



January 1997

Viewpoints: Hindu-Christian Dialogue Today

Anand Amaladass

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/jhcs>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Amaladass, Anand (1997) "Viewpoints: Hindu-Christian Dialogue Today," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 10, Article 11.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1157>

The *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* is a publication of the [Society for Hindu-Christian Studies](#). The digital version is made available by Digital Commons @ Butler University. For questions about the Journal or the Society, please contact cbauman@butler.edu. For more information about Digital Commons @ Butler University, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

VIEWPOINTS

Hindu-Christian Dialogue Today

Anand Amaladass

Institute of Philosophy and Culture, Madras

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE – more specifically Hindu-Christian dialogue – is felt to be one of the major concerns of all the Christian communities in India. An awareness has emerged at all levels, though the emphasis and involvement vary from place to place.

Those who are actively involved – either as director of dialogue centres or program organizers at grassroots levels – say that one of their major difficulties is to explain to the Christians about the need for this venture and their envisaged enriching effect on their faith. The majority of Christians and much more the authorities concerned are suspicious of the validity of this ministry. Their argument is simple: it dilutes the uniqueness of the Christian faith, trivializes the mission of the Church to evangelize, thus losing its identity.

But articles continue to appear in journals and books on dialogue: one God and many religions, appealing to a genuine pluralism of religions without compromise of any sort and so on. One can already notice the change of tone even among the staunch champions of this cause. It has rather mellowed over the years. In fact models have been proposed on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religious traditions, provoking many healthy discussions. But this has remained within Christian circles. There has not been much direct interaction with Hindu partners. The growing awareness of the Christian community in India about Hindu religious

traditions is a welcome sign, though one cannot rule out the lurking suspicion, uncertainty, and fear of losing one's identity. But all these factors are part of any growth process.

By and large Hindus do not see the need for dialogue with Christians and so they have not worked out a theology or philosophy of dialogue. One refers often to the traditional metaphors like all rivers flowing into the ocean, many doors to the same house, many paths to reach the mountain top, several blind men describing the elephant from what they experience and holding the part for the whole and so on. But in practice each religious tradition within Hinduism has tried to establish its position intellectually by refuting the others. This is at one level.

At another level Hindus do perceive things differently. Considering the interaction between Hindus and Christians in India over the years, one has to admit that so far the Christian community has not clearly articulated the content of what they consider to be indispensable for salvation to the other religious communities which consider their religions to be sufficient. Even those who feel self-sufficient in religious matters do admit two things with regard to the Christian presence. One is the appeal of the person of Jesus Christ. To cite a simple example, several non-Christian painters in India have painted at least one picture of Jesus or presented a Christian motif in some form or other where a

personal choice of the painter is involved. Secondly, even those who do not welcome the presence of Christian missionaries in India do acknowledge the commitment, the courage, and personality of these missionaries.

Similar to what happens among the Christian communities, there is also a ferment at work among the Hindus. The Christian presence does provoke them. It could be expressed in many ways – in anger and resentment, denying the equality to the Christian *dalits*, refuting the Christian claims in some form or other in their publications, citing the Christian example to motivate or correct their own community and so on. There are also positive words of appreciation for what the Christians do. But then this is not mainly due to the Hindu-

Christian dialogue initiative as we understand it today. One must admit that it is more the historical necessity of the present-day socio-political situation in India, in which no community can claim to achieve self-sufficiency or security all by itself without recourse to and interaction with other communities around. Various factors are at work to bring about this attitude.

So one cannot measure the Hindu-Christian dialogue in terms of numbers (of meetings, publications, or subscriptions to related journals) but by perceiving the growing awareness of one another's presence in public life; and the challenge it offers to re-think about one's own religious tradition with reference to others is already a great achievement.

Hindu-Christian Dialogue During the Past Decade

S. Wesley Ariarajah
World Council of Churches, Geneva

PERHAPS IT IS not too much of an exaggeration to claim that future historians will consider the past decade to be one of the most crucial periods in the development of contemporary Hinduism, both in its native Indian subcontinent and in other parts of the world. In India itself, the expression of the collective Hindu political consciousness has never been more articulate and the goal of making India a "Hindu Nation" never before seemed a reality within reach. Even many Hindu intellectuals who keep close watch on the tenuous relationship between religion and politics in a multifaith India were taken by surprise at the energy the concept of "Hindutva" has been able to generate, an energy that was strong enough

to pull down the mosque at Ayodhya, and with it some of the reputation Hinduism has enjoyed in the West as one of the most tolerant religions of the world.

Equally dramatic developments have also taken place in nations like Fiji and Trinidad where Hindus had settled down during the colonial period. In Fiji the rise of the Fijian Indian-Hindu economic and political power has threatened the Fijian-Christian native population to the point of open conflict in which Hindu temples have been set alight. In the recent elections in Trinidad, Trinidadians of the Indian-Hindu hue have for the first time in history taken political control of the nation. A Trinidadian of African decent writing to me of this