

## Special Supplement

### Selected Talks and Statements on Interfaith Issues by Religious Leaders and Scholars

*Compiled by Anjam Khursheed*

The following talks and addresses have been compiled to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Inter-Religious Organisation of Singapore. The selection is only meant to provide a small sample of the rapidly growing body of interfaith literature now available. Each talk or statement has been chosen primarily for its historical importance.

George Townshend, an Irish Archdeacon, wrote numerous books on the relationship between Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith and was one of the leading Western Bahá'í scholars in the first half of this century. His talk, delivered at the first World Congress of Faiths conference in 1936, is one of the earliest Bahá'í papers to appear in a modern interfaith setting. The Hindu contribution comes from some of Vivekananda's talks delivered at the first Parliament of the World's Religions conference held in Chicago in 1893. These talks, as well as his subsequent tours of the West, did much to disseminate information about Hinduism in the West. Vivekananda was the foremost disciple of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian sage, Ramakrishna, whose teachings revolved around the unity of religions and the non-dualist approach to God. The Buddhist talk comes from the fourteenth Dalai Lama, who is at present an influential spokesman for ecumenism between Eastern and Western religious traditions. The Jewish contribution comes from Jonathan Sacks, who was Chief Rabbi Elect of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth. Sacks was one of the first Chief Rabbis to clearly state his support for interfaith dialogue and religious pluralism. Robert Runcie, the present Archbishop of Canterbury, is also unequivocal in his support for interfaith dialogue. In his 1986 Sir Francis Younghusband memorial lecture, given here, Runcie displays an openness to other religions that is remarkably different to the exclusivist approaches taken

by his predecessors. Within Catholicism, the historic *Nostra Aetate* statement made by the II Vatican Council in 1965 is given. The statement began a new era of interfaith dialogue for the Catholic Church. Also included is an address given by Pope John Paul II in his recent visit to India. This message is concerned with interfaith relations in Asia. The Islamic contribution is problematic, since there are no religious leaders who represent the Islamic world, nor even a large section of it. Instead, the talk by Yusuf Ali delivered at the first World Congress of Faiths conference in London 1936 is given. Yusuf Ali was the translator of the most widely disseminated version of the Quran in English.

# BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S GROUND PLAN OF WORLD FELLOWSHIP\*

*George Townshend*

**World Congress of Faith, 1936, London  
Thursday, July 16th Morning Session**

The Ground Plan of World Fellowship which is now submitted to your consideration was composed out of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and presented by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, and later in Paris, about a quarter of a century ago. It proposes in the simplest possible form a practical scheme for mastering the urgent problem of world-fellowship; and its originating idea, though of outstanding magnitude, is such as to place the whole plan throughout, from its beginning, in complete accord with the purpose we have before us today - that of promoting the spirit of fellowship through the inspiration of religion.

This Plan, in every feature, plainly implies that nothing less than a concerted effort on a world scale, with the spiritual energies of mankind informing its practical energies, will now suffice to awaken the spirit of fellowship and secure deliverance from danger. No local or regional effort; no partial effort of either religion alone or statecraft alone, will completely solve our problems. The sense of fellowship, to be adequate to this unique emergency, must, on the one hand, be broad-based on the whole of our human nature, spiritual, moral and intellectual, and on the other hand must not be limited by any terrestrial boundaries whatever.

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\* Taken from *Faiths and Fellowship, Proceedings of the World Congress of Faiths Conference*, published by J. M. Watkins, 21 Cecil Court, London, W. C. 2, 1936, pp. 299-317. Reprinted with permission from the World Congress of Faiths.

Such a thesis may still be ahead of the public opinion of mankind. But it is not so far ahead of that opinion as it was when it was first proposed in this city in 1911. Today our emergency is rather more serious than then; but it is of the same general character. What, then, and up to the present, has been lacking in men's experiments is clearness of spiritual vision, the guidance of intuition. Only Faith can point or see the way in such an hour as this. Men question the love of a God who could let loose on them so dire a cataclysm and could choose out this generation for suffering wholly unprecedented. Their doubt cuts them off from the source of light and help. There is no vision; and the people perish. Only Faith sees clearly, in open view, that this darkness is cast by a great light, that this passing defeat of the spirit of Fellowship is the prelude of its final victory. A loving God would not have set this generation problems without bestowing the ability to solve them, would not inflict dire penalties on those whom he regarded as guiltless.

We are daunted by the strange new troubles that close us in on every side; we do not look within and observe that a new power of mastering these is being developed in conscience and in spirit. Intellectual vision never was so keen as in this generation; but spiritual vision, was it ever more weak? We talk, we boast, of the New Age, but we miss its greatest gift. We say the human race is at last reaching maturity, but we do not realise the fullness, the completeness, of this growth. We perceive it is intellectual; we do not perceive that it is, in like measure, moral and spiritual. Man's conscience has become more sensitive, his spirit more responsive to heavenly promptings. As he is today endowed with a new degree of intellectual power, so also is he endowed today with a new degree of religious power. The evolutionary process, with even hand, bears onward the whole being and nature of man; his heart as well as his brain. New ideals, new hopes, new dreams of further progress, a more general, more insistent desire to build a better world than the one which we inherit, these bear witness to man's consciousness of growth. In all its faculties the human race is passing from childhood and ignorance towards maturity; towards the tasks that befit full manhood. Today mankind is like a youth leaving school for the sterner world of business and affairs. It is called on to put into practice the lessons of moral principle and human fellowship in which it has been instructed for so long. For how many centuries have we, all of us, been under tutelage to those whom we revere as the Founders of our Faiths? Is it strange that a time should come when we should be required to put into concrete deeds

the precepts of brotherhood we all acknowledge, and should at last be threatened with condign punishment if we disobey?

Much, indeed, has been done of late to remedy old wrongs, to suppress tyranny, to uplift the oppressed, to relieve the poor, to teach the ignorant. But how much remains undone! We have accomplished enough to convict ourselves of being fitted for a better social order, of being ready to inaugurate a system of widespread justice and fraternity, and of lacking the resolution to put our ideals into effect. There is enough of good in our recent record to incriminate us, but not enough to deliver us. We stand now before the judgment seat of heaven condemned by the evidence of our own acts.

We had no vision. Men turned from the saints, mystics and seers, and listened to secular philosophers. Blind leaders of the blind, into what perdition have they led us! Our intellectual eminence by some fatality heightened our troubles. Divorced from faith, it aggravated human pride, taught men to forget their moral responsibility and to deny their servitude before the moral law. The inevitable hour of retribution draws near.

Surely this is a love-tragedy vaster in its scale, more terrible in its poignancy than any in the history of our race!

The urge of evolution pressed us forward; we would not go. The spirit of fellowship grew warm in our hearts; we would not feed its flame. The gates of world-brotherhood opened wide; we turned away. God poured His spiritual bounties on spirit and conscience in greater abundance than ever; we in our blindness rejected His gifts and Him.

But this failure is not final nor for long. It is not the failure of Faith, nor yet of Love. It is the open, the confessed failure of human wisdom. Through its purgation men who have doubted will learn to turn for fellowship and peace to the way they have not trodden; the way of religion. But all must tread this way together. Since the whole world as a unit is involved, the ideals which are to guide this movement must be given a definite shape. If there is to be concerted action towards a single goal, some map of the common journey must be made. Vague sentiments of goodwill, however genuine, will not suffice. Some explicit agreement on principles will be required for any co-ordinated progress.

It was to this task that Bahá'u'lláh long ago addressed himself, and worked out a Ground Plan on which the temple of human fellowship might be reared. It consisted of a set of fundamental principles and represented the minimum of what the occasion required. No foundation less deeply dug than this will hold the structure that is to be built upon it.

The burden of the whole scheme was laid ultimately upon the shoulders of each individual man and woman. Everybody by virtue of his status as a human being had his share in the vast world enterprise. The principle of individual responsibility was thus to be the basis of all progress.

But underneath this basic fact of human duty lay something deeper yet. The living rock on which this foundation was to be laid was something the strength of which humanity hitherto has too little recognised. That rock is the Truth. This spirit of fellowship which we seek to encourage is not by Bahá'u'lláh conceived as some addition to being, which the genius of man should undertake to create. As a flower within the bud, it lies waiting the hour of its appearance. It is a reality which our fragmentariness denies. And what this Assembly desires to do is not to create something new, but to give expression to something which is already in existence though unused. Man's advancing power is due to his increasing knowledge of truth; and the magnificence of this present age bears witness in the last resort not to the personal greatness of this generation, but rather to the greatness of a continuously unfolding Truth. If this Age is to become the Age of Universal Brotherhood, it must be the Age of Knowledge, knowledge of Truth. The Truth will set us free. The Truth will make us one.

As the first item of his programme, therefore, Bahá'u'lláh claimed that every individual should have the right of seeking for himself the truth. Love of truth, which at the present time is growing apace among mankind, is the sole real corrective of all forms of error and illusion. The great enmities which in the past have divided mankind, and which were due to misunderstanding and ignorance, have, in recent times, lost their vitality, and our estrangements are now due chiefly to the instinct of imitation and to prejudice. These prejudices have come down to us from the past, racial, religious, national. For them all Bahá'u'lláh offers one radical cure, the search for truth. The battle which mankind yet has to fight between prejudice and truth he seems to regard as the Armageddon of the human soul.

Through this search for truth mankind at last would become really and clearly conscious of the essential unity of the human race. For this unity is, and has ever been, a fact. "Ye are the branches of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye with one another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship", wrote Bahá'u'lláh. From the full knowledge of this unity, and from nothing less, there would be born in this age a spirit of world fellowship adequate to the present emergency. On this consciousness of unity, therefore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid the greatest stress. He gave to it a central place in his programme, other features supporting or amplifying it or giving it application in the practical affairs of mankind.

One of the facts which has obscured from men's view their essential unity is the difference between the world religions, which has been made the cause of estrangement, or prejudice and even of ill-will and strife. But, insisted 'Abdu'l-Bahá, there is nothing in these differences which should produce so sad a result. Indeed, there is an important aspect in which all religions are at heart one, and he included the existence of this unity as a principle in his scheme. He meant, so it seems, that a religion does not consist solely of a doctrine, and an institution, but is also, in a real and vital sense a spiritual atmosphere. It is, as he once described it, "an attitude of soul towards God, reflected in life." This is the essence of true religion; and to this extent, the whole world over, members of all the religions have an outlook, an experience, an obligation which they share in common with one another in spite of their special and distinctive loyalties, and which group them all together apart from the sceptic.

The more intensely spiritual men are, the more vividly conscious are they of the reality and sweetness of this communion, and one of their privileges is the experience of a deep sympathy, a common lowliness, a common aspiration which they share with those of a different tradition from their own.

Not only in their atmosphere and their influence but even in their profounder teachings the world-religions may show forth this unity. Do not all our faiths affirm and magnify the love of God for His creatures? What truth could be more ancient, more precious than this? What would bind those who espouse it with a closer tie of fellowship?

This age of widening consciousness and deepening love of truth has begun to bring us, on a scale quite unprecedented, some accurate knowledge of the sacred treasures and the sacred history of the human race. Scholars, divines, men of letters, poets have all contributed to this enlightenment. They show us each of the great religions as being like a majestic temple reared in some chosen spot by the hand of a master architect, and surrounded now by a multitude of lesser buildings of various later dates. Each temple blends with its own environment but is in marked contrast with all the other temples. No two are alike, and the annexes connected with each are still more unlike. But if the enquiring traveller pursues his investigations and makes his way within the sacred structures, he discovers, in their several interiors and even in the shrines themselves an unmistakable kinship in beauty.

Experts in comparative religion have spoken with emphasis of the points of agreement to be found between the world religions. Professor Cheyne quotes Max Muller as "advising the Brahmists to call themselves Christians," and himself argues that the reconciliation of religions must precede that of races "which at present is so lamentably incomplete." The evidence of men of learning is supported by that of another cloud of witnesses, whose testimony none can gainsay, and who speak with the voice not of intellectual criticism but of spiritual knowledge. The highest exponents of a religion, those who understand most thoroughly its meaning and interpret its spirit with the most compelling authority, are those men and women of mystical genius whose impassioned devotion and obedience to their divine Master is the outstanding feature of their lives. If each of these religions were strictly exclusive, the negation of all the others, bringing to men its own irreconcilable message, those who followed these religions to the extreme, the mystics and the saints, would assuredly move farther and farther apart, and would come to rest at the last point of divergence. The greater the saint the wider the gulf between him and the saints of alien allegiances. At the same time the less aspiring and spiritually gifted multitudes, immersed in the daily human concerns which all men share alike, would be found to be the least estranged from one another by their differing creeds.

But in fact this is not so. Strangely, very strangely, religious history shows us something quite different, exactly the opposite. The contrast between each world-religion and all its sister-religions is, as a rule, felt most acutely and insisted on most vigorously by the less mystically

minded of its votaries. While the mystics of all the religions, instead of moving farther and ever farther apart, seem rather to travel by converging paths and to draw nearer and nearer together.

If one is to accept the account of their experience given by contemporaries or by themselves, these mystics seem all the world over to have gone upon the same spiritual adventure, to be drawn onward by the same experience of an outpoured heavenly love; and they testify one and all that to reach this knowledge of the love of God is to understand at last the mystery and the hidden blessedness of life, and to possess an everlasting treasure for which the sacrifice of all earthly things is but a little price.

This fellowship among all mystics is common knowledge, of which evidence is within the reach of all. In a well-known English work, Miss Underhill writes of the mystics that, "We meet these persons in the east and the west, in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds. Their one passion appears to be the prosecution of a certain spiritual and intangible quest... This, for them, has constituted the whole meaning of life... and it is an indirect testimony to its objective actuality that whatever the place or period in which they have arisen, their aims, doctrines and methods have been substantially the same. Their experience, therefore, forms a body of evidence, curiously self-consistent and often mutually explanatory..." (Introduction to Mysticism, Chapter I)

Every public library in this country will contain books supplying illustrations of this statement. The mystical outlook and perspective both on the things of heaven and the things of earth is in its essence eternally the same. But perhaps no instance of the fundamental unity that underlies all mystical experience is more striking than that parallelism between Plotinus and St. Augustine to which in his *Evolution of Theology* Professor Edward Caird draws attention. "Some of the finest expressions of this (the mystical) attitude of soul," he writes, "may be found in the Confessions of St. Augustine. But when St. Augustine expresses his deepest religious feelings we find that he repeats the thoughts and almost the very words of Plotinus." Professor Caird then shows how closely akin to the thought of Plotinus is "that great passage in which Augustine gives an account of his last conversation with his mother Monica about the life of the redeemed in heaven." And he concludes, "how deeply neo-Platonism must have sunk into the spirit of St. Augustine, when, in

describing the highest moment of his religious experience, he adopts almost verbally the language in which Plotinus tries to depict the mystic ecstasy of the individual soul as it enters into communion with the soul of the world."

By what diverse paths have mystics, who had nothing in common save wholehearted servitude before the one loving God, by what diverse paths have they all alike attained the blessed Presence? And what man in his pride of opinion will shut out from Paradise those whom God's own hand has admitted? Thus do scholars and saints join to testify that the great religions have their aspect of unity as well as their aspect of variety, and that without qualifying their special allegiance, worshippers in all religions may find something in the fundamental nature of religion itself which promotes a sweet, precious and abiding sense of true companionship.

The promotion of a boundless spirit of concord and goodwill, Bahá'u'lláh maintained to be agreeable to the genius of every world-religion. Whatever misunderstanding may have arisen in bygone centuries, no religion as originally taught was meant to encourage animosity. Quite the contrary. Religion is meant to heal discord. So important, in an age of disintegration, did this feature of religion seem that 'Abdu'l-Bahá proposed to include in his Plan the precept that, "the purpose of religion is to promote harmony and affection."

One will not doubt this loving purpose may be discovered, or rediscovered, in every one of our world-faiths, and assuredly in Christianity. If we look away from Christendom to Christ and to the pure teaching of Christ, we find it evident throughout the Gospels. Christ said that one's whole duty was to love God and one's neighbour, and He described neighbour as meaning anyone you could help regardless of creed or kin. He made fellowship in love the evidence of Christian membership, "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples if ye have love one to another."

In this Age we congratulate ourselves that for centuries past religious enmity has been continually growing more weak. Yet our ideal remains negative. To manifest no illwill towards those who differ in opinion from us is not enough. Christ enjoined a more positive attitude of soul, one of active goodwill despite all differences. When God thus commands a

spirit of affection towards all, He gives the power to obey His command. Religion, in other words, is creative. Through its force the will of an earnest man is enabled to achieve an inward change that otherwise would be beyond his strength. If this were not so, what useful place would religion fill in this kosmos of ours?

If now the creative power of religion to effect this purpose were called upon and put to vigorous use, how many vital problems which have proved insoluble on the intellectual plane, such as the reunion of Christendom or the combating of secularism, might prove much more tractable when carried to the spiritual plane!

Another effort at harmonisation was called for when Bahá'u'lláh included in this scheme an active partnership between religion and science.

Tolerance between the two is too little. In their nature they are complementary, as two wings with which the soul soars towards knowledge of the truth. Science divorced from religion gives a wholly distorted view of reality. Religion divorced from science may become a mere superstition. Man is to use both as his servants and thus to bring the material aspect of life and the spiritual aspect at last into evident and complete accord.

To these principles Bahá'u'lláh added, as necessary for practical results, certain provisions of a more material nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentioned laws to prevent extremes of indigence and opulence, universal education, a common language, a central World-Tribunal.

To the use by all nations of a secondary or world language in addition to their mother tongue, great importance was attached. Without this device fellowship would never be assured. The religious history of mankind from the days of Babel to the present bears out this emphasis. When we remember, for example, the influence of the general use of the Greek language throughout the Roman Empire at the beginning of our Era; when we consider how in Islam the adoption of Arabic as a common language united peoples hitherto estranged, facilitated the interchange of thought and aided the rapid extension of a single culture over vast regions; or when again we observe how the cause of ecclesiastic unity was promoted by the use, and weakened by the disuse, of the Latin

language as a medium among the peoples of western Europe centuries ago; we are driven to conclude that in this age of radio and aviation a world-language would unify the peoples of mankind to a degree unprecedented in the past and difficult for us to calculate in anticipation.

The federal tribunal or Board of Arbitration which in a few words 'Abdu'l-Bahá proposed, differed in three notable points from the League which afterwards was set up. The provision of an adequate police force was an essential prerequisite: the draft of any proposed constitution was to be referred not only to the governments but also to the peoples of the world; and, when finally ratified and adopted, it was to enjoy the full support of religion, of church as well as of state, and its strict maintenance against any violation by any nation was to be held by all mankind as a sacred obligation.

In these and all other reforms man's greatest stay would be the Holy Spirit, without whose aid no peace or fellowship or unification would ever be secured.

This scheme of world fellowship, first promulgated some forty years before, was presented twenty-five years ago in London by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "This," he said, "is a short summary of the teachings of Baha'u'llah. To establish this, Bahá'u'lláh underwent great difficulties and hardships. He was in constant confinement and he suffered great persecution. But... from the darkness of his prison he sent out a great light into the world." ('Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 18)

'Abdu'l-Bahá claimed that these principles were consistent with the spirit of all the world-religions, and were measured with exact and unique fitness to mankind's heightened capacity and its tremendous responsibility at this time. He felt no doubt of this being at no very distant date adopted: fellowship along these lines was the birthright of our New Age. But though they have percolated far through the world and have cheered the hearts of many, yet the larger collaboration between races and religions here so definitely outlined has in fact been postponed in favour of narrower views and more materialistic reforms. Our civilisation is in desperate plight and has sunk into a moral and spiritual abyss.

Men realise the urgent need of a reformation greater in range and intensity than mankind has ever yet achieved; but know not how to meet that need.

In such an emergency does not this bold original scheme of fellowship merit serious consideration and even the test of experiment? Does it deserve to be merely ignored by the rulers and teachers of the world?

In advocating peace to a western audience 'Abdu'l-Bahá once said: "You have had war for thousands of years; why not try peace for a change? If you do not like it you can always go back to war." One might hazard a similar suggestion about this fellowship plan. We have tried every other device, why not now try this?

For all its brevity, this summary may suffice to suggest the character of the Ground Plan of World Fellowship constructed by Bahá'u'lláh and presented here in London by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and may indicate how close it is in spirit and in purpose to the ideal which is now before this Assembly.

If it be true that reforms as great and as numerous as these are demanded by the Genius of our Age, one will perceive why the alternatives tried by mundane wisdom during this generation have resulted in consistent disappointment. What has been lacking in all is religious insight, an appreciation of the fact that evolution has brought to men an advance in their moral and spiritual powers and a proportionate heightening of their opportunities and responsibilities.

"That one is a man indeed who to-day dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race... It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens." (Gleanings from Bahá'u'lláh, p.250)

Bahá'u'lláh clearly affirms that without a keener spirituality, a loftier and firmer faith in the Universal Father mankind will not discover the way out of its troubles. Only through the initiative of religion will humanity be rescued from dissention and united in hearts' fellowship. And if religiously minded men and women are to leaven with the spirit of fellowship this love-lorn and lonely world until the whole be

leavened, that which they will need beyond all else is that they have in their hearts no place where doubt or fear may enter but be possessed with the invincible assurance that under God the whole movement of evolution is with us in this endeavour, that no difficulty, no delay, no defeat which may take shape as we advance can ever stem the onward march of Heaven's purpose, that within man's soul to-day are ample powers to win all that we desire, and that the banner under which mankind will stand at last united is that spiritual faith in the love of Almighty God, which is the universal heritage of us all.

### **Comments by the Chairman, Viscount Sir Herbert Samuel:**

If one were compelled to choose which of the many religious communities of the world was closest to the aim and purpose of this Congress, I think one would be obliged to say that it was the comparatively little known Bahá'í community.

Other faiths and creeds have to consider at a Congress like this, in what way they can contribute to the idea of world fellowship. But the Bahá'í faith exists almost for the sole purpose of contributing to the fellowship and the unity of mankind.

Other communities may consider how far a particular element of their respective faith may be regarded as similar to those of other communities, but the Bahá'í faith exists for the purpose of combining in one synthesis all those elements in the various faiths which are held in common. And that is why I suggest that this Bahá'í community is really more fully in agreement with the main idea which has led to the summoning of the Congress than any particular one of the great religious communities of the world.

Its origin was in Persia where a mystic prophet, who took the name of the Bab, the "Gate," began a mission among the Persians in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. He collected a considerable number of adherents. His activities were regarded with apprehension by the Government of Persia of that day. Finally, he and his leading disciples were seized by the forces of the Persian Government and were shot in the year 1850. In spite of the persecution, the movement spread in Persia and in many of the countries of Islam. He was followed as the head of the community by the one who has been its principal prophet and exponent, Bahá'u'lláh. He was most active and despite persecution and imprisonment made it his life's mission to spread the creed which he claimed to have received by direct divine revelation. He died in 1892 and was succeeded as the head of the community by his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who was born in 1844. He was living in Haifa, in a simple house, when I went there as High Commissioner in 1920, and I had the privilege of one or two most interesting conversations with him on the principles and methods of the Bahá'í faith. He died in 1921 and his obsequies were attended by a great concourse of people. I had the honour of representing His Majesty the King on that occasion.

Since that time, the Bahá'í faith has secured the support of a very large number of communities throughout the world. At the present time it is estimated that there are about eight hundred Bahá'í communities in various countries. In the United States near Chicago, a great temple, now approaching completion, has been erected by American adherents to the faith, with assistance from elsewhere. Shoghi Effendi, the grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is now the head of the community. He came to England and was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, but now lives at Haifa, and is the centre of a community which has spread throughout the world.

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The Bahá'í Faith is a world religion that was founded in Persia in 1844 by Bahá'u'lláh. It is a monotheistic religion that teaches the unity of all religions and the equality of all people. The Bahá'í Faith is based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, who is considered by his followers to be the most recent of a series of prophets who have appeared in the world since the time of Adam. Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are contained in his book, the Kitáb-i-Íqán, which is the central text of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'í Faith is a religion of peace and harmony, and it is one of the fastest growing religions in the world today.

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# **SOME OF THE VIVEKANANDA'S SPEECHES AT THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGION\***

Sept 11: Introduction Paper at World Conference (Welcome Speech)

Sept 15: Why We Disagree

Sept 19: Paper on Hinduism

Sept 27: Address at the Final Session

## **September 11: Introduction Paper at World Conference (Welcome Speech)**

Sisters and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

My thanks, also, to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honor of bearing to different lands the idea of toleration. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.

I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell

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\* Taken from *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume 1, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, India, 1997, pp.3-24

you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to the southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings:

“As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world, of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita:

“Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me.”

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

### **September 15: Why We Disagree**

I will tell you a little story. You have heard the eloquent speaker who has just finished say, "Let us cease from abusing each other," and he was very sorry that there should be always so much variance.

But I think I should tell you a story which would illustrate the cause of this variance. A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born there and brought up there, and yet was a little, small frog. Of course, the evolutionists were not there then to tell us whether the frog lost its eyes or not, but, for our story's sake, we must take it for granted that it had its eyes, and that it every day cleansed the water of all the worms and bacilli that lived in it with an energy that would do credit to our modern bacteriologists. In this way it went on and became a little sleek and fat. Well, one day another frog that lived in the sea came and fell into the well.

"Where are you from?"

"I am from the sea."

"The sea! How big is that? Is it as big as my well?" and he took a leap from one side of the well to the other.

"My friend," said the frog of the sea, "how do you compare the sea with your little well?"

Then the frog took another leap and asked, "Is your sea so big?"

"What nonsense you speak, to compare the sea with your well!"

"Well, then," said the frog of the well, "nothing can be bigger than my well; there can be nothing bigger than this; this fellow is a liar, so turn him out."

That has been the difficulty all the while.

I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own little well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks the whole world is his well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that is the whole world. I have to thank you of America for the great attempt you are making to break down the barriers of this little world of ours, and hope that, in the future, the Lord will help you to accomplish your purpose.

### **Sept 19: Paper on Hinduism**

Three religions now stand in the world which have come down to us from time prehistoric - Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism. They have all received tremendous shocks, and all of them prove by their

survival their internal strength. But while Judaism failed to absorb Christianity and was driven out of its place of birth by its all-conquering daughter, and a handful of Parsees is all that remains to tell the tale of their grand religion, sect after sect arose in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundations, but like the waters of the sea-shore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only for a while, only to return in an all-absorbing Hood, a thousand times more vigorous, and when the tumult of the rush was over, these sects were all sucked in, absorbed and assimilated into the immense body of the mother faith.

From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.

Where then, the question arises, where is the common center to which all these widely diverging radii converge? Where is the common basis upon which all these seemingly hopeless contradictions rest? And this is the question I shall attempt to answer.

The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.

The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honor them as perfected beings. I am glad to tell this audience that some of the very greatest of them were women.

Here it may be said that these laws as laws may be without end, but they must have had a beginning. The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then, if there was a time when

nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in a potential form in God. In that case God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make Him mutable. Everything mutable is a compound and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So God would die, which is absurd. Therefore, there never was a time when there was no creation.

If I may be allowed to use a simile, creation and creator are two lines, without beginning and without end, zoning parallel to each other. God is the ever-active providence, by whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos, made to run for a time, and again destroyed. This is what the Brahmin boy repeats every day:

"The sun and the moon, the Lord created like the suns and the moons of previous cycles."

And this agrees with modern science.

Here I stand and if I shut my eyes, and try to conceive my existence, "I," "I," "I," what is the idea before me? The idea of a body. Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances? The Vedas declare, "No" I am a spirit living in a body: I am not the body. The body will die, but I shall not die. Here I am in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created, for creation means a combination, which means a certain future dissolution. If then the soul was created, it must die. Some are born happy, enjoy perfect health with beautiful body, mental vigor, and all wants supplied. Others are born miserable; some are without hands or feet; others again are idiots, and only drag on a wretched existence. Why, if they are all created, why does a just and merciful God create one happy and another unhappy, why is He so partial? Nor would it mend matters in the least to hold that those who are miserable in this life will be happy in another one. Why should a man be miserable even here in the reign of a just and merciful God?

In the second place, the idea of a creator God does not explain the anomaly, but simply expresses the cruel Rat of an all-powerful being. There must have been causes, then, before his birth, to make a man miserable or happy and those were his past actions.

Are not all the tendencies of the mind and the body accounted for by inherited aptitude? Here are two parallel lines of existence - one of the mind, the other of matter. If matter and its transformations answer for all that we have, there is no necessity for supposing the existence of a soul. But it cannot be proved that thought has been evolved out of matter; and if a philosophical monism is inevitable, spiritual monism is certainly logical and no less desirable than a materialistic monism; but neither of these is necessary here.

We cannot deny that bodies acquire certain tendencies from heredity, but those tendencies only mean the physical configuration through which a peculiar mind alone can act in a peculiar way. There are other tendencies peculiar to a soul caused by his past actions. And a soul with a certain tendency would, by the laws of affinity, take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency. This is in accord with science, for science wants to explain everything by habit, and habit is got through repetitions. So repetitions are necessary to explain the natural habits of a new born soul. And since they were not obtained in this present life, they must have come down from past lives.

There is another suggestion. Taking all these for granted, how is it that I do not remember anything of my past life? This can be easily explained. I am now speaking English. It is not my mother tongue; in fact, no words of my mother tongue are now present in my consciousness; but let me try to bring them up, and they rush in. That shows that consciousness is only the surface of mental ocean, and within its depths are stored up all our experiences. Try and struggle, they would come up. and you would be conscious even of your past life.

This is direct and demonstrative evidence. Verification is the perfect proof of a theory, and here is the challenge thrown to the world by the Rishis. We have discovered the secret by which the very depths of the ocean of memory can be stirred up - try it and you would get a complete reminiscence of your past life.

So then the Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce - him the fire cannot burn - him the water cannot melt - him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere but whose center is located in the body, and

that death means the change of the center from holy to body. Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter.

In its very essence, it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter and thinks of itself as matter.

Why should the free, perfect, and pure be thus under the thralldom of matter, is the next question. How can the perfect soul be deluded into the belief that it is imperfect? We have been told that the Hindus shirk the question and say that no such question can be there- Some thinkers want to answer it by positing one or more quasi-perfect beings, and use big scientific names to fill up the gap. But naming is not explaining. The question remains the same. How can the perfect become the quasi-perfect; how can the pure, the absolute change even a microscopic particle of its nature? But the Hindu is sincere. He does not want to take shelter under sophistry. He is brave enough to face the question in a manly fashion; and his answer is: "I do not know. I do not know how the perfect being, the soul, came to think of itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter." But the fact is a fact for all that. It is a fact in everybody's consciousness that one thinks of oneself as the body. The Hindu does not attempt to explain why one thinks one is the body. The answer that it is the will of God is no explanation. This is nothing more than what the Hindu says, "I do not know."

Well, then, the human soul is eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite, and death means only a change of center from one body to another. The present is determined by our past actions, and the future by the present. The soul will go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death. But here is another question: Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and from at the mercy of good and bad actions - a powerless, helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect - a little moth placed under the wheel of causation, which rolls on crushing everything in its way and waits not for the widow's tears or the orphan's cry? The heart sinks at the idea, yet this is the law of nature. Is there no hope? Is there no escape? - was the cry that went up from the bottom of the heart of despair.

It reached the throne of mercy, and words of hope and consolation came down and inspired a Vedic sage, and he stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings:

"Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again."

"Children of immortal bliss" - what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name - heirs of immortal bliss - yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. We are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. The divinities on earth - sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.

Thus it is that the Vedas proclaim not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws, not an endless prison of cause and effect, but that at the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One, "by whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain and death stalks upon the earth."

And what is His nature?

He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful. "Thou art our father, Thou art our mother, Thou art our beloved friend, Thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe; help me bear the little burden of this life." Thus sang the Rishis of the Veda. And how to worship Him? Through love. "He is to be worshiped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life."

This is the doctrine of love declared in the Vedas, and let us see how it is fully developed and taught by Krishna whom the Hindus believe to have been God incarnate on earth.

He taught that a man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by water; so a man ought to live in the world - his heart to God and his hands to work.

It is good to love God for hope of reward in this or the next world, but it is better to love God for love's sake; and the prayer goes: "Lord, I do not want wealth nor children nor learning. If it be Thy will, I shall go from birth to birth; but grant me this, that I may love Thee without the hope of reward - love unselfishly for love's sake." One of the disciples of Krishna, the then Emperor of India, was driven from his kingdom by his enemies and had to take shelter with his queen, in a forest in the Himalayas and there one day the queen asked how it was that he, the most virtuous of men, should suffer so much misery. Yudhishtira answered, "Behold, my queen, the Himalayas, how grand and beautiful they are; I love them. They do not give me any- thing but my nature is to love the grand, the beautiful, therefore I love them. Similarly, I love the Lord. He is the source of all beauty, of all sublimity. He is the only object to be loved; my nature is to love Him, and therefore I love. I do not pray for any- thing; I do not ask for anything. Let Him place me wherever He likes. I must love Him for love's sake. I cannot trade in love."

The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is, therefore, Mukti - freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery. .

And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure. So purity is the condition of His mercy. How does that mercy act? He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, yea, even in this life; then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight. Then all doubt ceases. He is no more the freak of a terrible law of causation. This is the very center, the very vital conception of Hinduism. The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories, If there are existences beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them. If there is a soul in him which is not matter, if there is an all-merciful universal Soul, he will Rota Him direct. He must see Him, and that alone can destroy all doubts. So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is: "I have seen the soul; I have seen God." And that is the only condition of perfection. The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realizing - not in believing, but in being and becoming.

Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God, and see God; and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus.

And what becomes of a man when he attains perfection? He lives a life of bliss infinite. He enjoys infinite and perfect bliss, having obtained the only thing in which man ought to have pleasure, namely God, and enjoys the bliss with God.

So far all the Hindus are agreed. This is the common religion of all the sects of India; but then perfection is absolute, and the absolute cannot be two or three. It cannot have any qualities. It cannot be an individual. And so when a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahma, and it would only realize the Lord as the perfection, the reality, of its own nature and existence, the existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. We have often and often read this called the losing of individuality and becoming a stock or a stone.

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound."

I tell you it is nothing of the kind. If it is happiness to enjoy the consciousness of this small body, it must be greater happiness to enjoy the consciousness of two bodies, the measure of happiness increasing with the consciousness of an increasing number of bodies, the aim, the ultimate of happiness, being reached when it would become a universal consciousness.

Therefore, to gain this infinite universal individuality, this miserable little prison - individuality must go. Then alone can death cease when I am one with life, then alone can misery cease when I am one with happiness itself, then alone can all errors cease when I am one with knowledge itself; and this is the necessary scientific conclusion- Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter, and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, Soul.

Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would

reach the goal. Thus chemistry could not progress farther when it would discover one element out of which all others could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfill its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations, and the science of religion become perfect when it would discover Him who is the one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world, One who is the only Soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations. Thus is it, through multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no farther. This is the goal of all science.

All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run. Manifestation, and not creation, is the word of science today; and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language and with further light from the latest conclusions of science.

Descend we now from the aspirations of philosophy to the religion of the ignorant. At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshipers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation.

"The rose, called by any other name, would smell as sweet." Names are not explanations.

I remember, as a boy, hearing a Christian missionary preach to a crowd in India. Among other sweet things he was telling them was, that if he gave a blow to their idol with his stick what could it do? One of his hearers sharply answered, "If I abuse your God, what can He do?" "You would be punished," said the preacher, "when you die." "So my idol will punish you when you die," retorted the Hindu.

The tree is known by its fruits. When I have seen amongst them that are called idolaters, men, the like of whom, in morality and spirituality and love, I have never seen anywhere, I stop and ask myself, "Can sin beget holiness?"

Superstition is a great enemy of man, but bigotry is worse. Why does a Christian go to church? Why is the cross holy? Why is the face turned toward the sky in prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church? Why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants when they pray? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing- By the law of association the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you, it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent. After all, how much does omnipresence mean to almost the whole world? It stands merely as a word, a symbol. Has God superficial area? If not, when we repeat that word "omnipresent", we think of the extended sky or of space - that is all.

As we find that somehow or other, by the laws of our mental constitution, we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sky, or of the sea, so we naturally connect our idea of holiness with the image of a church, a mosque, or a cross. The Hindus have associated the ideas of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such other ideas with different images and forms. But with this difference that while some people devote their whole lives to their idol of a church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows, the whole religion of the Hindu is centered in realization. Man is to become divine by realizing the divine. Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood; but on and on he must progress.

He must not stop anywhere. "External worship, material worship," say the scriptures, "is the lowest stage; struggling to rise high, mental prayer is the next stage, but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realised." Mark, the same earnest man who is kneeling before the idol tells you, "Him the sun cannot express, nor the moon, nor the stars, the lightning cannot express Him, nor what we speak of as fire; through Him they shine." But he does not abuse anyone's idol or call its worship sin. He recognizes in it a necessary stage of life. "The child is father of the man." Would it be right for an old man to say that childhood is a sin or youth a sin?

If a man can realize his divine nature with the help of an image, would it be right to call that a sin? Nor, even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him all the religions from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength till it reaches the Glorious Sun.

Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognized it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas and tries to force society to adopt them. It places before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols - so many pegs to hang spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for everyone, but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism.

One thing I must tell you. Idolatry in India does not mean anything horrible. It is not the mother of harlots. On the other hand, it is the attempt of undeveloped minds to grasp high spiritual truths. The Hindus have their faults, they sometimes have their exceptions; but mark this, they are always for punishing their own bodies, and never for cutting the throats of their neighbors. If the Hindu fanatic burns himself on the pyre, he never lights the fire of Inquisition. And even this cannot be laid at the door of his religion any more than the burning of witches can be laid at the door of Christianity.

To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal. Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why, then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.

It is the same light coming through glasses of different colors- And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns. The Lord has declared to the Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna: "I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there." And what has been the result? I challenge the world to find, throughout the whole system of Sanskrit philosophy, any such expression as that the Hindu alone will be saved and not others. Says Vyasa, "We find perfect men even beyond the pale of our caste and creed." One thing more. How, then, can the Hindu, whose whole fabric of thought centers in God, believe in Buddhism which is agnostic, or in Jainism which is atheistic?

The Buddhists or the Jains do not depend upon God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion, to evolve a God out of man. They have not seen the Father, but they have seen the Son. And he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also.

This, brethren, is a short sketch of the religious ideas of the Hindus. The Hindu may have failed to carry out all his plans, but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being from the lowest grovelling savage, not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognize divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be centered in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.

Offer such a religion and all the nations will follow you. Asoka's council was a council of the Buddhist faith. Akbar's, though more to the purpose, was only a parlor meeting. It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion.

May He who is the Brahma of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea! The star arose in the East; it travelled steadily towards the West, sometimes dimmed and sometimes effulgent, till it made a circuit of the world, and now it is again rising on the very horizon of the East, the borders of the Sanpo, a thousand fold more effulgent than it ever was before.

Hail Columbia, motherland of liberty! It has been given to thee, who never dipped her hand in her neighbor's blood, who never found out that the shortest way of becoming rich was by robbing one's neighbors, it has been given to thee to march at the vanguard of civilization with the flag of harmony.

### **Sept 27: Address at the Final Session**

The World's Parliament of Religions has become an accomplished fact, and the merciful Father has helped those who labored to bring it into existence, and crowned with success their most unselfish labour.

My thanks to those noble souls whose large hearts and love of truth first dreamed this wonderful dream and then realized it. My thanks to the shower of liberal sentiments that has overflowed this platform. My thanks to this enlightened audience for their uniform kindness to me and for their appreciation of every thought that tends to smooth the friction of religions. A few jarring notes were heard from time to time in this harmony. My special thanks to them, for they have, by their striking contrast, made the general harmony the sweeter.

Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. But if anyone here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth, or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.

Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most extended character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction", "Harmony and peace and not Dissension".

# RELIGIOUS HARMONY\*

*The Fourteenth Dalai Lama*  
*Tenzin Gyatso*

## Talks in North America 1979-1981

### Ecumenical Gatherings throughout North America

That we have here a common gathering of various believers is a positive sign. Among spiritual faiths, there are many different philosophies, some just opposite to each other on certain points. Buddhists do not accept a creator; Christians base their philosophy on that theory. There are great differences, but I deeply respect your faith, not just for political reasons or to be polite, but sincerely. For many centuries your tradition has given great service to humankind.

We Tibetans have benefited greatly from the help offered by Christian relief organizations, such as the World Council of Churches, as well as the many others that have helped Tibetan refugees when we were passing through our most difficult period. Our Christian friends all over the world showed us great sympathy along with substantial material assistance, and I would like to express my deepest thanks to them all.

All of the different religious communities accept that there is another force beyond the reach of our ordinary senses. When we pray together, I feel something, I do not know what the exact word is - whether you would call it blessings, or grace - but in any case there is a certain feeling that we can experience. If we utilize it properly, that feeling is very helpful for inner strength. For a real sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that feeling - that atmosphere and experience - is very useful and helpful. Therefore I particularly appreciate these ecumenical gatherings.

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\* Taken from *Kindness, Clarity, and Insight*, Snow Lion Publications, N.Y., 1984, pp. 45-50. Reprinted with permission.

All of the different religious faiths, despite their philosophical differences, have a similar objective. Every religion emphasizes human improvement, love, respect for others, sharing other peoples' suffering. On these lines every religion has more or less the same viewpoint and the same goal.

Those faiths which emphasize Almighty God and faith in and love of God have as their purpose the fulfilment of God's intentions. Seeing us all as creations of and followers of one God, they teach that we should cherish and help each other. The very purpose of faithful belief in God is to accomplish His wishes, the essence of which is to cherish, respect, love, and give service to our fellow humans.

Since an essential purpose of other religions is similarly to promote such beneficial feelings and actions, I strongly feel that from this viewpoint a central purpose of all the different philosophical explanations is the same. Through the various religious systems, followers are assuming a salutary attitude toward their fellow humans - our brothers and sisters - and implementing this good motivation in the service of human society. This has been demonstrated by a great many believers in Christianity throughout history; many have sacrificed their lives for the benefit of humankind. This is true implementation of compassion.

When we Tibetans were passing through a difficult period, Christian communities from all over the world took it upon themselves to share our suffering and rushed to our help. Without regard for racial, cultural, religious, or philosophical differences, they regarded us as fellow humans and came to help. This gave us real inspiration and recognition of the value of love.

Love and kindness are the very basis of society. If we lose these feelings, society will face tremendous difficulties; the survival of humanity will be endangered. Together with material development, we need spiritual development so that inner peace and social harmony can be experienced. Without inner peace, without inner calm, it is difficult to have lasting peace. In this field of inner development religion can make important contributions.

Although in every religion there is an emphasis on compassion and love, from the viewpoint of philosophy, of course there are differences, and

that is all right. Philosophical teachings are not the end, not the aim, not what you serve. The aim is to help and benefit others, and philosophical teachings to support those ideas are valuable. If we go into the differences in philosophy and argue with and criticize each other, it is useless. There will be endless argument; the result will mainly be that we irritate each other - accomplishing nothing. Better to look at the purpose of the philosophies and to see what is shared - an emphasis on love, compassion, and respect for a higher force.

No religion basically believes that material progress alone is sufficient for humankind. All religions believe in forces beyond material progress. All agree that it is very important and worthwhile to make strong effort to serve human society.

To do this, it is important that we understand each other. In the past, due to narrow-mindedness and other factors, there has sometimes been discord between religious groups. This should not happen again. If we look deeply into the value of a religion in the context of the worldwide situation, we can easily transcend these unfortunate happenings. For, there are many areas of common ground on which we can have harmony. Let us just be side by side - helping, respecting, and understanding each other - in common effort to serve humankind. The aim of human society must be the compassionate betterment of human beings.

Politicians and world leaders are trying their best to achieve arms control and so forth, and this is very useful. At the same time, we who have certain beliefs have a duty and responsibility to control our own bad thoughts. This is the real disarmament, our own arms control. With inner peace and full control of bad thoughts, external control is not particularly significant. Without inner control, no matter what steps are taken, external efforts will not make much difference. Therefore, under the present circumstances, we in the religious community have a special responsibility to all humanity - a universal responsibility.

The world situation is such that continent to continent all are heavily dependent on each other, and under such circumstances genuine cooperation is essential. This depends on good motivation. That is our universal responsibility.

Question: As a religious leader, are you interested in actively encouraging others to join your faith? Or do you take the position of being available if someone should seek knowledge of your faith?

Answer: This is an important question. I am not interested in converting other people to Buddhism but in how we Buddhists can contribute to human society, according to our own ideas. I believe that other religious faiths also think in a similar way, seeking to contribute to the common aim.

Because the different religions have at times argued with each other rather than concentrating on how to contribute to a common aim, for the last twenty years in India I have taken every occasion to meet with Christian monks - Catholic and Protestant - as well as Muslims and Jews and, of course, in India, many Hindus. We meet, pray together, meditate together, and discuss their philosophical ideas, their way of approach, their techniques. I take great interest in Christian practices, what we can learn and copy from their system. Similarly, in Buddhist theory there may be points such as meditative techniques which can be practiced in the Christian church.

Just as Buddha showed an example of contentment, tolerance, and serving others without selfish motivation, so did Jesus Christ. Almost all of the great teachers lived a saintly life - not luxuriously like kings or emperors but as simple human beings. Their inner strength was tremendous, limitless, but the external appearance was of contentment with a simple way of life.

Question: Can there be a synthesis of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and all religions, gathering the best in all, and forming a world religion?

Answer: Forming a new world religion is difficult and not particularly desirable. However, in that love is essential to all religions, one could speak of the universal religion of love. As for the techniques and methods for developing love as well as for achieving salvation or permanent liberation, there are many differences between religions. Thus, I do not think we could make one philosophy or one religion.

Furthermore, I think that differences in faith are useful. There is a richness in the fact that there are so many different presentations of the way. Given that there are so many different types of people with various predispositions and inclinations, this is helpful.

At the same time, the motivation of all religious practice is similar - love, sincerity, honesty. The way of life of practically all religious persons is contentment. The teachings of tolerance, love, and compassion are the same. A basic goal is the benefit of humankind - each type of system seeking in its own unique ways to improve human beings. If we put too much emphasis on our own philosophy, religion, or theory, are too attached to it, and try to impose it on other people, it makes trouble. Basically all the great teachers, such as Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, or Mohammed, founded their new teachings with a motivation of helping their fellow humans. They did not mean to gain anything for themselves nor to create more trouble or unrest in the world.

Most important is that we respect each other and learn from each other those things that will enrich our own practice. Even if all the systems are separate, since they each have the same goal, the study of each other is helpful.

Question: Sometimes when we hear Eastern religions compared with Western culture, the West is made to seem materialistic and less enlightened than the East. Do you see such a difference?

Answer: There are two kinds of food - food for mental hunger and food for physical hunger. Thus a combination of these two - material progress and spiritual development is the most practical thing. I think that many Americans, particularly young Americans, realize that material progress alone is not the full answer for human life. Right now all of the Eastern nations are trying to copy Western technology. We Easterners such as Tibetans, like myself, look to Western technology, feeling that once we develop material progress, our people can reach some sort of permanent happiness. But when I come to Europe or North America, I see that underneath the beautiful surface there is still unhappiness, mental unrest, and restlessness. This shows that material progress alone is not the full answer for human beings.

# THE INTERFAITH IMPERATIVE\*

*Jonathan Sacks*

Lecture to the Annual General Meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews, 1989

Many years ago I had the privilege of meeting one of the great religious leaders of the Jewish world. He was a Hassidic Rebbe, head of a large group of Jewish mystics. I was inspired by his teachings and impressed by the spirituality of his followers. But I had a question about the way of life he advocated. It seemed exclusive. In its intense and segregated piety it shut out the rest of the world. Was there not - I asked him - beauty and value outside the narrow walls in which he lived? He answered me with a parable.

Imagine, he said, two people who spend their lives transporting stones. One carries bags of diamonds. The other hauls sacks of rocks. Each is now asked to take a consignment of rubies. Which of the two understands what he is now to carry? The man who is used to diamonds knows that stones can be precious, even those that are not diamonds. But the man who has carried only rocks thinks of stones as a mere burden. They have weight but not worth. Rubies are beyond his comprehension.

So it is, he said, with faith. If we cherish our own, then we know the value of others. We may regard ours as a diamond and another faith as a ruby, but we know that both are precious stones. But if faith is a mere burden, not only will we not value ours. Neither will we value the faith of someone else. We will see both as equally useless. True tolerance, he implied, comes not from the absence of faith but from its living presence. His words rang true. My own experience had taught me likewise.

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\* Taken from *Faith in the Future, the Ecology of Hope and the Restoration of Family, Community, and Faith*, Mercer University Press, Georgia, 1997, pp. 74-81.

I grew up in Finchley, and my parents sent their children to the schools closest to hand. Both were Christian establishments, and I have often reflected on how my brothers and I, members of an Orthodox Jewish family, reacted to a religious environment so different from what we knew from the synagogue and home. The answer is simple. We encountered teachers who valued their religion, and as a result we learned to value our own. We were conscious of our difference, but the difference was respected. Interacting with our teachers and friends we learned that those who are at home in their own faith, who are confident in their beliefs and assured of their own religious heritage, are not threatened by another faith. On the contrary, they are capable of valuing and being enlarged by it.

So, at an early age, I learned how the encounter between Christians and Jews can benefit both traditions by teaching us pride in our own heritage, and humility in the face of another. That is the great truth on which the Council of Christians and Jews is predicated. But - and this is the crucial question - how many people still share that vision?

Twenty or thirty years ago, the answer would have been: a great many.

There was a time - it reached its high point in the 1960s - when the word 'interfaith' was on many people's lips. It seemed then as if dialogue would bring about a momentous transformation in the relationship between the great world religions. It was as if we were about to enter a new era in inter-religious understanding. There was a widespread sense that we had been estranged for too long.

For centuries, even millennia, religions had seen themselves as possessors of exclusive truths and of unique paths to salvation. Each in affirming its own faith, denied the integrity of others. Above all, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity had been fraught with tragedy. As centuries of suspicion, even hostility, reached their shattering climax in the Holocaust, men and women of faith knew in their hearts that some other understanding had now to emerge. So, in a historic gesture of reconciliation, Christians and Jews alike began to reach out to one another, determined to turn a history of alienation into a legacy of love.

It was, and in retrospect will be seen to be, a heroic undertaking. But the world has moved on, and in some respects not for the better. Today we stand between the beginning of two new decades, the 5750s in the Jewish calendar, the 1990s in the Christian calendar. And from both perspectives, the future seems more sombre than it did twenty or thirty years ago. In Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other world faiths the voice of tolerance and moderation has become muted, even unsure of itself. Those who claim to represent religious authenticity have been those who, by and large, reject dialogue, accommodation and pluralism, and speak instead of authority, exclusivity and the uncompromising fundamentals of faith. As a result, religion in the contemporary world has become again a scene of conflict rather than reconciliation.

Specifically in terms of the Jewish-Christian encounter there have been tensions on both sides. For Jews there has been a sense of unease. They ask the following questions. Have the Churches fully come to terms with the centrality of the State of Israel in Jewish consciousness? Have they understood what its security means to a people who came face to face with the angel of death at Auschwitz, and had no inch of the planet Earth that was their refuge and their home? Have they reflected fully on the pain caused by the convent at Auschwitz, a pain whose dimensions are too deep for me to analyse here? Do the Churches understand the particular assault on Jewish sensibilities caused by missionary activities targeted on lonely or vulnerable Jews? More deeply: Has Christian theology yet fully come to terms with the contemporary vitality of Jewish existence, with the miracle of Jewish religious and national rebirth after the Holocaust, with the fact that *Am Yisrael Chai*, the people of the covenant lives?

I speak as a Jew. But a Christian would surely set forth another perspective and testify to pain on the other side of the relationship as well. In Christian eyes it must at times seem that the State of Israel is a dilemma, not just an achievement. How can Jewish and Palestinian claims co-exist and be resolved? How, in Israel, can military and religious values live alongside one another? Can there be a religious ethic, not of powerlessness, but of power? Must our hearts not go out to the Palestinians as they once went out to the Jews? And as for the Holocaust, have we not moved beyond the time of remembering to a time of forgiving? Is there not a certain unforgiving relentlessness about bringing aged war criminals to trial forty years after the event? As a Jew,

I must hear that voice and that pain and know that they express sincere Christian concerns.

These tensions do not exist in isolation. They are part of a much deeper shift in religious consciousness. One image brings this vividly to mind. Two years ago a great hurricane swept across southern England. As Jews, we remember the date because it took place on the night of one of the great festivals of the Jewish year, *Simhat Torah*, the day of 'Rejoicing in the Law'. Our family was in the West End of London at the time, because my synagogue is next to Hyde Park. Just before dawn broke I went out to see what had happened. I came upon a scene of devastation. There was silence. No one else was yet about, and the wind had died. But everywhere, great trees had been uprooted and branches hurled across roads. The order of the park had been reduced to chaos. As the sun rose over that ravaged landscape it seemed for a moment like the end of the world.

A fearful thought then occurred to me. It was in just such moments that our ancestors saw God. Didn't the Psalm - the very Psalm which rabbinic tradition associated with the giving of the Torah - declare: 'The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars, the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon... The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare' (Psalm 29:5,9)? God was not only in the still small voice that spoke to Elijah. He was also in the mighty east wind that divided the Red Sea. He was in the earthquake that swallowed Korach. He was in the volcanic upheaval that swept away Sodom and the cities of the plain. He was in the tempest that threatened to sweep away Jonah's ship.

That moment came back to me when the Salman Rushdie affair first began. I spoke about it on the radio. I said that for the past two centuries in the West we had seen God in the order of the garden and not in the mighty wind that wrecks the garden. We had seen Him in quiet faith, not in the fire and the thunder and the hurricane. The Rushdie affair took us by surprise because we had edited out of our image of religion a whole range of passion that submits to neither moderation nor tolerance. We remembered that God spoke to Elijah in a still small voice. We forgot that He spoke to Job out of the heart of the whirlwind.

And there lies the problem. The great conversation between faiths, which reached its heights in the 1960s, was predicated on a series of

assumptions that had their roots in the Enlightenment. We were gradually moving from a world of tradition to a society built on rationality. We were passing, slowly but inexorably, from the particular identities of particular faiths to a more universal conception of humanity. Society was becoming, as the sociologists said, secularised. Religious belief was still strong, but it was becoming marginal to our public decisions. Passion and prejudice were gradually dying, and in their place reason and moderation would hold sway. On that scenario, the bitter religious conflicts of the past looked very much like things of the past. It was a time for reconciliation.

But it didn't happen that way. Almost immediately, a new kind of religiosity began to emerge, or re-emerge, in Christianity, Judaism, Islam and other world faiths. It transpired that secularisation had failed to provide us with our most basic human needs: the need for meaning and personal identity. And the way to meaning and identity lay in highly particular religious traditions. So we began to see, and have become increasingly aware of, religious revivals built on intense hostility to the assumptions of the modern world. Critics call it Fundamentalism, a word I do not like because it groups together many different phenomena under a single name. But several things followed, and have become more and more noticeable over the passing years.

Firstly, religion, far from being a force for reconciliation, has become the battleground of some of the fiercest and most intractable conflicts in the contemporary world, from Northern Ireland to Lebanon and beyond. Secondly, the kind of religion that has real power over the lives of its followers is increasingly exclusive and confrontational. Thirdly, the theology that speaks of tolerance and openness and dialogue with the modern world is seen, by many believers in search of the truth, as a compromise that lacks content and authenticity. The result is that the most passionate religious believers today, in many faiths, are more concerned with their own destiny than with our collective destiny in this tense and troubled world.

### **“Restating the Interfaith Imperative”**

So, as we face a new decade, we must begin to restate the inter-religious imperative in more forceful terms. We must see it not simply as a gesture

of goodwill undertaken by men and women of exceptional liberalism and vision, but as a set of religious axioms that must be confronted by all believers, even those who do not as yet see the need for meeting and reconciliation. We must focus our search not on the modern world and its values, for these are precisely what many religious believers reject. Instead, we must take our stand on the classic texts and principles of our great religious traditions. What, as a Jew, impels me to enter into conversation with men and women of other faiths?

The Hebrew Bible contains the great command, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18), and this has often been taken as the basis of biblical morality. But it is not: it is only part of it. The Jewish sages noted that on only one occasion does the Hebrew Bible command us to love our neighbour, but in thirty-seven places it commands us to love the stranger. Our neighbour is one we love because he is like ourselves. The stranger is one we are taught to love precisely because he is not like ourselves.

Time and again the Hebrew Bible emphasises that we are judged by how we act to those who are unlike us, and who may even call into question everything we stand for. Rabbinic tradition held that Abraham was a greater man than Noah. Why so? Noah, the Torah says, was 'a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time' (Genesis 6:9). Nonetheless, said the rabbis, when the world was drowning, Noah saved only his own family, whereas Abraham fought a war and later prayed for the inhabitants of Sodom and the cities of the plain. The Jewish mystics once asked: Why is the *hassidah*, the stork, an unclean animal? Its name means 'the compassionate one'. How can a bird called 'compassion' be unclean? They answered: the *hassidah* has compassion only for its own kind. Compassion only for your own is not compassion.

Just before the story of Abraham and the covenantal people begins, the Bible relates the episode of the tower of Babel. In broad outlines, the moral of the story is clear. People gathered together to build a tower that would reach to heaven, but the proper place of man is on earth. They were guilty of hubris and they were punished by nemesis. The story is a satire of the pretensions of Babylonian civilisation and of the thought that because man has technological mastery, he can become like God. But this does not explain the story's central message, that after Babel the

world is split into many languages, and that until the end of days there is no single universal language.

Babel is the essential preface to the history of Abraham. Without it, we might have thought that the covenant with Abraham was universal like the covenant with Noah, that it applied to all humanity and that it expressed a universal religious truth. It did not. Just as after Babel there is no single universal language, so there is no single universal culture and no single universal faith. The faith of Abraham left room for other ways of serving God, just as the English language leaves room for French and Spanish and Italian.

Faiths are like languages. There are many of them, and they are not reducible to one another. In order to express myself at all, I must acquire a mastery of my own language. If I have no language, I will still have feelings but I will be utterly inarticulate in communicating them. The language into which I am born, which I learn from my parents and my immediate environment, is where I learn self-expression. It is a crucial, perhaps even an essential, part of who I am. But as I venture out into the world I discover that there are other people who have different languages which I must learn if we are to communicate across borders.

A faith is like a language. I am at home in my own language as I am at home in my own faith. True conversions are rare. But I am not compromised by the existence of other languages. To the contrary, the more languages I can speak, the more I can communicate with others and the more I am enriched by their experience. To believe that our faith is the only religious reality there is, is rather like the old-fashioned British tourist who believed that you could communicate with the Spanish by speaking English very slowly and very loudly. After Babel, the religious reality, like the linguistic reality, is inescapably plural.

In recent years we have become conscious of global ecology. Environmental thinking has made us aware of the inter-connectedness of our actions. The destruction of a rain-forest in one part of the world can affect the climate in another. So it is with our social ecology. Once, religions and cultures could live for the most part at a safe remove from one another, as if each was an island entire of itself. Today there is no safe remove. Walk down a modern city street, and you will pass people of a dozen different cultures and languages. Our economy and politics

are affected by the actions of a hundred different countries. Our very survival depends on the decisions of several powers not to use nuclear or chemical weapons. International terrorism may suddenly involve us in someone else's argument thousands of miles away. Our interconnectedness has become tangible. Modernity has cast the wholly other directly into our lives.

Judaism long ago recognised the significance of social ecology. It formulated the idea of *darkhei shalom*, 'the ways of peace'. It took this not as a pious sentiment, but as a significant factor in Jewish law. *Darkhei shalom* asserts that the basic duties that I owe to the members of my faith community, I owe to those outside it as well - not because we share a faith but because we share an environment, a society, and we must be able to live together if we are to be able to live at all. Faith sometimes demands radical and uncompromising action. But *darkhei shalom* tells me that I must exercise restraint and moderation if I am not to destroy the social environment in which I live along with those who have a different faith. *Darkhei shalom* is an ecological principle that tells us that we live in a world of complex interdependencies, and we must exercise self-restraint in order to preserve that world.

These ideas are undergirded by the most fundamental proposition of all. Before there were religions, even before there were human beings, God pronounced the still awesome truth of the human situation: 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness' (Genesis 1:26). On this, the sages of the Mishnah delivered the following commentary: When human beings make things in a single image, they are all alike. God makes humanity in a single image, yet each of us is unique.

A faith built on the Hebrew Bible must come to terms with the stunning implications of that remark. We have great difficulty in recognising the integrity - indeed the sanctity - of those who are not in our image, whose faith and traditions and culture and language are not like ours. Nonetheless, we are told, and must struggle to see, that the wholly other, he or she who is not in our image, is yet in God's image.

I have tried to show in this chapter how a Jew, through his or her commitment to Judaism, is led outward to the realities of a multifaith world. My argument rests on no hidden liberal or modernist premises that could be rejected by a religious extremist. Christian theology will

find its own way at arriving at these conclusions. But arrive at them we must. For if we are to co-exist in a world of rising religious intolerance, we shall have to find an interfaith imperative that speaks not only with a small voice, but also out of the heart of the whirlwind.

# THE ESSENTIAL BASIS OF RELIGION\*

A. *Yusof Ali*

The whole air is ringing with cries of world unity and world brotherhood. Let us examine how near we are to achieving it, and what is the best method by which it can be made real and permanent?

If we consider the marvellous development of communications in our own day, it seems strange that human solidarity should not have kept pace with these mechanical developments. From the horse-drawn coaches of the nineteenth century we went on to motor-cars with a speed of twenty or thirty miles an hour. Now Sir Malcolm Campbell achieves a speed, on land, of 300 miles an hour and the internal combustion engine is giving us every day more and more command of the air. We have air-lines and air-routes scattered all over the world. The aviation record is held by the Italian Agello at 440 miles per hour. The sea voyage from England to India round the Cape, which took five or six months in the sailing ships of Warren Hastings's day, was shortened to three weeks by the Suez Canal steamship route of the latter part of the nineteenth century. The steamship speed grew from ten knots to twenty and twenty-five knots per hour, and now fast cruisers do twenty-seven or thirty knots or even more. In the air, the post from England to India now takes barely ten days and in all probability will shortly take only a week or even less. A few aviators and aeroplane constructors are already talking of an hourly post service between the two sides of the Atlantic, separated by a distance of over 3,000 miles.

But it may legitimately be asked, "Have these mechanical facilities of communication brought men's minds and hearts nearer?" It may be that there are greater facilities of mental contact between different races and

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\* Taken from *Faiths and Fellowship, Proceedings of the World Congress of Faiths Conference*, published by J. M. Watkins, 21 Cecil Court, London, W. C. 2, 1936, pp. 13-25. Reprinted with permission from the World Congress of Faiths.

people, but even that is doubtful. After all, the ordinary business of everyday life looks solely to the simple material needs and no higher. The real contact of mind with mind comes only when there is behind it a real desire to know and understand human personality in diverse and even unfamiliar forms.

Economic considerations have always played a large part in the lives of individuals and in the policy of nations. But in our own day, with all the complexities of modern life, we are apt to think of many other interests in economic terms. Our politics are coming to be more and more dominated by economics. Family life is undergoing strange transformations. It is becoming more and more fashionable in our education to emphasise the economic factor in both college and school curricula.

The growth of tariffs has made economics the main pivot on which national policy turns. God's earth is spacious, but economic nationalism has made it very narrow, and broken it up into a number of units mutually jealous of each other. Racial antagonisms are also being coloured more and more by economic jealousies.

Many of us, who, after the Great War, hailed the foundation of the League of Nations as heralding a new era of peace and goodwill among men, have had shocks, disappointments, and disillusiones. The leaders of nations are genuinely anxious to remove causes of difference and to build up a system of mutual understanding and mutual co-operation, but it cannot be said that the path before them is smooth. All sorts of barriers lie in their way. When we hold a World Economic Conference, currency questions and tariffs are found to be intractable barriers. During the present Italo-Abyssinian dispute, the question of an even and just distribution of raw products among many competing nations has been raised and not solved. When we hold Disarmament Conferences, questions of Ratios, Parity, and Security are raised. Nations are not yet ready to trust each other. The formula of "collective security" which has figured so largely in recent discussions is itself evidence of the distrust which individual nations feel one against the others. While this distrust continues, we can make no real progress in either disarmament, or in the reduction of tariffs, or in free travel or in real inter-communication between one country and another.

The League of Nations itself, as now constituted, is not able to carry out the programme or the objects with which it started. In the League Assembly there are various currents and undercurrents which it is not good form to mention, and which are not usually reported, but which everyone who has any inside experience knows to be the most important factors in the present relations of nations with each other. The racial factor is not negligible. Eastern nations have frequently said that they are at a disadvantage when dealing with Western nations, and the small States say the same thing against the bigger States. The European nations have a majority in the League, which other nations not within that charmed circle of geography or race are unable to counteract. In the cases of Japan and Germany the League was unable to do anything to express its collective will as embodied in solemn treaties. In the case of Abyssinia I fear that all the League's best intentions have been defeated by the onward march of armed force and the obscure but intricate relationships arising out of many years of political rivalry among three big naval Powers.

Fear, distrust, selfishness, jealousy, arrogance, or a sense of superiority - such human weaknesses can never be eradicated by political institutions, however wise and efficient they may be. Ultimately the whole brunt of the fight against these moral evils must be borne by Religion.

I am not going to discuss the various features of agreement and difference between the different religions as now professed in the world. Nor am I going to preach the ideal form which in my opinion religion should take in order to save humanity. Even taking human beings as they are, with their different religions as we find them, it is I think possible to build up a sense of mutual understanding, which will go far towards eradicating the evils of the conflicts whose climax expresses itself in war, boycott, or economic struggles between nation and nation, class and class, interest and interest. In the modern world, armed conflicts are so costly and so enormously destructive even to the victors, that they are undertaken only after tremendous preparations. But once undertaken, the cost, in lives lost, lives ruined, passions let loose, poisons injected into the moral atmosphere, territories devastated, industries uprooted, and capital swallowed up, is so gigantic that, except where victory is within easy grasp owing to obviously unequal forces, ordinary human intelligence shudders at the very idea. But other forms of conflict - continuous and insidious - are waged daily, and even become the

ordinary stock-in-trade of journalism, platform oratory, and herd-instinct patriotism.

Can we not expel this kind of poison from our social and international system? Only religion can do it. I mean by "Religion" that mode of looking at things which postulates the oneness of humanity, the ideals of peace, justice, and righteousness under the divine government of the world, and the responsibility of man to the voice of a God-given conscience. That is worth appealing to. Such appeals are made from time to time, but we must organise our spiritual forces, and consciously cooperate with men who share this faith, however widely divergent their views may be on doctrinal matters. I think that this is possible. I know from my own experience that it is possible as between individuals. And, after all, what are nations but groups of individuals? If men of goodwill can band themselves together, they can act as a leaven and influence large masses of humanity.

Let me describe my own personal experiences as one who has lived and mixed with people of almost all the religions in the world. I think I am entitled to say that, however human nature may be overlaid with baser motives, there is always latent in the human heart a spirit of sympathy, love, and service, which I consider to be the essential basis of Religion.

There are in India, as you know, people of many races and religions living side by side. It is true that in recent times there has been a great deal of racial and religious antagonism, mainly due to political manoeuvring. But individuals find that where there is any mutual desire for peace and goodwill the human heart responds in spite of differences in race, religion or community.

Amongst the Muslims themselves there are many shades of theological opinion. There is the main division of Shias and Sunnis. But in each of these main divisions there are sub-divisions which it is unnecessary for my purpose to enumerate. Further, under the stress of modern life and modern culture, new schools of thought are arising, each with its own point of view, and there is often a wide divergence of opinion on many doctrinal points. It seems to me strange that a Religion (and perhaps this is true of every religion) which entirely condemns sectarianism and preaches Catholic unity, should have divisions which result in acrimonious disputes of this nature. In the Quran (xxx, 31 -32), we are

expressly warned to avoid being among those who give false worship to God. "Those who split up their religion become mere sects -each party rejoicing in that which is with itself." It is also the Quranic teaching that men were all framed according to one divine pattern by the handiwork of God; our nature as created by God conforms to one divine standard; and if, through error or ignorance, mankind wanders away from that unity, it must be restored through the true teaching, and we must set our faces steadily towards that ideal. I have personally found no difficulty in mixing freely and working with and for Muslims of all denominations and shades of thought. I have travelled through nearly all Muslim countries - Arabia, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Persia, and a great many others. Beneath many differences in their points of view there runs a general desire to cement the Brotherhood of Islam and to find in it the solution of the many difficulties and evils from which the Islamic world is suffering. This is in itself a happy augury, but I wish to see this principle carried very much further.

By far the larger proportion (about three-fourths) of my fellow-citizens in India belong to the Hindu Religion. This in itself is a very comprehensive system, comprising many schools of thought and many ways of practical and social life. While adhering to my own ideas on the subject of worship and religion, I have found much in Hindu philosophy, Hindu poetry, and the best of Hindu thought, to appreciate and admire. And I consider the Bhagawad Gita and the Ramayana of Tulsi Das (to mention only two instances) to be among the world's great treasures of religious literature. I consider the Tamil Kurral and the Hymns of Maratha Saints, like Tuka Ram, to have a claim to the attention of all students of devotional poetry. I number among my personal friends many Hindus, both those whose names are household words in India and those in private spheres of life. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with them. As individuals we find no barrier to friendship and understanding. We trust each other and take a delight in each other's company. Why can we not bring our respective groups to the same frame of mind?

Then there are minor religions in India, such as those of the Parsis of Bombay and the Sikhs of the Punjab. I call them "minor," not in a sense derogatory to their intrinsic value, but merely with reference to the numerical strength of the people professing those religions. In common with all who have much to do with the Parsis, I have found them socially

delightful. Their ladies are advanced in modernity. Their whole community has in many ways adopted modern ways. In material civilisation they probably lead the van.

I can say the same about my Sikh brethren in the Punjab. For many years I have lived in the Punjab and have taken part in its educational and public activities. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of friction at present between the Sikhs and the Muslims in that Province. That friction is due more to historical and political causes than to differences in religion properly understood. I know many Sikhs intimately. I know something of their religious literature. I have participated in the celebration of their Guru Nanak's Birthday. They have been publishing recently some of their religious literature in English, which I have read both with pleasure and profit. On the other hand, I know at least one Sikh (a true and valued friend of mine) who takes an interest in my English translation of the Quran and reads it regularly as it comes out in parts. There are all villages in the Punjab where Sikhs and Muslims live side by side. The Sikh Religion itself stands midway between Hinduism and Islam. In their scriptures are included some hymns of Muslim Saints. I am quite sure that apart from political and other rivalries and jealousies which reflect no credit on either community, there is no reason whatever why they should not live side by side, each tolerating the point of view of the other and all working together for the common good of India.

I have also travelled widely through Buddhist countries. In this connection let me mention Burma, China, and Japan. The Burmese have such a gentle nature that, if I had not read in the papers of the anti-Indian riots in Burma, I should not have believed that such a thing was possible. Here again the root cause of the trouble is political or economic. Under the New Constitution Burma is to be separated from India.

Of China I carry away very friendly but somewhat melancholy memories. The religions of China are Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. In such a classification it is difficult to say where philosophy begins and religion ends. The three systems live side by side, and are not at all mutually exclusive. I have mixed with the votaries of all these cults and assisted at their meetings and celebrations. If it is not true to say that their teachings are fused together, it is at least true to say that in China there is no sharp antagonism of one against another. There are many individuals whom it will be difficult to classify under any name. And

there is the ultra-modern Chinese man or woman, very self-confident with his American English, but somewhat materialist in his religious outlook. Strange to say, I had more sympathy with both the new and the old type than they had with each other. The sadness of Chinese life arises from the extreme poverty of their masses and the breakdown of their political organisation. The heart of the Chinese people is sound; their morals will stand comparison with those of any people in the world; their intellects are acute, and are now turned towards modernity as made in the United States. In Religion the work of the great Hsu-Shi is bringing Chinese thought to an international plane. If only the Chinese people get a fair chance, they have much to contribute to the world's work and the world's thought.

Japanese Buddhism has developed special phases of its own. During my visit to Japan I tried to study some of these phases, and I found the heartiest welcome and the most generous assistance in my enquiries. When I was in the city of Osaka and mentioned my intention to visit Nara, where Indian Buddhism first established itself, everybody said:

"Of course, you must see that place because it is a piece of your own country." I went and saw it. It is a delightful place with a beautiful undulating park, left almost untouched from the eighth century onwards. If it were not for the characteristic trees - cryptomerias and oaks - I could have let my imagination roam at large and pictured myself visiting the Benares Deer Park, in which the Buddha preached in the days of his earthly ministry. For there are deer in this park left free at large, and no one is allowed to hurt or capture them.

The Japanese have developed special sects of Buddhism characteristic of their own country, the most learned of these sects being the "Zen". They believe in a contemplative life, and their priests have made valuable contributions to religious thought in the learned books which they have written. In philosophy they seem to be very near Vedantism. They believe in the unreality of the phenomenal world. A marked contrast to the Zen sect is the Jodo sect which may be called the popular form of Japanese Buddhism. They do not rely upon philosophy or learning. They rely mainly on faith, or what we should call in India Bhakti. In this respect they approach very near to the medieval Panths of India. They are very friendly and sociable with anyone who takes an interest in their beliefs and practices. I met some of them preaching in parks and public

places like the missionaries of foreign religions. The Jodo sect takes a revivalist form. The third sect which I shall mention is known as the Nichiren. This sect was of particular interest to me for they have diverged a great deal from the Hinayana doctrines of the countless Avatars of the Buddha, and have reached the teaching of Divine Unity through belief in the one and only Buddha of whom all other Buddhas are merely reflections. By a roundabout way they have approached Monotheism.

Let me relate to you a little experience I had with the Japanese Christian whom I met in climbing up to a Buddhist monastery situated on a high hill. There were many paths going up to the temple at the top. I found different people taking different paths up. I was a little puzzled as to the best way to take for myself. This gentleman of his accord came up and talked to me in Japanese English, and we became great friends. When I met him he was descending the hill, but when I asked for his guidance he was not content with merely giving me directions, but actually changed his own course and went up again with me to the temple. We had an interesting talk. When I spoke to him about the multiplicity of paths going up, he said, quite simply: "Is not that the way of Divine things? The goal is one, but the paths to it are many." He asked me if I had come on a special pilgrimage to that temple in my visit to Japan. I told him that I was interested in all religions, but that I was not myself a Buddhist but a Muslim. "Nor am I a Buddhist," said he. "Do you then follow the Shinto Way?" I asked. He smiled and said: "I am a Christian, but like you I love to go to Buddhist temples. I should like to go to your Muslim temples if there were any in Japan." I told him something about the Muslim form of worship and Muslim ideas of religion. We remain together for about two hours, but never for one minute in the course of our conversation did either of us feel that the other was an alien.

That is the one great charm of Japan. Their religion like their art is expressed in forms of delicate grace, which it would be difficult to define precisely. The ethnic and national form of their religion is Shinto. But who can define the elusive spirit of Shintoism? The Shinto Scripture Kojiki is, I understand, concerned with rites and ceremonies and beautiful customs which mingle well with almost any religion. They say that Buddhism absorbed Shinto, but I think it is more correct to say that the coalescence of Buddhism and Shinto has produced a national religion which is simple and easy, but not exclusive, except in so far that the

Japanese race idea or national idea seems exclusive to foreigners. The complete absorption of a man like Lafcadio Hearn in the Japanese spirit is an experience which has fallen to the lot of very few foreigners.

I now come to Judaism and Christianity, which are sister religions to Islam. There is so much common ground between them that it seems a pity that there should not be more intimate contact between those who bear those labels. It is true that there are certain fundamental doctrines in Trinitarian Christianity which are rejected by Islam. It is also true that the Jews have in the past suffered much persecution in Christian countries and are still suffering persecution in some parts of the world. But I see no reason why, in the freer countries, and in an international atmosphere, these three should not come together in fellowship and establish an understanding without either side giving up the beliefs which they consider fundamental. The Jews have lived in Muslim countries from the earliest ages of Islam. They thrived and flourished there and have contributed a great deal to the economic and social life of Muslim countries. In countries like England both orthodox and reformed Jews mix freely in society, in business, and in politics. Since Jewish emancipation they have filled with credit some of the highest posts under the Crown. It is very much to be hoped that the spirit of persecution and misunderstanding which still lingers in some parts of the world will disappear, and in its place a true and sincere fellowship of faiths, such as we all desire, will be substituted. When I advocate contact and understanding between two or three faiths, I must be understood to imply that as a prelude to contact and understanding between all faiths.

I have left to the last the mention of my personal relations with the Christians. They have been very intimate all through my life. The fellowship of England and India in one United Empire, though it is sometimes overshadowed by racial considerations on both sides, has yet brought about a better understanding of the Christian religion amongst the Indian Muslims, and I also think a better understanding of the religion of Islam amongst the British people. Speaking for myself, I can say that I understand and respect the essential spirit of British Christianity. My guardian, when I came to England at an immature age for study, was a Christian Englishman in the highest sense of the term. I love and revere his memory. I have met other members of his family with whom I have also been on the most friendly terms. I have studied the Christian religion as few Muslims have studied it. Although I am

earnestly and sincerely devoted to my own religion and have striven both in writing and in speech to expound it, I have always advocated, and still advocate, the possibility and desirability of a better understanding between Muslims and Christians in all spheres of life. Such an understanding is likely to help us not only in our own Empire, and in international relations generally, but I think it can also become a great guarantee of world peace and international understanding. The Holy Quran (verse 85) expressly says that the Christians are nearest in faith and friendship to the Muslims. In spite of many wars and misunderstandings, the thirteen centuries and a half that have passed since the birth of Islam have seen a gradual growth of a better understanding between the two faiths.

Again appealing to my personal experience, I can say that many Christian audiences have listened with welcome to my exposition of Islam, and some churches have even invited me to occupy their pulpits. Apart from doctrinal matters, there is so much common ground. The late Archbishop Soderblom of Sweden was a personal friend of mine. He and I had more than one opportunity of discussing some scheme, by which not only the Christian Churches, but Islam and other Faiths, could be brought to mutual understanding and harmonious co-operation. In Canada one of the meetings, at which I was expounding Muslim ideas, was presided over by an Archbishop, and he spoke in the most friendly and cordial terms of my exposition. In the development of Christian thought, and especially in Protestantism, many of the points which were raised by Islam by way of protest have been accepted, and Unitarianism is practically Islam. The abolition of a hereditary or privileged priesthood, the right of private judgment, personal responsibility, equality in brotherhood, removal of racial or caste barriers, the selection of rulers by democratic choice, government and corporate action after free consultation—principles like these are the basis of the preaching of Islam, and are now accepted (at least in theory) in all parts of the world.

I had an extraordinary experience in my early student days when I visited the island of Malta. I visited the Catholic Cathedral there. I conducted myself with reverence and attracted the attention of some Italian priests who, afterwards, came up to me, and spoke to me in the most friendly terms. In those days I knew no Italian, but I had some knowledge of Latin. When I spoke to them in Latin they were surprised, and their friendliness to me was all the more increased. We could not carry on a

very long conversation, as our pronunciations of the classical language were quite different. But the friendly feeling that grew up after that chance meeting induced them to add to their kindness by inviting me afterwards and showing me things which I should never have seen unshepherded. I still carry fragrant memories of that meeting in my heart and remember the words with which we parted. I asked them if it would be possible for us to meet again. They pointed to the sky and said: "Let us hope, in Heaven." (In coelo, speremus.)

Thus you will see that, individually, many of us have actually felt and experienced the fellowship of faiths. Why can we not bring it about on a larger scale and in a more organised way? We have seen before our eyes the "Past's enormous disarray." (Rupert Brooke.) Such ills cannot be cured by ordinary means, and certainly not through the instrumentality of politics. We have to look to deep-seated causes within. These are bound up with whole bundles of prejudices, feelings of attraction or repulsion, inherited tendencies and environments, historical and cultural chains of association, varied intellectual responses to common human experiences, and even deliberate misrepresentations or misunderstandings created perhaps for purposes of war or selfish aggrandisement. In so far as history and human experience have cleared our vision, we can put away past conflicts in the limbo of forgotten things. In so far as our actual feelings and sincere beliefs prevent us from seeing things in the same light, we can tolerate and try to understand other points of view. But there is nothing to prevent us, with all our differences, from realising a sense of fellowship and co-operation. The office of Religion is to bind us together in the bonds of a common humanity. Let us go forward, with humble faith and a firm resolve, to the achievement of our collective Hope!

Will you allow me to close with a quotation from Dolben's "Shrine"? -

"Without, the world is tired and old,  
But once within the enchanted door  
The mist of time are backward rolled,  
And creeds and ages are no more;  
But all the human-hearted meet  
In one communion vast and sweet."



# CHRISTIANITY AND WORLD RELIGIONS\*

*Robert Runcie*

**The Sir Francis Younghusband Memorial Lecture delivered  
by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace on 28th  
May 1986**

Let me say first what a pleasure and privilege it is for me to give the Sir Francis Younghusband Memorial Lecture during this 50th anniversary year of the World Congress of Faiths. I am grateful for the opportunity this gives me to share with you some of my own reflections on the encounter of Christianity with other religions and to raise a number of questions which spring from what is a relatively new dimension for Christian experience, thought and identity.

Our present age is characterized by the resurgence and renewal of religions in many parts of the globe, as well as by attempts to translate their original message into the terms of a world transformed by science and technology. Behind this lies a wide spread pessimism about the future of humankind, an unsatisfied longing for alternative paths to salvation, and a search for some 'golden core' of religion independent of any specific tradition.

Increased travel and improved communication have provided many more opportunities for meeting people of other faiths and cultures. In turn, interreligious encounter and dialogue have generated hope for greater global unity and for wider global ecumenism. Historically speaking, this is a very recent development. Religious diversity has often been disruptive of community, and it remains the root cause of tensions and

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deep divisions between different human groups. It is premature to presume that the age of holy wars is long past. The twentieth century has seen much bloodshed where religious differences have been a fundamental factor. But today a number of interfaith movements exist with the explicit purpose of fostering a better understanding of religious differences and similarities. Through nurturing a spirit of friendship and reconciliation, true dialogue can help us to overcome religious divisiveness and create new conditions for greater fellowship and deeper communion. It can help us to recognize that other faiths than our own are genuine mansions of the Spirit with many rooms to be discovered, rather than solitary fortresses to be attacked.

All of us have a part to play in this development, but some individuals have been outstanding in carrying the torch. Such a personality was Sir Francis Younghusband (1863-1942). In his book *A Venture of Faith* (1937), he movingly describes how he first had the idea of holding a World Congress of Faiths. He came from a Christian background and, in his own words, inherited a religious disposition and was encouraged in religious practice in his youth. But his experience of scientific thought, of government service and politics, of wide travelling and reading, made him see religion in a new perspective. Through numerous expeditions in India, China and Tibet, he encountered many expressions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam and developed a deep interest in eastern religions and philosophies. Profound personal experiences and the inspiration of earlier examples made him perceive the need to replace the spirit of rivalry among members of different faiths with a spirit of fellowship and a search for greater unity. He also developed a global vision of the role of religions in the development of society, and saw the need for a shared spirituality to give direction to mankind. Sir Francis Younghusband has been described as a mystic who pondered the mysteries of life, and answered the call of the spirit whilst remaining a devout Christian throughout his life.

“World fellowship through religion” - that was the keynote of the first Congress held here in London in 1936. Younghusband expressed the hope that “efforts will be made to take a worldview, to develop a world-consciousness, and to create a sense of world-fellowship”. He was not a dreamer but a practical man who knew well enough the obstacles which stand in the way of human harmony. The human spirit in each of us is as contentious as it is creative.

Yet despite opposition and criticism, the religious and cultural diversity represented at the Congress was considerable. It also included representatives of different philosophical, scientific and humanist world views. Out of the experience of so many different people meeting together, sharing their thoughts, insights and even worship, there came a sense of exaltation and vision of the enriching possibilities of closer contact between peoples of different faiths. There was a clear rejection of any idea that the Congress intended to evolve some overall synthesis or new kind of eclectic religion. Instead, there was the recognition that, in Sir Francis' words:

"Religion, taken as a whole, benefited much from the variety in its different forms. All the centuries that the spirit of God had been working in Christians, He must also have been working in Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and others... And recognizing this all-important fact, members of the Congress showed no disposition to try to form any new religion: rather were they inclined to draw inspiration from others for the development of their own".

In his personal conclusions Younghusband affirmed that "we shall have to make our lives conform to the greater conception of the world which is now emerging". He also admitted that his continuing loyalty to Christianity was sometimes strained to breaking point by the air of superiority and indifference so often adopted by Christians to those of other faiths. But the main impression left by the Congress was "that it deepened each man in his own faith ... the Hindu was made all the better a Hindu, the Muslim all the better a Muslim, and the Christian all the better a Christian. Each was driven down to his foundations - down to where he had perhaps never reached before. Each sought the permanent and abiding amid the great diversity of gifts".

### A visit to India

The experience of that first conference of the World Congress of Faiths shows what many more of us have experienced since; namely that interreligious encounter and dialogue do not occur at an abstract, but at a personal level. They are at their liveliest when people meet with each other to share the sustaining insights and transforming treasures of their faith and to recognize an affinity of the human heart in the fellowship of the spirit. Such encounter nourishes new life and vision, and from it

arises the need for fresh reflection on the unprecedented religious, cultural and ethnic pluralism which most human groups experience today.

Speaking personally, my recent visit to India proved just such an experience, and I returned to this country with a fresh awareness of the need for reflection on the deep questions which arise for any Christian who takes the religions of India seriously. I went with a genuine but somewhat notional commitment to the need for dialogue between the great faiths. I returned with a deep sense of the urgency of our need to listen, revere and reflect.

India can be a stunning experience - not in any Hollywood sense - but rather as an experience which leaves one dazed and uncertain of one's bearing. Before, there were the certainties of an encapsulated western Christianity. After, there are new ways of thinking about God, Christ and the world. A number of vivid and haunting images remain and continue to pose disturbing questions.

There was a conversation with a Parsee in Bombay. To meet a living Zoroastrian is to be reminded that even the most ancient faiths are still alive. Here was someone for whom the utter *holiness* of God was indeed as fire. God's holiness is such that only the faithful may worship in the Temple of Fire. And I wondered whether contemporary Christianity had not something to rediscover about the awesome 'otherness' of a God we have at times neutered and domesticated.

Then there were the marvellous early Hindu sculptures at Mahabalipuram, near Madras, where gods and goddesses take hundreds of different forms and images. The sheer diversity of the divine was disconcerting. God seemed somehow greater than western monism. In the same place there was a moving carving of Vishnu resting on the waters of creation. Serenity and creativity do not normally go together in western thought. Again we have lost something which other faiths may restore to us. Though I did not have the opportunity of seeing a Buddhist shrine, the serenity of that early Hindu carving gave some intimation of the Buddhist gift of tranquillity and recollection.

In the north were the great Islamic monuments of the Moghul Empire. They speak again of the transcendence of God which is so prominent a

feature of Islam. Symmetry and mathematical perfection in the architecture of a mosque or palace are a reminder to the Christian of the source and goal of the human search for the perfect beyond this mutable world, for the changeless behind the transitory state of human life.

But I not only saw great temples and mosques. There were also the little street corner shrines of the cities with their garish painted idols and loud canned music. There was the simple rural mosque with no walls and with two stumps for minarets. In the countryside I saw the painted rocks and hill shrines which told of the piety of the animist - India's earliest aboriginal faith, continuing still alongside both the great religions and godless secularism of modern India. All this suggests the intimacy and holiness of faiths incarnated in the everyday life and culture of ordinary people.

### Encounter with other religions

Encounter is the proper word for such experience. And it calls for rigorous reflection on matters Christians often take for granted: the uniqueness of God's revelation in Christ, or the universal significance of His incarnation and redemption. I do not question these basic Christian affirmations, but an experience of other faiths insists that we reflect upon them more deeply.

Over the last few decades many have written of the encounter of Christianity with other religions. They have done so largely in a spirit of openness, of enquiry and search for greater truth and understanding. But they are not the first to adopt this more enlightened approach. That search is a longstanding one. In the fifteenth century, Nicolas of Cusa, a Roman cardinal, set out in his *De Pace Fidei* the formal proposition that behind all the differences of religious practice there is one universal religion on which Jews, Christians and Muslims can agree. It turned out, however, that this one true religion involves the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Mass. But the *idea* of the harmony of all religions beyond the diversity of practice is a prophetic vision which we find again and again in Christian thought.

An impressive example of an early Anglican involvement with these concerns is to be found in the writings of Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), and particularly in his Boyle Lectures of 1845 on "The

Religions of the World and their Relations to Christianity". Maurice was a seminal 19th century theologian who is perhaps as difficult to read as he is to classify. He is, I suppose, best remembered for his central work "The Kingdom of Christ", and for his part in the foundation, with Ludlow and Kingsley, of the Christian Socialist Movement. By contrast, his lectures on "The Religions of the World" are much neglected and today overlooked, although they have been described as Maurice's "most popular work during his lifetime".

Whilst "The Kingdom of Christ" augured ideas which proved important for the ecumenical movement among Christians, Maurice's thoughts on world religions in relation to Christianity foreshadowed some current and prevalent ideas in global ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. He delivered his lectures in two series: the first described some major religions of the world, and the second dealt with the relation of Christianity to them. The examples used were drawn from Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Whilst Maurice may have ventured beyond his depth in dealing with such a wide range of subjects, and whilst he did not always make the best use of the historical information available to him, he nonetheless spoke and wrote with considerable sympathy, understanding and insight about people of other faiths. He produced a pioneer work which in its own way helped Christians to develop a new attitude to world religions.

Maurice considered faith an essential constituent of being human, and recognized that all religions bear witness to man as a spiritual being. He insisted that some truth, but not necessarily the same truth, exists in all religions, and whatever this may be, it must stem ultimately from the Source of all truth. Whilst he approached other religions from the perspective of Christianity, and interpreted them by taking his own religion as the norm in a way more characteristic of the 19th century than our own, Maurice was also prepared to admit that Christianity might need the corrective contained in the insights of other faiths.

Maurice's insights went further than most other Christian writers of his period. He not only affirmed the truth of his own religion, but insisted on the possibility of learning from the truths present in others. Maurice believed in a divinely implanted religious aspiration in all human beings, at all times and in all places, even though he had yet to develop a realistic appreciation of the sheer pluralism of world religions. However,

he readily recognized the pluralism to be found within Christianity itself, and perceived the need for a closer integration of all human kind through the forces of both religion and science. He saw the unity of all human beings grounded and crowned in the ultimate unity of God.

### The religious meaning of pluralism

These thoughts can still be relevant and inspiring, in spite of the fact that our contemporary religious pluralism has become far more complex and implies many new challenges. Several 20th century thinkers with a sensitive ear for the needs of our times have indicated that we have reached a new historical moment when a global consciousness is emerging, with a new awareness of the religious diversity and spiritual heritage of mankind. Instead of simply acknowledging such diversity as mere plurality, we need today to reflect critically and theologically on the religious *meaning* of pluralism. Such reflection is an urgent task for all faith communities.

I cannot speak here about the impact of interreligious dialogue on other religions, but must restrict my remarks to reflections made from a Christian perspective. Certainly, given the experience and witness of Christian faith, encounter with other faiths can deepen and enrich us, and make us reflect anew on matters central to our own faith. It should not be forgotten that Christianity itself was formed in dialogue with Judaism. Jesus of Nazareth was himself a Jew, and always remained a Jew, regularly joining in the worship of the synagogue, regardless of how fiercely he may have criticized the establishment figures of the Judaism of his time. The Christian church too first gained self-consciousness through wrestling with the pressing issue of its relation to Judaism.

#### (a) Freeing ourselves from isolation

First, interfaith encounter and dialogue helps us to avoid making crude choices between what is 'true' and what is 'false' in different religions. For whatever we say about religious experience it is clear that it is no respecter of credal differences. We have already begun, painfully, to emancipate ourselves from the isolation which limits religion to the insights and errors of one stream of tradition. I am reminded of a story told by Ninian Smart of the lady missionary who was driving him to a hospital not far from Benares. They passed a shrine, and she remarked:

"I'm always very sad to see the piety with which those Hindus worship at that shrine". He asked why. "Well", she said with a sort of simple finality, "there's no one there to hear them". That "simple finality" has no place today. Was it Max Muller who urged that in respect of religion "He who knows one, knows none"?

#### (b) Deepening our spirituality

Secondly at a deeper level, interfaith dialogue has important implications for the experience and practice of *spirituality*: for the life of faith, both in the individual human heart and in our respective communities. We must learn to recognize the work of the spirit at the centre of each of our faiths. 'Live Aid' and 'Sports Aid' are powerful signs that we are learning that the life and destiny of all human beings are closely interdependent, at the material and economic level, but we must also learn that we are globally interdependent in spiritual matters too.

Such an encounter of people from different faiths is a global event of great historical importance. We, as people of faith, owe it to the world to respond to the challenge of contemporary religious pluralism, not by weakening the intensity of our religious commitment, but through entering into dialogue at the deepest level by strengthening the depth of our own faith, by renewing the sincerity of our own worship, and by increasing the fervour of our own spirituality.

If we trust the life-giving power of the spirit within and amongst us, we can meet each other in openness and trust; we can learn to explore together the moments of revelation and the spiritual treasures which our respective faiths have handed down to us - a spark of divine life and a vision of holiness whereby the lives of countless people in past and present are nourished, sustained, transformed and sanctified. Again, the Indian religious heritage contains a great variety of spiritual disciplines and knows many saints and sages who have lived and taught the path of meditation and inwardness. Indian spirituality invites Christians perhaps above all to the practice of contemplation, to a life of inner and outer simplicity. Many western Christians have gone to India to learn precisely this, to be schooled in the inner life. It is remarkable how many Christian ashrams have been founded all over India in recent years.

But whilst Christians may strive for greater inwardness, contemporary Indians are actively engaged in moving outwards, into areas of social and political action, in the affirmation of their distinct cultural and national identity, the building of nationhood, and in working for greater social and economic justice. This, of course, is part of the great Jewish tradition. It requires a certain kind of dialogue, too, so that harmony and balance are maintained between the different ethnic and religious groups.

We need both courage and humility to recognize this work of the spirit among us in other faiths. It takes courage to acknowledge religious diversity as a rich spiritual resource, rather than a cause for competition and tension. And it takes humility and sincerity to concede that there is a certain incompleteness in each of our traditions. However diverse in their development and message, they always remain in a process of becoming, so that there is always room for growth towards a fuller, richer vision of the truth. We must also recognize that ultimately all religions possess a provisional, interim character as ways and signs to help us in our pilgrimage to Ultimate Truth and Perfection.

### (c) Rethinking our theology

Thirdly, for the Christian the theological challenges of religious pluralism are compelling enough. In particular, they affect our understanding of God and his grace, of Christ and his mission, and also our perceptions of community and the nature of Christian love.

Theology is literally 'talk about God'. In a wider sense it represents the struggle of 'faith seeking understanding', and concerns every attempt to conceive of ultimate reality and divine transcendence as revealed to us. Any dialogue must wrestle with this task. But if we are honest, we must recognize that no words, no thoughts, no symbols can encompass the richness of this reality, nor the richness of its disclosure in different lives, communities and traditions. Signs of divine life and grace, of the outpouring of the spirit on earth can be seen in myriad forms in human history and consciousness. From the perspective of *faith*, different world religions can be seen as different gifts of the spirit to humanity. Without losing our respective identities and the precious heritage and roots of our own faith, we can learn to see in a new way the message and insights of our faith in the light of that of others. By relating our respective visions

of the Divine to each other, we can discover a still greater splendour of divine life and grace.

Different religions have found many names and symbols for transcendence, many faces and forms as partial expressions of the Ultimate Mystery. Alternatively, they have followed the *via negativa* of the apophatic method, and have denied and emptied all concepts and categories to point to the Cloud of Unknowing beyond which we encounter the One who encompasses all realities and existence. To find the invisible behind the visible, the everlasting behind the everchanging turmoils of existence is the great longing and hope of the human heart. We yearn for peace, salvation, freedom and fulfilment, for the plenitude of the spirit promised to us, summed up in India in the one word *Brahman* which stands for pure Being, Consciousness and Joy. Although we may come from different religious backgrounds, we can all recognize a prayer of profound longing and hope in the well-known invocation of the *Upanishads*:

“Lead me from the Unreal to the Real,  
Darkness to Light,  
From Death to Immortality”.

Indian religious life presents us with an amazing variety of perspectives on the Divine Spirit as source of all life, whether this spirit is celebrated as utterly impersonal transcendence, worshipped as Lord of all beings, meditated upon as innermost centre of human person, or praised as a loving God of grace. When Thomas Merton visited India, he reflected on the spiritual significance of his pilgrimage in his *Asian Journal*, where he describes his encounter with Hindus and Buddhists. Merton felt that Hinduism was vibrating with a God-consciousness as presence - God not primarily understood as concept or image, but encountered in the fullness of experience as ultimate ground of reality and meaning from which flow all life and love. Some years ago John Robinson wrote a book about the encounter of Hinduism and Christianity which he entitled “Truth is Two-Eyed”. Given the richness and diversity of Indian religious perspectives, it might be rather more appropriate to say, drawing on a well-known Indian image, that ‘Truth is thousand-eyed’. For Hindus, the fullness of truth is reflected in myriads of facets and faces, all of which the unfathomable mystery of the Divine must encompass in ways which surpass our understanding.

## The Universalism of Christ

For Christians, the person of Jesus Christ, his life and suffering, his death and resurrection, will always remain the primary source of knowledge and truth about God. The central message of the Christian gospel is a message of love, love poured out in the complete self-giving of God in His Son for the sake of all life and creation. For the Christian, this is firm and fundamental - it is not negotiable. Nonetheless, Christians recognize that other faiths reveal other aspects of God which may enrich and enlarge our Christian understanding. I am reminded here of that eloquent passage in Ninian Smart's contribution to *Soundings*:

"Journeying into foreign lands and alien cultures can bring one to a better understanding of one's own faith. One can see certain general features of good religion which can be used as a yardstick for measuring the inessential accretions of one's own faith. And just as studying Tolstoy may throw indirect light upon Turgenev, Mozart upon Brahms, Goya upon Picasso, so the gentle wonders of Buddhism and the subtle theologies of Hinduism, the poetry of the Tao and the single-mindedness of Islam, will shed some illumination upon the heart of Christianity".

One of the greatest challenges of interfaith dialogue which Christian theology must face is the question of the universality of Christ and his mission: the question as to the meaning and significance of the incarnation within the context of religious pluralism. There exists no easy answer to these questions, and it would take time before Christians can accept that there may be a plurality of answers within Christian theology itself, even before one moves to the wider pluralism of interfaith experience.

What is at stake is our understanding of the finality and significance of Christ's life and work, of, to use F. D. Maurice's term, 'the universalism of the Kingdom of Christ' at the centre and heart of the Christian faith. For Christians the coming of Christ is the ultimate sign of the fullness of God's grace. But in an age of radical historical consciousness an understanding of the incarnation as the central Christian event must also be linked to an understanding of the historical circumstances in which this belief first took root and developed.

Theological reflection must take account also of contemporary circumstances to which this message must now relate. These are not only

questions of theological import but of pastoral concern. An honest attempt to seek for answers would require an attitude of love and respect towards neighbours of other faiths. It would also open up new possibilities for mutual witness. If we want to find viable and helpful answers in a situation of great need, we will have to abandon any narrowly conceived Christian apologetic, based on a sense of superiority and an exclusive claim to truth. Instead of triumphalism and rejection, Christians must practise reconciliation.

We need to hear afresh the call of our Lord to follow his example of generous self-giving and loving service, his example of compassion amidst suffering, of help and hope for the poor, of strength for the weak. There is a call to universalism here, to the universal power of love and forgiveness which can transform the world.

I glimpsed something of the universalism of Christ's love in Calcutta when I visited Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying. I had not realized before that her hospice is built on temple property - dedicated appropriately enough to the goddess Kali. But there was more to it than that. Here was the love of Christ given and received by men and women of all faiths and of none alongside the goddess who symbolizes a mixture of destruction and fertility. At work was a saintly woman dedicated to the ministry of the mystery of dying and rising. That juxtaposition speaks powerfully of the universal power and significance of the love of Christ.

But most current models of theology do not yet proceed from a situation of dialogue. They are still mostly monologues internal to each of our faith communities. Yet things are changing. Whilst in the past the goal of Christian mission has mainly been the awakening of faith, the founding of churches, the growth and maintenance of Christian life we now perceive more clearly - as I perceived in Calcutta - another goal as that of giving witness to the spirit of love and hope, of promoting justice and peace, of sharing responsibility with others for the development of a caring society, especially where people are in need. Interfaith dialogue can help to remove barriers between us by creating conditions for greater community and fellowship. This will mean that some claims about the exclusiveness of the Church have to be renounced, but also that past and present prejudices about other religions have to be overcome, and ignorance and contempt actively resisted.

The Cambridge Divine, Brooke Foss Westcott, used to prophesy that new life for the Christian Church would come out of India. Devoting his intellectual life to resisting the German thesis that primitive Christianity had been corrupted by the influence of Greek philosophy and culture, he believed on the contrary that Christianity reached out to other cultures and dominated them, but in dominating them received new life for itself. And so he saw the Church as reaching out to India, and appropriating all that was best in the indigenous Hindu tradition.

What would emerge was doubtful: he prophesied that we might receive a new insight into St John's Gospel, a new light upon Christian mysticism. That still remains to be seen. We thought there was peril in the Indian Church if they so undervalued the need for truth transmissible in proposition that they might fail to see the dangers of eclecticism. But there has been strength in the fact that they have found it impossible to think in old and rigid categories about schism, sects, bell, book and candle. It is not an accident that some of the most significant strides towards Unity have been Indian - and never at the cost of the vitality of Christian discipleship.

I am not advocating a single-minded, and synthetic model of world religion. Nor was Sir Francis Younghusband. What I want is for each tradition, and especially my own, "to break through its own particularity", as Paul Tillich put it. Indeed Tillich is worth listening to here. The way to achieve this, he says, "is not to relinquish one's religious tradition for the sake of a universal concept which would be nothing but a concept. The way is to penetrate into the depths of one's own religion, in devotion, thought and action. In the depth of every living religion there is a point at which religion itself loses its importance, and that to which it points breaks through its particularity, elevating it to spiritual freedom and to a vision of the spiritual presence in other expressions of the ultimate meaning of man's existence. That is what Christianity must grasp in its encounter with the world's religions".

Our world is in desperate need of a new and larger vision of unity which transcends our differences. All people of faith possess potential for seeking greater unity through dialogue, through bonds of fellowship, and through shared service of the wider community. Is not the communion experienced in interfaith dialogue ultimately about a new way of life, a new mode of being, where we no longer see each other as competitors

but as partners and fellow pilgrims called to bear witness to the same spirit among all people?

'Faiths and Fellowship' was the theme of the first World Congress of Faiths Conference in 1936. Later, Sir Francis Younghusband prefaced its published Proceedings with the words: "To promote the spirit of fellowship was the one aim of the Congress". And the final impression of the Congress was that:

"Members, through meeting and working together to achieve one high object, had experienced something of that deep soul-satisfying joy such as only spiritual communion can give. There was a great gladness that such a thing was possible - and, if possible once, then possible again".

This is a word of hope and encouragement which 50 years later should inspire and strengthen us to go forward in the same direction. Arnold Toynbee, in a remarkable prophecy, suggested that the present century would be chiefly celebrated by historians hundreds of years hence as the time when the first sign became visible of that great interpenetration of eastern religions and Christianity which gave rise to the great universal religion of the third millenium AD. That is further than we can see, and certainly further than many would like to see happening - now or at any time. A rich diversity of religious experiences and forms is one of God's greatest gifts to his world. But it requires from us the virtues of understanding and sympathy, humility and readiness to listen and to learn. Only then can we build a greater global unity in the spirit of faith, hope and love.

# ***NOSTRA AETATE (IN OUR TIME)***\*

## **DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS**

*II Vatican Council*  
*October 28, 1965*

1. In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely the relationship to non- Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth.(1) One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men,(2) until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.(3)

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgement and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

2. From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the

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\* Taken from the Official Vatican website: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realizes the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.(4)

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

3. The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,(5) who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they

revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgement when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham's sons according to faith (6)-are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.(7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.(8)

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed

not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).(12)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to "maintain good fellowship among the nations" (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,(14) so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven.(15)

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## NOTES

1. Cf. Acts 17:26
2. Cf. Wis. 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:4
3. Cf. Apoc. 21:23f.
4. Cf 2 Cor. 5:18-19
5. Cf St. Gregory VII, letter XXI to Anzir (Nacir), King of Mauritania (Pl. 148, col. 450f.)
6. Cf. Gal. 3:7
7. Cf. Rom. 11:17-24
8. Cf. Eph. 2:14-16
9. Cf. Lk. 19:44
10. Cf. Rom. 11:28
11. Cf. Rom. 11:28-29; cf. dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of nations) AAS, 57 (1965) pag. 20
12. Cf. Is. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11-32
13. Cf. John. 19:6
14. Cf. Rom. 12:18
15. Cf. Matt. 5:45

## THE POPE IN INDIA: Meeting with religious leaders\*

*On Sunday afternoon, 7 November 1999, the Holy Father (John Paul II) went to Vigyan Bhawan Conference Centre in New Delhi for a meeting with representatives of India's many religions. After an opening prayer and welcome, addresses were given by Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Jain, Baha'i, Protestant Christian and other religious leaders. The Pope then gave the following address in English. Here is the text.*

Distinguished Religious Leaders,  
Dear Friends,

1. It is a great joy for me to visit once again the beloved land of India and to have this opportunity in particular to greet you, the representatives of different religious traditions, which embody not only great achievements of the past but also the hope of a better future for the human family. I thank the Government and the people of India for the welcome I have received. I come among you as a pilgrim of peace and as a fellow-traveler on the road that leads to the complete fulfilment of the deepest human longings. On the occasion of Diwali, the festival of lights, which symbolizes the victory of life over death, good over evil, I express the hope that this meeting will speak to the world of the things which unite us all: our common human origin and destiny, our shared responsibility for people's well-being and progress, our need of the light and strength that we seek in our religious convictions. Down the ages and in so many ways, India has taught that truth which the great Christian teachers also propose, that men and women "by inward instinct" are deeply oriented towards God and seek him from the depths of their being (cf. St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 60, a. 5, 3). On this basis, I am convinced that together we can successfully take the path of understanding and dialogue.

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\* A newspaper article which appeared in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1999.

2. My presence here among you is meant as a further sign that the Catholic Church wants to enter ever more deeply into dialogue with the religions of the world. She sees this dialogue as an act of love which has its roots in God himself. "God is love", proclaims the New Testament, "and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him... Let us love, then, because he has loved us first ... no one who fails to love the brother whom he sees can love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4: 16, 19-20).

It is a sign of hope that the religions of the world are becoming more aware of their shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family. This is a crucial part of the globalization of solidarity which must come if the future of the world is to be secure. This sense of shared responsibility increases as we discover more of what we have in common as religious men and women.

Which of us does not grapple with the mystery of suffering and death? Which of us does not hold life, truth, peace, freedom and justice to be supremely important values? Which of us is not convinced that moral goodness is soundly rooted in the individual's and society's openness to the transcendent world of the Divinity? Which of us does not believe that the way to God requires prayer, silence, asceticism, sacrifice and humility? Which of us is not concerned that scientific and technical progress should be accompanied by spiritual and moral awareness? And which of us does not believe that the challenges now facing society can only be met by building a civilization of love founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty? And how can we do this, except through encounter, mutual understanding and cooperation?

3. The path before us is demanding, and there is always the temptation to choose instead the path of isolation and division, which leads to conflict. This in turn unleashes the forces which make religion an excuse for violence, as we see too often around the world. Recently I was happy to welcome to the Vatican representatives of the world religions who had gathered to build upon the achievements of the Assisi Meeting in 1986. I repeat here what I said to that distinguished Assembly: "Religion is not, and must not become a pretext for conflict, particularly when religious, cultural and ethnic identity coincide. Religion and peace go together: to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction".

Religious leaders in particular have the duty to do everything possible to ensure that religion is what God intends it to be - a source of goodness, respect, harmony and peace! This is the only way to honour God in truth and justice!

Our encounter requires that we strive to discern and welcome whatever is good and holy in one another, so that together we can acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral truths which alone guarantee the world's future (cf. *Nostra aetate*, n. 2). In this sense dialogue is never an attempt to impose our own views upon others, since such dialogue would become a form of spiritual and cultural domination. This does not mean that we abandon our own convictions. What it means is that, holding firmly to what we believe, we listen respectfully to others, seeking to discern all that is good and holy, all that favours peace and cooperation.

4. It is vital to recognize that there is a close and unbreakable bond between peace and freedom. Freedom is the most noble prerogative of the human person, and one of the principal demands of freedom is the free exercise of religion in society (cf. *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 3). No State, no group has the right to control either directly or indirectly a person's religious convictions, nor can it justifiably claim the right to impose or impede the public profession and practice of religion, or the respectful appeal of a particular religion to people's free conscience. Recalling this year the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I wrote that "religious freedom constitutes the very heart of human rights. Its inviolability is such that individuals must be recognized as having the right even to change their religion, if their conscience so demands. People are obliged to follow their conscience in all circumstances and cannot be forced to act against it (cf. Article 18)" (*Message for the 1999 World Day of Peace*, n. 5).

5. In India the way of dialogue and tolerance was the path followed by the great Emperors Ashoka, Akbar and Chatrapati Shivaji; by wise men like Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Swami Vivekananda; and by luminous figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Gurudeva Tagore and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who understood profoundly that to serve peace and harmony is a holy task. These are people who, in India and beyond, have made a significant contribution to the increased awareness of our universal brotherhood, and they point us to a future where our

deep longing to pass through the door of freedom will find its fulfilment because we will pass through that door together. To choose tolerance, dialogue and cooperation as the path into the future is to preserve what is most precious in the great religious heritage of mankind. It is also to ensure that in the centuries to come the world will not be without that hope which is the lifeblood of the human heart. May the Lord of heaven and earth grant this now and for ever.