue

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Secretary
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Seminar on Tradition of Faith

JANUARY 25-26, 1992. The Institute for the Study of Religion, Pune, India organised an inter-faith consultative seminar on Tradition of Faith. Hindu, Muslim and Christian participants—(17) met to reflect what they understand by religious tradition, whether there is a universal concept of religious tradition, irrespective of the content and specificity of the different traditions.

Professor Siegfried Wiedenhofer of the University of Frankfurt, Germany, who has written on this topic extensively from the Christian point of view led the discussion. The focus was on the necessity of dealing scientifically with the concept of cultural and religious tradition and methodological parameters. It

was an attempt at envisaging a transcendental model of tradition—here interreligious concept of tradition—as a precondition for meeting of cultures and religions.

Dr. Francis D'Sa, the organiser of this seminar, intends through such meetings, to create a climate of acceptance among the inter-religious dialogue partners, where a process of critical reflection of one's own tradition is initiated, without defending oneself in the presence of the other all the time by describing in detail the merits of our hoary past.

Anand Amaladass
Satyanilayam
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International Convention on Āyurveda

THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION on Āyurveda was held in New Delhi, April 10-12, 1992. His Excellency, Shri R. Venkataraman, President of India, inaugurated the convention. Other dignitaries included M.L. Fotedar, Union Minister for Public Health and Family Welfare, Balram Jakhad, Union Minister of Agriculture, and D.K. Taradevi Siddharth, Union Minister of State for Public Health and Family Welfare.

Āyurveda is one of the oldest systems of medicine with principles tested over the long haul of time, and of special interest today because of its orientation toward the preservation and promotion of health.

Āyurveda is now internationally practised and is meeting a new need of public health, according to the conference delegates from the United States, Canada, Japan, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, The Netherlands, among other foreign countries.

Prof. Vaidya Shriram Sharma, President of the All India Ayurvedic Congress, articulated the two main objectives of Ayurveda as: "1. *Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*—to keep healthy person every healthy, and 2. *Aturasya Vyadhi Parimoksha*—to cure the disease."

To achieve these objectives, Ayurveda adopts a natural and holistic approach to the person, disease and drugs, involving an orderly regimen that is centred around two specialties: *Rasayana* and *Panchakarma*. As described by Sharma: "*Rasayanas* are used for rejuvenation, enhancement of general immunity, protection from diseases, to acquire longevity, and to reverse the process of untimely aging. *Panchakarma* is purifying therapy to enhance the metabolic process through food and medicine. It is used in the case of chronic diseases and seasonal imbalances of *doshas* in the body to eliminate the vitiated *doshas* or *malas* from the body and to keep the person always healthy."

"The *Panchakarma* and *Rasavana* Therapies" were featured prominently in the convention programme which included the following subjects: "Principles of Health Care in Ayurveda and their Applicability at the Global Level;" "Use of Natural Products;" "Ayurveda

Pharmaceutics;" "Areas of Clinical Interest;" and "Ayurveda and The All India Ayurvedic Congress."

The Congress is presently concerned with upgrading standards of ayurvedic colleges in the areas of research and training. Its approach is multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary. This provides an opening for philosophers to assume a formative role in the ongoing development of Indian medicine which, according to S. Dasgupta, was "the most important of all the physical sciences which were cultivated in ancient India," and which was "directly and intimately connected with the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika physics and was probably the origin of the logical speculations subsequently codified in the *Nvāva-sūtras*."

In his key-note address, "Āyurveda: The Science of Long Life in Contemporary Perspective," this reporter explored the roots of ayurvedic thought in Sāṃkhya philosophy and Yoga psychology, enabling it to address some of the health issues of our times. Christianity has performed a similar role in the development of western medicine, which presents points of similarities and contrasts for dialogue with Hinduism. Cognate areas covering ethics and the environment can also be discussed for mutual enlightenment. This is a propitious juncture for dialogue because the Congress is wishing to join with western scholars in collaborative publications.

Along similar lines, for some years the Congress has carried on a successful programme of sending ayurveds abroad to train people. President Shriram Sharma who heads a major hospital in Bombay is eager to popularise Indian medicine in the West, but he is equally eager for dialogue with western scholars. For more information, please contact the All India Ayurvedic Congress, Dhanwantari Bhavan, Punjabi Bagh, New Delhi.

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