

Some contemporary aspects of Hindu-Christian dialogue

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“A basic prerequisite for such future dialogue is that all participants have accurate information about each other’s religions. Fulfilling this prerequisite is probably the single largest obstacle to the success of religious dialogue. The majority of people today are illiterate of their own religion as well as the religion of others. The academic study of religion has a major role to play in overcoming this problem [1].” (Harold Coward)

ABSTRACT

The present paper deals with an important aspect of today’s interreligious dialogue, that between Christianity and the second largest religion of Asia, namely Hinduism. The concern is centering around not the ancient or traditional links between these two expressions of the Sacred, but rather of the contemporary ones. But that requires certain knowledge of what has already happened. The dialogue comes from the heart of the people, and is situated in the middle of life. Unfortunately, many present-day dialogues set the stage according to the terms of one of the parties alone. But in spite of misunderstandings and difficulties of the Hindu-Christian dialogue, it has an unavoidable effect: it changes our vision and interpretation of our own religion. The main tenets would be: the future of Hindu-Christian dialogue will largely depend on future mutual interest; Hindu-Christian dialogue may be linked to the future development of Hinduism and Christianity; the future of Hindu-Christian dialogue may be endangered by an institutional misunderstanding of its nature; Hindu-Christian dialogue may have to be placed into a larger “secular” context; Hindu-Christian dialogue is inevitable. It is an imperative and it must exhibit more continuity.

Keywords: interreligious dialogue, Christianity, Hinduism, vision, future, imperative, benedictive mood.

Preliminaries

The Hindu-Christian dialogue, in its present state, demands both a deep experience of one’s own tradition and a sufficient knowledge of the other one. It requires certain knowledge of what has already happened.

The context of the Hindu-Christian dialogue, as well as of any interreligious dialogue, is not the narrowly specific “religious” field, but the arena of life, the daily struggle for justice, peace, happiness. We meet the true ‘other’ not in an artificial milieu, but as fellow-traveler in the concerns of real life. But today people meet in the streets of cities, in their places of work and entertainment, and normally exchange only information of superficial feelings, having put a mask on their true personalities. [2]

Over 250 million Hindus live today in the West and their number is multiplying. Not all of them are ‘orthodox’ Hindus. Of course, the archetypes still come from the Indian traditions. An increasing number of Westerners also have close ties with the Indian subcontinent. Not all of them are ‘orthodox’ Christians. Yet the archetypes still come from the Christian tradition. Mutual interactions are inevitable. Understanding between people

belonging to those two religions is imperative for peace in the world. It should be clear here that Hinduism is not reducible to orthodox Vedanta, and, likewise, Christianity not identical with the orthodox versions of it. Religions today, as in bygone eras, are living organisms. They are moving and changing realities. Only from outdoor one can perceive a static vision of a religion. If we live a religious faith consciously and sincerely, we experience at the same time the freedom to transform it precisely by living it. The Hindu-Christian dialogue of the present cannot be limited to discussing frozen doctrines of the past. And yet the past is still effective in the present. We cannot neglect it.

Each one of us struggles to understand the partner. In this exchange we discover points or perspectives lacking in our own beliefs, and something similar happens to the other partner. Then we discover that we have perhaps gone too far and try to retreat to our previous positions, but it is too late for both sides. Something has changed in each, although it sometimes goes unconfessed to the other party.

While some will stress the difficulties in academic dialogue, others will say that only Christians are interested in it. It all depends on what we understand by *dialogue*.

Those many levels may be bewildering for the neat minds of certain intellectuals but we back down that they have a deeper reason than sociological considerations. In fact, both Hinduism and Christianity are two abstract labels. Hinduism does not exist; there are only giving and separated traditions. Christianity also is non-existent; there are thousands of churches, doctrines, and groups that, seen from the outside, appear as baroque and overwhelming as Hinduism may appear to the outsider. There is not one Hindu-Christian dialogue. There are scores of them.

The Hindu-Christian dialogue is not simply a theoretical issue. It belongs to the life of the peoples of the world, and of the Indian subcontinent in particular. Many historical movements today are not only incomprehensible, but they would have been impossible without this mutual fecundation between religions (i.e. Hinduism and Christianity in this case) [3]

John Webster reminds us that Mahatma Gandhi, when addressing a group of Christians (in 1927), told them to use Hindi instead of English and to give the spinning wheel priority over literacy in uplifting the masses; Gandhi thus touched on two of the most fundamental pillars for dialogue: language *and* praxis. [4]

Firstly, *dialogue* has to be, in reality, *duo-logue*. There have to be two *logoi*, two languages encountering each other, so as to overcome the danger of a *double monologue*. One has to know the language of the other, even if one has to learn it precisely from the other, and often in the workout of dialogue. Dialogue engages the intellect, the *logos* and that is precisely due to the fact that the academic study of religion is not a luxury.

At the same time, it has to be *dia-logue*, that is, a piercing of the *logos*, an overcoming of the mere intellectual level, a going *through* the intellect into an encounter of the whole person. It has to proceed from praxis and discover the symbolic power of action.

The dialogue comes from the heart of the people, and is situated in the middle of life. The spinning wheel is the symbol of Gandhi's challenge to technocracy and the way of saying that the Hindu-Christian dialogue has to proceed starting from both sides. Many present-day dialogues set the stage according to the terms of one of the parties alone. To assume that Christocentrism – or Theocentrism, for instance – can offer a basis as unsatisfactory as to presume that *apaurusevatva* (that which is not man-made, such as Scriptures) – or *karman* – are proper starting points. But there is a much more subtle partner for fruitful and unbiased dialogue: *modernity*.

The modern cosmology, which assumes that time is linear, that history is paramount, that individuality is the essence of Man, that democracy is an absolute, that technocracy is neutral, that social Darwinism is valid, and so on, cannot offer a fair platform for the dialogue. The basis for the dialogue would hardly be the modern Western myth. Modern Science has permeated the modern world to such an extent that it is difficult to avoid taking it as the basis of the dialogue.

Both Hinduism and Christianity have *to come to grips* with Modern Science, but it would not be fair to Hinduism to consider Modern Science as the neutral starting point. Though Modern Science is not Christianity, both share many common myths extraneous to the Hindu traditions. One can understand a certain Hindu resistance to an apparently neutral dialogue based on the assumptions of a scientific cosmology. In other words, a complete *dialogos* should be at the same time a *dia-mythos*. The respective *logoi* are bearers of meaning and life only within their respective *mythoi*. And it is by means of dialogue that we reach the myth of the other and create a climate of communication. [5]

In spite of misunderstandings, difficulties, and drawbacks of the Hindu-Christian dialogue, it has an unavoidable effect: It changes not only our opinion of the religion we study and dialogue with; it also changes our vision and interpretation of our own religion. It undermines the very basis on which one stood when beginning the dialogue. We may not convince the partners; we may even get irritated at the others; they may be impervious to our opinions. Nevertheless, we ourselves imperceptibly change our stance. The interreligious dialogue prompts the intra-religious dialogue in our own minds and hearts.

A good number of factors have changed in the present-day historical constellation:

1. Both Hinduism and Christianity have lost political power. India is no longer dominated by a Christian empire. Nor is she legally controlled by Hindu institutions. Both Hindus and Christians still have to overcome mutual suspicions and heal wounds of the past, but the meeting can take place without direct political interference.
2. Both Hinduism and Christianity are undergoing an institutional crisis, and this creates fellowship when the Hindus sense that the same difficulties and struggles are also felt by the Christians, and vice-versa.
3. Both religions are also facing a similar challenge from the technocratic complex. The challenge is not the same nor is it seen in the same way, but nevertheless it is there.
4. Due to many reasons, both religions are on the brink of a mutation, different as the two mutations may be. Perhaps the key word here is *secularity*. At any rate, there is a re-interpretation of tradition and a reformulation of the main tenets of both religions. This puts the dialogue in a very peculiar and fruitful position. Unless we are going to discuss, for example, what Sankara and Aquinas wrote, that is, unless we are engaging in merely historical and exegetical research, when we come together ready for a dialogue we do not know much. Not only do we not know what the other is going to say, we don't even know what we ourselves are going to be provoked to articulate. The dialogue does not take place from two firm and well-delimited trenches; rather, it is an open field. [6]

That's why, precisely, dogmatism is not needed, and that even dogmas are on the move. Thus, a new and fundamental function of dialogue is the encounter of religions. The first aim was to better know each other, to dispel fears and misinterpretations; a second role was that of mutual influence and fecundation. But there are also, lately detected, a third function: that of positively contributing to the new self-understanding of both sides. If

this is the case, the dialogue will become an indispensable element in the very formation of the new identity of each religious tradition. [7]

The Hindu-Christian dialogue has never been a roundtable conference, not a merely theoretical exercise in theological disputations. It is embedded in particular socio-political circumstances and takes place within a certain elusive myth.

i) *The first phase* was that of a tiny minority finding its own identity: Christians dialoguing with the Hindu majority in order to establish their own identity. No wonder the dialogue was not one of the great theological speculations, as it has been noted. It was *the Christian dialogue with Hinduism*.

ii) *The second phase* reverses the roles. Demographically, the Hindus were the majority, of course, but the power was on the other side. Hinduism had to establish its identity, and awaken from an alleged slumber that had permitted first the Muslim and later the Christian conquests. The so-called Hindu Renaissance is witness thereof. It was a *Hindu dialogue with Christianity*.

iii) *The third phase* is the prevailing one today in religious and academic milieu. It is *the Hindu-Christian dialogue*. Christians, to be sure, have taken most of the initiative, and it has been a predominantly *Christian-Hindu* dialogue; but Hindu voices are also present and many of the Christians have adopted an unbiased stance. It has been a predominantly doctrinal dialogue. Christian doctrines have been deepened or enlarged for the sake of the dialogue. Hindu doctrines have been awakened so as to show that there was also 'science,' 'rationality,' 'service of neighbor, and the like in Hindu wisdom. [8]

This third phase has eliminated clichés of superiority, exclusivism, and absolutism from both sides. Yet Westerner's knowledge of Hinduism today seems insufficient. S. Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, similarly, had sympathy for Christianity and were somewhat informed. Yet their knowledge of Christian theology was rudimentary. It is to the credit of this third phase that it has created a more conducive climate for dialogue. And here one has to acknowledge the great services of academic studies. [9]

4) The fourth phase challenges the fixed identity of both parties. The fecundation of the previous phases has produced clear effects. The fourth phase is a genuine dialogue among people who happen to be Hindus and Christians. It is the *religious dialogue* among Hindus and Christians.

But here the problems begin and do not end. What does it mean to be a Hindu? Or a Christian? Is it a doctrine, an interpretation? A church or *sampradaya* (religious system)? A historical tradition? What makes one a Hindu? Or a Christian? Who decides? And even if we say a community, which one? And according to which criteria? Have we to prescribe once and for all what it is to be a Hindu or a Christian? [10]

As some contributors suggest, the dialogue has to be secular, it has to descend to the areas of mutual concern, it has to enter into the human and political arena of our times. But the understanding of the *saeculum* does not need to be the Christian notion of secularization.

The fourth phase starts a dialogue in which neither a politically dominating Hinduism nor an established and powerful Christianity has the upper hand or provides the framework in which the dialogue takes place. Nor is the dialogue purely dialectical or simply doctrinal. The dialogue has gone deeper, on the one hand, and more external, on the other. [11]

This fourth phase is, first of all, dialogue. It is a dialogue among experts or common people, merchants or industrialists, intellectuals or artists who happen to more or

less love their traditions, but who are not tied to them to such an extent that they defend any fixed orthodoxy. The archetypes may play a more important role than the explicit ideas. To be sure, any authentic dialogue is a search for truth, and therefore it runs the 'risk' of finding itself 'outside' the fold.

The fourth phase is a new step. It is creative not only in interpreting the 'other.' It is also innovative in understanding oneself.

We could put it in terms of depth psychology. Should we not suspect also that one may one day fall in love with the person with whom one is constantly dealing? Cultural symbiosis is also a phenomenon happening among religious traditions. We also know that the constant encounter with each other may generate hatred and disgust. Fundamentalist reactions are also possible. And again one feels instructed with the lessons of history that leads us into a phase that is the prelude to overcoming religious nationalisms *pari passu* so that we may walk toward a healthy pluralism.

The Future of Hindu-Christian Dialogue

The English language has three moods that are future oriented: [12]

1. The future mood assumes that a certain event is going to occur, and that its occurrence can be anticipated with some confidence.
2. The subjunctive mood leaves alternatives open and attributes a certain probability to the occurrence of a future event.
3. The imperative mood expects a certain event to occur as the result of a command given or an order executed.

While in our daily use of the language we form future forms of verbs with ease and regularity, from a logico-epistemological viewpoint future - talk is quite problematic. Can meaningful and true statements be made about future events? Can the rules of thought that were developed on the basis of past experience be extended into the future? Must we not assume an unproven homogeneity of time when doing so? Things become even more problematic when we address the ontological status of future events. There are theories that assume all future events are already located in an eternal present. The *Bhagavad-Gita* maintains such a view, [13] and it could also be extrapolated from certain biblical passages.[14] Classical Galilean-Newtonian science operated with a similar concept: It did assume that all events were predetermined by the immutable eternal laws of nature, operating in a uniform, infinite space and time, that a complete knowledge of these laws would unfailingly allow us to predict all future events. [15]

Modern science, as well as modern religion, has become more careful. The acknowledged irreversibility of time, the asymmetry introduced by it into the universe, the relativity of space and time, both conceived as finite have led to an acceptance of indeterminacy, which at the very least, would (fundamentally) restrict our power to predict the future, because of our inability to know simultaneously all the factors necessary for doing so. The role of prophets and seers, shamans and yogis has been greatly diminished in the major religions of our time in comparison to former ages.

Since by its very nature the future is open, and since there is no claim to a special knowledge of future events, we are going to use grammar as the organizing principle of this paper and thus address the future of Hindu-Christian dialogue in the three future-oriented moods the English language offers.

1. What will be the future of Hindu-Christian dialogue?

There are many Hindus who are familiar with the New Testament and who are in sympathy with the ideals of the Sermon on the Mount. There are few Hindus who are interested in (contemporary) Christian theology, and there are fewer still who have a desire to enter into a dialogue with their Christian counterparts. There is a growing interest among Christians in India for Hinduism. Several Christian training institutions now have courses in Hinduism, and a fair number of good studies of specific aspects of Hinduism are appearing, often authored by Christian clergy. That there is a certain amount of mutual interest today is certain. Whether that interest is going to increase is uncertain. Celebrations and affirmations of dialogue notwithstanding, there seem to be few new ideas; there seems to be little progress.

Hindu-Christian Dialogue Will Require the Affirmation of the Role of Scholars in Religion

Hindu-Christian dialogue at the level of theology is by definition a scholarly affair. While not wishing to see living religiosity reduced to mere intellectualism, I attribute an important role within major religions to the activity of scholars, to thought and reflection. R. Boyd has rightly said, "For the modern educated man in India religion is philosophy or it is nothing." [16] In contemporary organized Hinduism the trend appears to be toward the political rather than toward the intellectual, toward agitation more than toward reflection. Hindu-Christian dialogue is a frontier for both Hinduism and Christianity. It requires new thought and new articulations. It requires the honest work of true intellectuals. It is the perception of many of those working in this area that the institution is not behind them.

2. What may be the future of Hindu-Christian dialogue?

It is an oft-quoted affirmation according to which as institutions both Hinduism and Christianity are today in a severe identity crisis. It is very obvious in many areas. For an institution an identity-crisis arises out of a crisis of legitimacy. The institutional crisis is more radical than the crisis in individual lives. Institutions, Hindu or Christian, represent concrete interests, which have much to do with their own past and which they must legitimate. They have institutional rights to defend, a historically-grown identity to preserve, rules to enforce; they aim at self-sufficiency and ideally at an impersonal way of functioning. [17]

The Church, used to be terribly fast with its anathemas when it encountered new ideas, and so were caste-pancayats (i.e. paria) with excommunicating members. As an institution the church was all that the individual Christian was not supposed to be: [18] it made a show of its charities; it had no patience with its dissenters; it was vain and self-seeking, tough and suspicious, avaricious and unscrupulous in pursuing its supposedly divine mission. There is a Hindu counterpart to this too in many a *sampradaya* and many a temple board, which flatly contradict the lofty ideals of the Upanishads or the exalted image of a Vaishnava theism.

As long as the institutions have not come to terms with their identity crisis they cannot meet as institutions. Some individuals in them may be able to dialogue as private persons, but it will not be an institutional Hindu-Christian dialogue, nor will it have any repercussions on the majority of Hindus or Christians. There also may be not much future for Hindu-Christian dialogue if the prevalent right-wing, conservative and fundamentalist factions in both Hinduism and Christianity take over. [19]

A statement like the following would not be found very helpful for dialogue: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, made man, is our saviour.... He ascended to heaven but not before

he had carefully prepared his apostles to bring salvation to all men, of all times, in all places.”[20] While a Hindu might not have difficulty accepting such a statement qualified by a “we Christians believe...”-in its naive dogmatism it not only offends non-Christians but also more thoughtful Christians. Hindus, presumably, would take this as an expression of the church’s missionary intentions rather than as an invitation to dialogue. Even less reassuring are some lines on the next page: “Interreligious dialogue would be unnecessary if all men believed in Jesus Christ and practiced only the religion which he established.” Is it that easy to make out “the religion which Jesus Christ established”? Or would interreligious dialogue also be unnecessary if all men believed in Buddha and the religion he established? Or in Mohammed, or ... or ...? Is the very mention of a possible single-religion Christian world not a sign of lack of realism, a revelation of a profound ignorance of history and uncalled-for Christian triumphalism?

The secular, science-based modern culture of the West has become the background to contemporary intellectual life almost everywhere – or is fast becoming so. Hindu-Christian dialogue of the future may not only have to take place in the awareness of this situation, but it may have to incorporate it into its agenda. Most Hindus and most Christians know very little of the traditions they belong to; most have no interest in acquiring any extensive knowledge of the ritualism or the theologies of their faiths.

The *de facto* emancipation of large populations in East and West from traditional religious domination has led to a great deal of independence *vis-à-vis* religious authorities also in matters where religions were traditionally thought normative. Hindu-Christian dialogue need not aim at preserving existing institutional structures or maintaining traditional beliefs. Largely unofficially as yet and not yet fully recorded, a massive shift has taken place in the understanding of key concepts of both traditional Christianity and Hinduism, much of it under the impact of modern science. There is much deep spirituality and religious searching in some of the writings of twentieth and 20st century giants of science and some contemporary scientists are quite clear about their offering a “new religion” in their thinking.[21] Hindu-Christian dialogue cannot detour this development, especially since these scientists quite often enter into dialogue with both Hinduism and Christianity, albeit in a somewhat eclectic and not always scholarly fashion.

3. Hindu-Christian dialogue in the imperative

Hindus and Christians in India share the same country and largely the same laws. They interact every day on many levels, and they cannot ignore each other’s religions. Hindus and Christians must demolish the barriers that have been set up between them by zealous ecclesiastics and by centuries of sectarianism. [22]

While engaging in honest dialogue, both Hindus and Christians will discover that the denominational fragmentation of their traditions is against the true spirit of these traditions, and that they will have to recover an identity beyond that of denominationalism. In a sincere and open dialogue focused on the basics of religious life it will not be possible for participants to retreat to the safety of their narrowly-defined sectarian identities, to refuse to come out of their shells with references to their “Catholic tradition,” their “Vaisnava background,” their “Lutheran identity,” their “Saiva faith.” Hindu-Christian dialogue, if it has a future, must be a radical questioning of traditions and an in-depth searching for ultimates.[23] The sacred for both denominational Christianity and sectarian Hinduism is not sacred unless it carries their own trademark; the good is not good unless it is identified by sectarian signs. In the process Christians and Hindus have lost the ability to see goodness and truth where it appears and have been trained to look only for the external

signs of their traditions, regardless of whether these signs are imprinted on the genuine article or on fakes.

There is a strong trend in present-day Christian theology to replace systematic thinking and philosophical engagement by story and narrative, to dismiss the intellectual approach to religion as irrelevant and to cultivate only its emotional and pragmatic sides. This trend may be both symptom of a lack of intellectual substance and cause for an erosion of intellectual content of Christianity. We see a similar trend also in contemporary Hinduism, especially in the “new movements.” When they were really strong, both Hinduism and Christianity were intellectually very vigorous. It hardly needs stating that the world today is neither governed by Christian nor by Hindu principles, and that both Hinduism and Christianity must fight hard to get a hearing. While in their best times religions lead the intellectual life of a civilization, today they are trailing it. Today religions are largely perceived as political lobby, as representing particular interests and as, generally, out-of-touch with the times. Hindu-Christian dialogue must recover the intellectual substance of Hinduism and Christianity and must contribute actively to the ongoing search for truth/reality in all spheres of life.

All too many organizers of dialogue conferences and writers of dialogue books believe, and claim, that they are the first who have seen the light, and that they are the ones with whom serious dialogue really begins. [24] If a dialogue is to be fruitful it must continue what was said and done before. An amazing amount of constructive work has been done, and many ideas have already been tried out. [25] Today’s Hindu-Christian dialogue cannot begin with a *tabula rasa*, but it adds on to a page of history on which much has already been written. It may not have been called dialogue in former times, but meetings, exchanges and encounters have taken place in India between Hindus and Christians for centuries, and both sides formed opinions of each other, which have to be taken into account. Western Christian missionaries often carried tension and dissension into India and separated not only Indian Christians from their Hindu neighbors but also brought about a split within Indian Christianity.

4. Hindu-Christian dialogue in the benedictive mood

Over and above the three future-oriented moods of the English language, which we utilized, Sanskrit possesses a “benedictive” mood used to express wishes and blessings, hope and support. Our so-called hard-nosed (unsentimental) modern world does not believe much in these things. But wishes and hopes have come true before, and blessings and supportive words have helped many. Why not use them in the context of Hindu-Christian dialogue?

May Hindus and Christians discover in each other’s traditions insights and values and blend them with their own insights and values.

May Hindus and Christians open up in dialogue toward each other and toward that which they call – by different names – God, Brahman, Bhagvan, Siva, Sakti... May Hindus and Christians gain respect for each other and may they have the courage to change their institutions accordingly.

May dialogue become the normal way of communication between Hindus and Christians rather than the exception.

May Hindus and Christians (in conjunction with all others) regain the center needed to order our social and political, our economic and our ecological lives.

May Hindus and Christians in dialogue shed all pretensions and all claims of racial superiority or religious privilege.

May Hindu and Christian scholars not only talk about dialogue but enter into genuine dialogue for their own enlightenment as well as of those for whom they teach and write. [26]

Conclusion

A consequence of the encounter between Hinduism and Christianity (and other religions and ideologies) might be a certain alienation from the local and accumulated traditions in the same sense in which the discovery of new continents brought about an alienation of Europeans from their homelands, and the discovery of distant planetary systems through the telescope brought about an alienation of humankind from earth. The process is not likely to be stopped. The attempt to conquer foreign continents and alien religions, to missionize and to make them like one's homeland has ended in failure, and not only for reasons of strategy. Horizons have shifted and the point once considered the center has turned out to be on the periphery. [27]

John Archibald Wheeler (†2008), one of the most thoughtful astrophysicists of the last decades, ends a major essay with the remark that we only begin to understand the universe and to grasp how simple it is when we begin to see how strange, unexpected and different it is from what we had imagined. [28] This is true also of religion. Not only do we begin to understand in genuine, profound and personal Hindu-Christian dialogue how strange and different and also unsuspectedly familiar the "other's" religion is, but we also begin to understand something of the extraordinary strangeness of our own religion, which we believed we knew and were familiar with.

Dialogue requires compassion, which includes, necessarily, love of neighbor, especially when he does not resemble us. In Tibet, the following fable or parable is told: "One day, I saw something in the distance. Moving ahead I thought it was an animal. I went closer and I realized it was a man. He came closer and I realized that it was my brother." [29]

References

- [1] Harold COWARD, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 107.
- [2] Raimundo PANIKKAR, *Foreword*, in: Harold COWARD (edit.), *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1993, p. X.
- [3] History is not only an account of wars. Che Guevera and Martin Luther King, Jr., are impossible without Gandhi, who is indebted to Tolstoy, who in turn is the product of an Eastern Christianity that has one of its roots in Eastern spiritualities of an extra- and pre-Christian nature. The great names of the school of Alexandria were strongly influenced by Indian doctrines. Pantaenus went to India; Ammonius Saccas, whatever his origin, was conversant with oriental religions. There is a *mala*, a rosary of living names, East and West, Hindu and Christian, which forms the warp and woof of real human history. In short, the Desert Fathers and the Hindu mystics as much as the British viceroys and the Hindu rajas or Muslim nawabs are latent partners in the present-day encounters. *Ibid*, pp. XII-XIII.
- [4] John WEBSTER GRANT, *God's people in India*, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1959, p. 13.
- [5] Raimundo PANIKKAR, *op.cit.*, p. XIV.
- [6] How often one has heard the criticism from the other side: "But you as a Hindu (or a Christian) should not be saying this."
- [7] Gladys AMBAT, *Viewpoints: Why Dialogue With Hindus?*, in: *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 2, Article 12, p. 3. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7825/2164-6279.1021>
- [8] Comparative studies of great value have appeared. Shankara and Aquinas; Krishna and Christ; Hindu and Christian pilgrimages; the notion of grace, scriptures, God, and so forth, are today well-studied topics. But comparative studies are only implicit dialogues. Cf. Roland E. MILLER, *Triologue: The Context of Hindu-Christian Dialogue in Kerala*, in: Harold COWARD, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, p. 49.

- [9] Nevertheless, the true pioneer in this respect was Max Müller († 1900), the initiator of the most celebrated work entitled: *The Sacred Books of the East* (50 vol.).
- [10] Raimundo PANIKKAR, *op.cit.*, p. XVII.
- [11] The Hindu and Christian contexts are different; they are religious and personal, but at the same time political, economic, secular, and they inform ordinary life. The fourth phase of the dialogue is a burning issue.
- [12] Other languages have somewhat different arrangements.
- [13] Bhagavad-Gita, 32 ff.: “Time am I, world-destroying, grown mature ... by me alone are they slain already. Be thou merely the occasion ...” (trans. S. Radhakrishnan). Foreseeing the future is one of the siddhis Yogis are supposed to be able to acquire. Cf. *Yogasutra*, IV, 16.
- [14] Cf. Ps. 139:16: “You had scrutinized my every action, all were recorded in your book, my days listed and determined, even before the first of them occurred”. It was the sign of the “true” over against the “false” prophet to be able to accurately predict future happenings.
- [15] The power of accurate prediction was seen as the greatest strength and proof for the validity of the scientific method. Klaus KLOSTERMAIER, *The Future of Hindu-Christian Dialogue*, in: H. COWARD, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, p. 263.
- [16] R. BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: CLS, 1979), p. 262.
- [17] Both Hinduism and Christianity (in its mainstream) are mass-religions, “national religions,” to which one belongs automatically by the sheer fact of being born into a certain community (infant-baptism, at least as it used to be practiced, is the equivalent of being born into a religion, as is the case in Hinduism). What we see developing today, both in Hinduism and Christianity, is the forcing of identities in contrast to “the others”. See Klaus KLOSTERMAIER, *The future of Hindu-Christian dialogue*, p. 266.
- [18] We are referring here to the portrait of a Christian drawn by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13.
- [19] Klaus KLOSTERMAIER, *op.cit.*, p. 266.
- [20] “The Urgency of Dialogue with Non-Christians” in *Origins* 39/14, Washington (March 14, 1985), pp. 641-50.
- [21] Douglas HOFSTÄDTER ends the preface to his widely acclaimed *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Band* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980) with these words: “In a way, this book is a statement of my religion. I hope that this will come through to my readers, and that my enthusiasm and reverence for certain ideas will infiltrate the hearts and minds of a few people. That is the best I could ask for” (p. xxi). See also Ken WILBUR, ed., *Quantum Questions: Mystical Writings of the World's Great Physicists* (Shambhala, 1984). Books like Sin's *Tao of Science* and F. Capra's *Tao of Physics* have become “bibles” for a generation of science-and-religion-interested youth. See Klaus KLOSTERMAIER, *The future of Hindu-Christian dialogue*, p. 267.
- [22] The sociologist L. DUMONT has said emphatically: “Cultures not only can be made to communicate, they must!” *Religion/Politics and History in India* (Mouton, 1970), p. 161.
- [23] Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 1, 2 approvingly quotes Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, “*Fides est circa simplicem et semper existentem veritatem*” (“faith is about the simple and ever existing truth”). This must be the definition of faith adopted by both Christians and Hindus in order to enter into meaningful dialogue.
- [24] Thus W. STOLZ and S. UEDA, eds., *Offenbarung als Heilserfahrung im Christentum, Hinduismus and Buddhismus* (Collected Papers from a Dialogue Conference: Vienna, 1992) begin their preface with the sentence: “Christian theology has just now begun the dialogue with the great religions of Asia.” (Sic!)
- [25] Just two major works – out of an impressive number – may be mentioned to substantiate the claim: R. BOYD, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: CLS, 1979) and M. M. THOMAS, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (London: SCM, 1969).
- [26] Harold G. COWARD, *The Reflective Word: Spirituality in the Grammatian Tradition of India*, in: *Hindu Spirituality. Vedas through Vedanta*, Krishna SIVARAMAN, ed., Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1995, p. 223.
- [27] Robert D. BAIRD, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue and the Academic Study of Religion*, in: H. COWARD, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*, p. 220.
- [28] John ARCHIBALD WHEELER, “From Relativity to Mutability”, in J. Mehra, ed., *The Physicists' Conception of Nature* (Dordrecht, 1973), pp. 204-247.
- [29] Jean DELUMEAU, *The World Religions (Le fait religieux*, Paris, Fayard, 1993, p. 779.)