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## Reports & News

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## REPORTS & NEWS

### *The Society for Hindu-Christian Studies*

THE SOCIETY FOR Hindu-Christian Studies was founded in Chicago on 19 November 1994. The Society is dedicated to the study of Hinduism and Christianity and their interrelationships. It seeks to create a forum for the presentation of historical research and studies of contemporary practice, for the fostering of dialogue and interreligious conversation, carried forward in a spirit of openness, respect, and true inquiry.

Committed to scholarly interchange according to accepted traditional and contemporary methods, the Society understands its scope broadly, so as to include issues related to religious practice, spirituality, education; it is interested in supporting activities related to the comparative study of Hinduism and Christianity. Our membership includes Christians interested in the study of Hinduism, Hindus interested in the study of Christianity, and scholars – Hindu, Christian and other – interested in the historical and contemporary interactions of Hinduism and Christianity.

The words “Hindu” and “Christian” in our name indicate the general scope of our Society, but their use is not intended to overlook the diversity within the several traditions, nor to reduce them to simplistic essences, nor to posit them as two exactly parallel traditions conformed to a single standard of religion. Essential to the work of the Society will be the effort to unpack the terms “Christian” and “Hindu” productively.

At the beginning of the Society’s operation, we are mindful that we do not begin in a vacuum. There is a long history to the interactions between Christians and Hindus, and centuries of good and fruitful

encounters must be balanced against a series of unfortunate factors as well, including colonialism, orientalist misreadings, clumsy missionary efforts, tendencies to relativize the faith of others and reduce it to a version of one’s own. Influential features of today’s world – such as immigration, growing global economic and cultural interdependence, the simultaneous events of secularization and religious revival, shifting styles in the academic study of religion – mark the context in which the work of the Society occurs. We expect that the initial years of the Society will include forthright and frank conversations in which important issues are brought forward and discussed. In its early formative stages, the Society expects to shape and clarify its identity according to the insights of its members and interested colleagues inside and outside academic circles.

For more information on the Society, contact: Francis X. Clooney, S.J., President (Theology Department, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA 02167-3806, USA); Vasudha Narayanan, Vice-President (Department of Religion, University of Florida, Gainesville FL 32611, USA); Lance Nelson, Secretary (Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of San Diego, San Diego CA 92110-2492, USA); Anantanand Rambachan, Treasurer (Department of Religious Studies, St Olaf College, Northfield MN 55057, USA); Harold Coward, Editor *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* (Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, P.O. Box 3045, Victoria BC V8W 3P4, Canada). Other members of the Board are: John Carman (Harvard), Brad Malchowsky (Notre Dame) and Seshagiri Rao (U. of Virginia).

## *A University Department for Interreligious Relations*

**THE MADURAI KAMARAJ** University, Tamilnadu, India, has instituted a Department of Interreligious Relations. There are universities which offer courses on Comparative Religion, but a department meant to promote positive relations among religions is indeed a novel venture from the point of view of secular universities. The aim of the new department is not purely academic but also to be a catalytic agent for bringing about communal harmony. The basic idea is promotion of cordial relations between religions.

This university department aims at providing a theoretical base for a complementary relationship among religions such that various religions will be enabled to collaborate with one another for the purpose of establishing a new and just society. Its objectives are: 1) to bring about the basic unity of religions without undermining the distinctive features of each religion; 2) to interpret religious traditions, paving the way for a meaningful and mutual enrichment of religions; 3) to create awareness among people about the abuse of religions by vested interests; and 4) to promote and preserve the pluri-cultural mosaic of India handed down to us from times immemorial.

Keeping in mind its context and objectives, the department has launched the following programs: 1) initiating research; 2) providing a forum for interaction among scholars of religions; 3) taking the message to people at the grass-roots level. As regards the first category of actions, the department proposes to have both Ph.D. as well as M. Phil. programs. Already one scholar has made progress in his research to trace the basic unity underlying Hinduism and Christianity by a comparative study of two great saints: Gandhi and St Francis of Assisi. A genuine spiritual search is bound to involve one in socio-political affairs too. Thus another scholar is engaged in researching the "Ethical Aspects of Nehru's Policies and Peace Actions".

More than the formal courses there are other fora for acquiring deeper knowledge within a short time. Therefore the department is keen on providing such fora as seminars and symposia etc. for scholars of different religions. During the academic year 1994-95 itself the infant department has organized two major events: one, a national level seminar on "The Role of Interreligious Dialogue in National Integration" (16-17 August 1994), and the other, "National Consultation on Communal Harmony and National Integration: A Challenge to Interreligious Dialogue" (25-27 February 1995). Nearly 100 participants benefited by each of the events.

Above all, the department is keen to take the message to the masses, particularly the young generation of today. It takes advantage of the enthusiastic approach to life, the vibrant and competitive spirit of the modern youth, and organizes healthy competitions on themes of communal harmony. Already in this year many competitions were held in essay-writing, elocution, music composition, memory test, drawing, dance, and drama. Nearly three hundred students from the city schools participated in them.

Also, a series of lectures are arranged by the department in the schools and colleges of the city and elsewhere, mainly inculcating interreligious understanding and highlighting the basic unity of religions. Communal harmony should not be merely an intellectual exercise. Rather it should be a matter of conviction and commitment at the heart level. Therefore students in the city schools are encouraged to cultivate a personal friendship among the believers of other religions by organizing interreligious prayer meetings among themselves at lunch intervals or at their school assembly. The department has prepared models of interreligious prayer services and circulated them to the local schools and colleges to help organize joint celebration of major

festivals like Deepavali, Christmas, and Ramadan.

The assumption underlying the various activities of the new department is that diversity of religions is not a threat to harmonious living. But rather it can really be a catalyst for interreligious amity and enriching collaboration. Through a shared

vision and sincere dialogue, diverse religions can work together in order that a loving, peace-reigning, just, and new society may be established here on earth.

A. Pushparajan  
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## IN MEMORIAM Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J.

**IGNATIUS HIRUDAYAM, S.J.**, died in Madras on 25 March at the age of 85, in his room at Aikiya Alayam, the interreligious dialogue and research centre which he had founded over 25 years before. With his passing the age of great pioneers in Hindu-Christian dialogue and studies draws ever nearer to its close. A friend of Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux, Bede Griffiths and Raimundo Panikkar, Fr Ignatius inspired, provoked, taught and formed several generations of lay persons and Jesuits who sought to combine simplicity, scholarship and contemplation. He was known and loved in the Hindu community of south India, honoured on numerous public occasions and, most importantly, by the loyal friendship of great Hindu scholars, monks and humble devotees who recognized in him the simplicity of a man who loved God, and the brilliance of a learned scholar who probed and explained religious realities in a way that nourished both mind and heart. In this journal, though, it is appropriate to mark his scholarly contribution, particularly since his writings were mostly in Tamil and are therefore not well known outside of south India. Though he did not have the advantages of academic training in the religions of India, by patient, hard work he immersed himself in the religious classics of his own Tamil culture, particularly in *Śaiva* Siddhānta. His masterpiece was *Kiristava*

*Indiya Jnana Varvu* (perhaps, “The Life of Wisdom, Christian and Indian”), which appeared first in 1982 in a single 550-page volume, and later in an expanded three-volume version. In a depth that has not been achieved before or since in Tamil Christian writing, he first sets forth a remarkably detailed picture of Christian spirituality, calling the attention of his readers to the Fathers of the Church, the spirituality of the great medieval religious orders, his own Ignatian spirituality (in the context of the Reformation), and modern forms of religious piety in the West. Thereafter, he surveys Hindu spirituality according to the traditional themes of the four *purusarthas* and karma, *jnana* and *bhakti margas*, illustrating his points with examples from both Sanskrit and Tamil sources; he develops with particular care *Vaiṣṇava* and *Śaiva* spirituality as these have flourished in Tamil culture. The last part of the revised *Jnana Varvu* focuses on the nature and meaning of “ashram life”, as this can be interpreted, and lived, by Hindus and Christians. Supplemented by his smaller writings and his lectures at the University of Madras, *Jnana Varvu* marks a very great contribution to the development of a solidly intellectual and spiritual “Tamil Catholicism” in south India. But he was himself very concerned to encourage younger scholars to do more than he did, to develop on deeper scholarly foundations a

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truly Indian – Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jaina – theology which would enhance the self-identity of each community and foster mutual understanding. At his

passing, we can only hope that his work is continued, thus truly honouring this simple priest, scholar, son of the Tamil lands.

### *Recent Articles of Interest*

Chapple, Christopher. "Two Traditional Indian Models for Interreligious Dialogue: Monistic Accommodationism and Flexible Fundamentalism", *Dialogue and Alliance*, 7,3 (Fall/Winter 1993): 18-30.

Coward, Harold. "Hindu-Christian Dialogue as Mutual Conversation", *Studia Missionalia*, 43 (1994): 177-92.

Coward, Harold. "Hinduism's Sensitizing of Christianity to its own Sources", *Dialogue and Alliance*, 7,3 (Fall/Winter 1993): 77-85.

Dallmayr, Fred. "Western Thought and Indian Thought: Comments on Ramanujan", *Philosophy East and West*, 44, 3 (July 1994): 527-42.

Klostermaier, Klaus. "Indische Christologie", *Studia Missionalia*, 43 (1994): 193-210.

Teasdale, Wayne. "Father Bede's Mystical Consciousness: and Adventure in Grace", *The Golden String*, 1,2 (Winter 1994): 1-2.

Teipen, Alfons H. "Electronic Mail as a Tool for Interreligious Dialogue", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 31,3-4 (Summer/Fall 1994).

### *In Press*

Anand Amaladass & Richard Young. *The Indian Christiad: A Concise Anthology of Didactic and Devotional Literature in Early Church Sanskrit*. Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, India, 1995.

This anthology consists of selections from the writings of Jean Calmette, W. H.

Mill, John Muir and Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya. The text both in Nagari and Roman script is given with English translation. It has a long historical overview of Church Sanskrit and a comprehensive bibliography.