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Editorial

Is Truth Plural?

If we deny the necessity of one humanity, one truth and one God, the alternatives are racism, confusion and chaos. Deducing backwards, starting from the prevalence of these very facts in our time, one is tempted to infer that after all, reality, is pluralistic. This issue of *ERT* concentrates on the question of pluralism in religions, or (what eventually boils down to the same thing) truth-claims. The articles approach the topic from a variety of angles—theological, epistemological, religious.

This question of pluralism has also engrossed Hindu philosophical systems for millennia of years. They seem to have exhausted all kinds of possibilities in answering the question—yet not exhausted the question itself. Now that the world has come of age and has become a global village, not just Hindu philosophies, but all religions and ideologies are challenged to give an answer—urgently.

Evangelicalism stands or falls on the issue of the finality of God's revelation for man in Jesus of Nazareth. It is this Jesus who is the basis for the two Evangelical pillars, that of the supreme authority of the Bible ('You search the scriptures ... it is they that bear witness to me ...') and that of world missions ('Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ...'). Once the foundational finality of Jesus is questioned the twin pillars are also at stake. It is Jesus of Nazareth—rather than any concept of the cosmic Christ—who is the way, the truth and the life.

But what does all this theologizing have to do with my daily life? It is surprising how much our world-views affect our life and day-to-day decisions. Only when my commitment to this Jesus Christ affects my decisions in my family, church or business life, will I have adequately met the confusion of contemporary pluralistic tendencies. p. 196

Hindu response to Pluralism

S. Arles

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This is an extract from a paper presented in a conference sponsored by Partnership in Mission in London in 1986, with the theme 'Mission in Plural Contexts'. Particularly concentrating on Hindu response to Christianity, Arles discerns several kinds of reactions: mutuality response, mitigating response, merger response, militant response, missionary response, modelling response, and mukti response. He draws our attention to the fact that though there are many secret admirers and believers of Christ in other religions, at least equally significant is the fact that many more are being drawn into the Church, of which Christ is the head.

Editor

The history of India is not only marked by a series of invasions and conquests, but also by a continual absorption of newer religious faiths. From without came Zoroastrianism, Islam, Christianity, Baha'ism and Marxism; and from within came reformatory

heterodoxies like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Without suppressing them Hinduism peacefully assimilated them. The religious aggression of the Moghul and British periods was met with the Hindu attitude of 'tolerance'.

Often the Hindu claims that Hinduism has been tolerant towards other faiths, ideologies and nations. Is tolerance a 'positive' virtue? It could be. But 'toleration' sounds like the kind of attitude we could expect from one who is in a position of rightful authority or ownership who 'allows' or 'permits' or even 'puts up with' someone else who either 'does not belong' or is inferior. Taken in this way, the Hindu claim to tolerance could disclose a really *intolerant* assumption of superiority. It would help here to note the reaction of W. Burnet Easton to the use of the word 'tolerate' in the context of interfaith dialogue. He contends that it is a horrible use of the word to speak of 'the Christian attempt to tolerate the Jew'.¹

Richard Fox Young argues that it is often the Hindu tendency to 'inclusivism' which is misconstrued as 'tolerance' in the European sense. Tolerance is not the starting point of the Hindu attitude to other faiths or sects. Glossing over real differences, Hinduism always tries to make diverse teachings fit with itself in a hierarchical fashion, high or p. 197 low, in diverse modes of inclusivism. Further, in the history of Hinduism's inter-religious relations, Young observes that 'competing salvation—theories are initially viewed with hostility, but subsequently assimilated once the threat they pose has diminished'. He cites the example that the Buddha, who was disowned as a false *avatara* with a mission of propounding a false religion, was later accepted as one of Vishnu's ten *avatars*. So also Christianity which was seen with 'jaundiced eye' as the 'fearsomely overwhelming juggernaut' in the early nineteenth century was later regarded benevolently when once the threat of its imperial connections ceased at independence. Tolerance is the final privilege for Hindus to enjoy when all fears are averted and threats subdued.²

In any case, the intercourse of these faiths was not without effect. Christianity in particular tended to arouse Hinduism to self-consciousness, bringing to birth the reform trends that led to the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century.³ The new spirit of Indian nationalism and reform tendency invoked a quest for self identity in the Hindu, who responded to western influence, Christian missions and Muslim separatism through the launching of movements like Arya Samaj, Hindu Maha Sabha, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. This meant that Hinduism, which thus far had enjoyed an 'unbounded' freedom, was made rigid through attempts to formulate a definitive theological framework. A renewal of Hindu faith and a recasting of Hindu personality⁴ procured an intolerant and offensive political and missionary image for Hinduism and brought about a Hindu schizophrenia: *theoretically* desiring equality and secularism, but *practically* growing cynical and contemptuous of other religions and of secularism. Deifying the land as *Bharatha matha* and *harsha bharath*, and enforcing *suddhi*⁵ upon Christian and Muslim converts, are but part of the identity crisis of Hinduism.

¹ See 'Observations' from W. Burnet Easton's 'The Embarrassing Jews' in *Current Dialogue*, No. 1, Winter 1980/81, p. 5.

² Cf. *Indian Journal of Theology*, 30:1, Jan—Mar 1981, pp. 38–39.

³ See M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, London: SCM, 1969, p. 340; J. N. Farquhar, *op. cit.*; D. S. Sarma, *op. cit.*; S. J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ*, Madras: CLS, 1974, p. 202.

⁴ Cf. P. Spratt, *Hindu Culture and Personality*, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966.

⁵ Cf. J. F. Seunarine, *Reconversion to Hinduism through Suddhi*, Madras: CLS (for CISRS), 1977, p. 105.

Atheism does not seem to feature as an option within the Indian context. This is proved by the 1961 census reports which showed 34,000 atheists in Tamilnadu, 44,000 in Nagaland, and only few p. 198 hundreds in the rest of India.⁶ Marxist and Communist ideologies are embraced by many as political creeds, but without doing violence to their upholder's religious identity.

HINDU RESPONSE TO CHRISTIANITY

Stanley Samartha characterizes the Hindu response to Christ as

highly complex, varying from aggressive rejection to warm welcome, from uncritical appreciation to thoughtful understanding and from vague admiration to partial commitment.⁷

To some the compassion of Christ towards the poor, exploited and hurt; to others his moral and ethical teachings; and to many his example of non-violent love from the cross, become the drawing force. Recognizing the diversity of responses, let us isolate a few general trends in the Hindu reaction to Christ and Christianity.⁸

1. Mutuality Response

Hindus have what might be called a 'live and let live' mentality. Eric Sharpe affirms:

Certainly India has for many centuries harboured a bewildering variety of sects and religious traditions, most of which were able to tolerate the others on a 'live and let live' basis.⁹

This tendency derives from the Hindu scriptures and their understanding of reality. Hindu metaphysical tradition held that 'the world of senses, and hence the world of phenomena, is not and never can be given absolute status as the ultimate reality'. Hence, even when disagreeing with one another, the Hindu classical schools of philosophy 'seemed not to be concerned'. They understood that 'religions with their temples, rituals, prayers, sacrifices and pilgrimages, may be good as pathways leading in the general direction of Truth, but are p. 199 valuable only in so far as they lead to a reality beyond themselves'. According to *Rig Veda*, the real one, known by different names—'Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni and Garutman'¹⁰—and existing in many forms as claimed by *Maitri Upanishad*—'fire, wind, the sun, time, the breath of life, food, Brahma, Rura, Vishnu'—should be meditated upon, praised and then discarded.¹¹ Truth lies beyond any of these, even as Lord Krishna claimed in *Bhagavad Gita* that all faiths not only led to one reality, but were accepted by that reality:

⁶ Judith M. Brown, *Men and Gods in a Changing World: Some themes in the religious experience of twentieth century Hindus and Christians*, London: SCM, 1980, p. 157 end-notes 2:1. Cf. A.M.A. Ayrookuzhiel, 'A study of the religion of the Hindu people of Chirakkal (Kerala)', *Religion and Society*, XXIV:1 (March 1977).

⁷ S. J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁸ What follows emerges from a paper that I presented at the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at the University of Aberdeen, on December 9, 1985.

⁹ Eric J Sharpe, *Faith Meets Faith*, London: SCM, 1977, p. 60.

¹⁰ *Rig Veda*, 1.164.46.

¹¹ See R. C. Zaehner (ed.), *Hindu Scriptures* (new edition), London: Dent and Dutton, 1966, p. 226.

Yet even those who worship other gods with love and sacrifice to them, full filled with faith, do really worship Me [Krishna] ... for it is I who of all acts of sacrifice am Recipient and Lord ...¹²

Thus a Hindu cannot but recognise other faiths—including Christianity—as credible forms of faith and worship.

2. Mitigating Response

Several Hindus comfortably incorporate Christ into their system as one of many deities. An example of this could be seen in the Sathya Sai Baba Movement. In 1976 my Wife and I were at the foot of the Periamalai hills of Dharmapuri in Tamilnadu, at the mission station of one of our indigenous Christian missions, conducting a weekend teaching mission for their new converts. Our camp was located on the property of a high caste convert from a Hindu sect. A nearby Hindu temple was the site of a Sai Baba all-night *bhajan*.¹³ Noticing the musical talents of the team of our students from South India Biblical Seminary, the leader of the Sai Baba group invited us to ‘come and sing’ in the *bhajan*. Our students sang and taught simple choruses like ‘God is so good’ in its many vernacular forms: *Yesu Nallavar! Yishu Acha Hai! Yesu Olleva!* No charismatic singing of a western audience could have matched the exuberance with which the Sai Baba devotees—seated in front of Sai Baba’s portrait—sang of Jesus! They were in a pious act of worship, the name or particularity did not matter to them, as Baba claimed to incorporate every expression of the godhead in himself. All particularities submerge into the universality of the one reality, which they willingly addressed in any name or form.

When zealous Christian preaching kindles a reaction, the Hindu p. 200 responds with mitigating benevolence. This reflects Lord Krishna’s claim that he responds to all who call him.¹⁴ Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s experiences in his various visions and *samadhis*¹⁵ with Kali, Rama, Hanuman, Radha, Krishna, Brahman, Mohammed¹⁶ and *Christ*¹⁷ became a powerful source of mitigation. He contended that

a lake has several ghats; at one, Hindus take water and call it *jal*, at another, Muslims take water and call it *pani*, and at a third Christians call it *water*. The substance is one under different names, and everyone is seeking the same substance; only climate, temperament and name create differences.¹⁸

In such mitigation, Hinduism challenges the Christian claim to the uniqueness of Christ.

3. Merger Response

¹² *Bhagavad Gita*, ix.23f. See Zaehner, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

¹³ Service of songs and praise in worship.

¹⁴ *Bhagavad Gita*, ix.23f.

¹⁵ A ‘trance-like state, so near to death itself, in which the world of the senses is transcended, and in which direct insight is gained into the world of the spirit’; Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁶ Govind Ray, a Hindu influenced by Sufi mysticism, introduced Islam to Ramakrishna.

¹⁷ Jadu Mallick, a Hindu who had chosen Jesus as his Ishta Deva (personal God), read parts of the Bible to Ramakrishna.

¹⁸ Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

Since Hinduism grants that all religions may serve equally well as pathways to God (or the ultimate reality), it sees no reason why anyone should give up his allegiance to one religious tradition and attach himself to another. Here again, Ramakrishna, whose experiments took *sadhanas*¹⁹ not only of Hinduism, but also of Islam and Christianity as well, claimed that ‘all religions differ only in their manifestations and not in essence’, which ‘substance’ is the same with different names. Eric Sharpe sharply remarks on such a view:

Now what had happened here was that Ramakrishna had temporarily clothed his own intensely personal (and very Hindu) religious experience in the language and symbolism of Islam and Christianity respectively. But this did not make him either a Muslim or a Christian, though it did result in an over-simplified view of the relations between religions.²⁰

Ramakrishna’s disciple Swami Vivekananda furthered his views and proclaimed: p. 201

... we accept all religions to be true ... The Hindu is invariably tolerant toward other forms of religious belief and practice, seeking to exclude and excommunicate none.²¹

He fitted all religions within his ‘comprehensive vedanta’.

Similarly, Gandhiji and a host of others, while keeping their Hindu identity intact, began to take the values of other faiths and blend them with their own. This was possible because ‘the Hindu is not concerned with dogmas and definitions’, and as Radhakrishnan pointed out,

While fixed intellectual beliefs mark off one religion from another, Hinduism sets itself no such limits. Intellect is subordinated to intuition, dogma to experience, outward expression to inward realization.²²

The absence of boundary lines, and the fact that Hinduism can merge values from outside into its ever—evolving identity as a faith and a ‘way of life,’ appears positively a ‘comprehensive charity’ to Radhakrishnan. Sharpe names this the new ‘not to destroy but to absorb’ motto of Hinduism.²³

This merger response is favourite among educated rationalists and patriotic nationalists. They refuse to accept Jesus Christ’s teaching as the property or monopoly of the church. As Samartha suggests, they have ‘unbound’ Christ, emphasizing both the universality and the accessibility of Christ.²⁴

4. Militant Response

A growing pattern in some sectors of the Hindu majority has been to demand ‘India for Hindus’. Muslims, Christians and others must either reconvert to the Hindu fold or quit

¹⁹ Spiritual discipline.

²⁰ Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 63–64.

²¹ For Swami Vivekananda’s address, see J. H. Barrows (ed.), *The World’s Parliament of Religions*, Chicago, 1893, pp. 968ff.

²² p. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (Upton Lectures, Oxford, 1926), London: Allen and Unwin, 1964, p. 13.

²³ Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

²⁴ Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

India. An active reconversion process has been launched by members of the Arya Samaj,²⁵ Jan Sangh, Hindu Maha Sabha, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak, Shiv Sena and Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Their impulse to militancy²⁶ runs counter to the national goal of secular democracy. p. 202

The militant response of Hinduism towards Christianity is illustrated by a recent happening on the streets of Delhi, when thousands of Hindu students and farmers participated in a protest march triggered by 27 right-wing Hindu groups. They disapproved of Pope John Paul's tour of India. Banners pictured the Pope 'hammering to pieces a map of India' and declared, 'He wears a mask of peace and unity but his mission is to divide and destroy the country.'²⁷ This statement discloses two Hindu notions: the Hindu fear that religious pluralism would lead to a disintegration of Indian national unity; and the Hindu bias that India is a Hindu country of Hindu people held together by Hindu faith. While the Muslim separatist tendency and Sikh militancy could contribute to justify such notions, the scattered Indian Christian minority neither desires separation nor is ideologically conditioned to demand it. The onus for Christians has been to work out a theology and practice of 'Christian participation in nation building'. Men like K. T. Paul, P. D. Devanandan, M. M. Thomas and a host of others have challenged Indian Christians to discover their role in Indian national development.²⁸

But a number of Hindu fanatics continue to discredit the positive contribution of Indian Christians. Charan Singh, president of the opposition Lok Dal Party, contended that missionaries have had a 'free run' in the strategic north-eastern regions where the Nagas and Mizos are converted to Christ; and that Christian converts might well ask for 'complete independence'. He implored the government of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to 'stamp out' Christian missions from the country. In complete contrast to such antagonism, Lal Chhuanliana of the faculty of Aizwal Theological College in Mizoram states that '80% of Mizo tribespeople had become Christians by 1954', giving up head hunting and learning both the 'values of democracy' and their 'tribal identity'; and argues that 'their first political party, Mizo Union, decided to remain within the Indian republic' even as early as in 1949!²⁹ p. 203

In the protest march referred to above, there were other banners saying: 'Service and education is merely a myth. John Paul has come to convert.' And one of the protest organizers declared, 'We don't mind preaching and we respect the Bible ... what we mind is conversions which take advantage of the weak and ignorant'.³⁰ Here the blinding effect of militant fanaticism blunts the cutting edge of conscience which knows no party spirit

²⁵ S. J. Seunarine, *Reconversion to Hinduism through Suddhi*, Madras: CLS (for CISRS), 1977, p.105. S. J. Samartha notes that reconversions cannot be ignored politically. They ensure votes! Yet Samartha does not count reconversion as minimizing Christ's influence on India and Hinduism (Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 5).

²⁶ J. A. Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Hindu Politics: a study of the R.S.S.*, New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1951.

²⁷ See 'Thousands of Hindus march in protest at Pope's tour of India', *The Times*, Saturday, February 1, 1986, p. 5.

²⁸ Cf. P. D. Devanandan and M. M. Thomas, *Christian Participation in Nation Building*, Bangalore: NCCI & CISRS, 1960, p. 325. The many contributions of CISRS cannot be ingored in this regard. This concern has been shared by evangelical Christians as well, as indicated by the All India Conference on Evangelical Social Action (Madras 1979) and the recent programmes of the EFI Theological Commission on caste and nation building.

²⁹ See 'Events and People' in *The Christian Century*, 102:38, December 4, 1985, p. 1113.

³⁰ 'Thousands of Hindus ...', *The Times*, *op. cit.*

in accepting good as good. Even the services of a Mother Teresa appear tainted to such militants. Perhaps the classic failure of Indian Hinduism is the fact that it accepts the presence of the 'weak and ignorant', ignores, uses, exploits and oppresses them, thrives on their services, labour and votes—but, then when some other group like Christianity attempts to alter their 'fate' and make them 'strong and enlightened', can neither bear it nor see it as 'advantageous to the weak and ignorant'. Is it taking advantage of such people when we alter their status for their own good? So it appears to this sector of Hinduism.

After his visit to the Church of South India in January 1986, Lesslie Newbigin wrote of a leader of the RSS in Tamilnadu whose 'prosperous business was destroyed; his wife tried to commit suicide; the local RSS tried and is still trying, to have him killed'—all because he had become a Christian.³¹ This demonstrates graphically the impact of Hindu militancy, which is as real as Hindu tolerance.³²

5. Missionary Response

Upon his return from the 1893 World Parliament of Religions, and his four years of accidental travel as 'Hinduism's first missionary to the west', Swami Vivekananda found a 'rapturous reception'; and with him old currents of Hinduism began to flow in new directions.³³ Hinduism became a missionary religion. This Hindu metamorphosis is as real as the emergence of 'third world missions' and 'third world theologies'. Vivekananda took his guru Ramakrishna's insights, experiences and theology and poured them into a missionary mould, p. 204 providing a theological justification with his concepts of *Jivanmukta*³⁴ and *Karma Yoga*.³⁵

The western-based Swami Akhilananda, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Swami Satchidananda, Bal Bhagwan, the presently floating Bhagwan Acharya Rajneesh, the India-based Sri Aurobindo and Sathya Sai Baba, are among the popular Hindu missionaries with an appeal to the west.³⁵

The success of this missionary thrust should partly be traced to the west's historical legacy; the post-colonial complex is at work economically; the bewildering maze of the

³¹ Lesslie Newbigin in *CSI News* from the CSI Council of Great Britain, No. 98 (February 1986), p. 2.

³² Cf. Douglas C. Smyth, 'The Social Basis of Militant Hindu Nationalism' in *The Journal of Developing Areas*, vol. 6 (April 1972), pp. 323–344.

³³ Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

³⁴ Cf. M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ*, pp. 124ff.

³⁵ Cf. Swami Akhilananda, *The Hindu View of Christ*, New York, 1949; S. J. Samartha, 'Swami Akhilananda' in *The Hindu Response*, pp. 61–72; Swami Satchidananda, *The Message of Yoga*, Connecticut: Satchidananda Ashram, Yogaville Inc., 1976, p. 26; A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *The Path of Perfection*, London: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1979; *Search for Liberation*, featuring a conversation between John Lennon and Swami Bhaktivedanta, London: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1981; V. C. Samuel, *The Ramakrishna Movement: The World Mission of Hinduism*, CISRS, 1960; Herbert Jai Singh, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life and Religious Thought*, CISRS, 1962; D. P. Sham Rao, *The Contemporary Gurus in Shirdi (Sai Baba) Tradition*, CISRS, 1972.

³⁵ Cf. Swami Akhilananda, *The Hindu View of Christ*, New York, 1949; S. J. Samartha, 'Swami Akhilananda' in *The Hindu Response*, pp. 61–72; Swami Satchidananda, *The Message of Yoga*, Connecticut: Satchidananda Ashram, Yogaville Inc., 1976, p. 26; A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, *The Path of Perfection*, London: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1979; *Search for Liberation*, featuring a conversation between John Lennon and Swami Bhaktivedanta, London: The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1981; V. C. Samuel, *The Ramakrishna Movement: The World Mission of Hinduism*, CISRS, 1960; Herbert Jai Singh, *Sri Aurobindo: His Life and Religious Thought*, CISRS, 1962; D. P. Sham Rao, *The Contemporary Gurus in Shirdi (Sai Baba) Tradition*, CISRS, 1972.

complexities of a soulless technocratic consumerism replaces values with 'profit, pleasure and domination motives' and the increasing irrelevancy of the 'faith of our fathers' leaves a resultant emptiness in western culture. Western youth become ready targets for the drug pushers, 'porn' peddlers and antinomian heretics as well as the newer religious sects. Some Hindu gurus blend and accommodate western sensual aspirations with eastern spiritual pursuits and so concoct a new religious product. Rajneesh perhaps stands at the top of the list presently. He was fined \$400,000 on federal charges of immigration fraud in the USA, where he admitted lying on his visa application, and contriving sham marriages in order that the Indian disciples could remain in the USA. When he left Rajneeshpuram, Oregon, and returned to India in mid-November 1985, his foundation was fined \$800,000 in unpaid taxes.³⁶ Britain has now denied him entry into the country and his private jet has taken him to the West Indies. Whether his missionary theology will take a new direction, is anybody's guess.

Unsurpassed by most other exponents of Hinduism, Swami Akhilananda engaged leading American theologians in dialogue about the great problems of religion. His mission was based on the conviction [p. 205](#) that occidental Christians suffer from a debilitating religious myopia, the result of a narrow provincialism. Claiming an easier access to the mind of Christ as his oriental birthright, he not only admired Christ but acceded to him the status of an advaitic *vedantin* and reformulated prominent Biblical passages in advaitic mould, making Christ the mouthpiece for propagating advaitic ideas.³⁷

It would be easy to fall into the mistake of painting the missionary concern of Hinduism rather too black. Heinrich Barlage contends that Swami Akhilananda has much to teach Christians about the Gospel and the Hindu background against which it needs to be made meaningful. We must take a serious look at the critique of western culture, its concepts of freedom, spirituality, family and community, which emerges from the encounter of Hindu missions with Western youth. The Church of the west has much insight to gain from this encounter for self-criticism of its decaying cultural environment. Similarly the Church in India should be sensitive to the impact of these apostles of modern Hinduism.

6. Modelling Response

From K. M. Panikkar's writings, Stephen Neill observed of Asia:

At no point have the foundations of Asian life been touched; the thoughtful and educated classes have considered the Gospel, and, for all their respect for the person of Jesus, they have rejected it as a way of life. Asia is in process of rediscovering its own soul, and in the future will live spiritually by its own resources, and not by anything borrowed from outside.³⁸

This is true of India and Hinduism in particular, as there has certainly been a process of rediscovery, renaissance and reform which has included also the process of modelling newer values. Remakrishna Mission exemplifies the 'modelling response' of a Hindu

³⁶ See 'Events and People', *op. cit.*, pp. 1112–1113. See Rajneesh's books, such as *Sex and Super-consciousness*, for his views.

³⁷ Heinrich Barlage, Christ, *Saviour of Mankind: A Christian appreciation of Swami Akhilananda*, West Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1977, p.283.

³⁸ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (The Pelican History of the Church, vol. 6), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, p. 560. Cf. K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western advance*, 1953.

system to Christianity. Two streams of influences caused Vivekananda to shape Ramakrishna mission into a social service orientation. Firstly, after wandering all over India and observing the many castes, customs, races and sects, he meditated on the past, present and future of India at Cape Comorin; there, grasping Ramakrishna's statement that 'an empty stomach is no good for religion', he consecrated himself to serve the starving, oppressed, outcast millions. Secondly, while in the west, he was impressed with the western nations' great concern for their masses; the high culture of the women; the power of organization; and western material prosperity. He concluded that 'unless his countrymen also gave a strong physical basis to their civilization, it would tumble down in the present state of the world'.³⁹ This humanization of Hindu theology and practice has had significant effects on Hinduism.

Man-centredness in theology is incarnational, and this could be seen in the wider developments in Christian theology.⁴⁰ Had he lived longer, Vivekananda might have furthered Hinduism's modelling response. D. S. Sarma laments his death at the age of 39 as a national calamity, saying:

One can imagine what he might have done for India and Hinduism, if he had lived at least to the Psalmist's age of three score years and ten. But he was destined only to be a pioneer. He broke new ground and led his people across and sighted the promised land, but did not live to enter it.⁴¹

By this Sarma indicates that it was only in the twentieth century that Hinduism was to respond with its gospel to the religious and material questions of the Indian masses. Through the decades of this century Hinduism has adapted itself to values drawn from many corners, including Christianity. The service motto of Christian missions reflects in the many schools, hospitals, village clinics, and service associations; the concern for human rights; a new status and dignity for women, and social consciousness. Such modelling has also protected Hinduism from losing converts to other faiths, particularly Christianity.

7. Mukti Response

From Lal Behari Day to Sadhu Chellappa, we note a train of Indian men and women including Nehemiah Goreh, Pandita Ramabai,⁴³ Sadhu Sundar Singh, Paul Sudhakar, Bakht Singh and a host of others, p. 207 who responded to Christ through conversion. They found *mukti* in Christ.⁴⁴ The question of conversion has loomed large in the Indian setting,

³⁹ Cf. D. S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–155 and M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ*, p. 111 and 124.

⁴⁰ Cf. M. M. Thomas, *Salvation and Humanization, Madras: CLS, 1970*; Emerito Nacpil, *The Human and the Holy: Asian Perspectives in Christian Theology*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1980.

⁴¹ D. S. Sarma, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁴³ See Nalini Arles, 'Pandita Ramabai and Amy Carmichael: A Study of their Contributions Towards Transforming the Position of Indian Women', M.Th. thesis, Religious Studies Department, University of Aberdeen, 1986. The thesis traces a Hindu Brahmin woman's pilgrimage to Christ and her struggle with the institutional Church.

⁴⁴ See G. MacPherson, *Lal Behari Day, Convert, Pastor, Professor*, Edinburgh, 1900; B. R. Barber, *Kali Charan Banerjea, Brahmin, Christian, Saint*, Calcutta, n.d.; C. E. Gardner, *Life of Father Goreh*, London, 1900; A. J. Appasamy, *Sunda Singh*, London, 1958; Pandita Ramabai, *A Testimony*, Kedgaon, Peona, 1907 (9th edition, 1968, p. 68); *Indian Christians: Biographical and Critical Sketches*, Madras, 1928; Al Krass, 'Proclaiming the Inner Christ of Hinduism—an interview with Paul Sudhakar', in G. H. Anderson & T. F. Stransky (eds.), *Mission Trends* No. 5—*Faith Meets Faith*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Paulist Press, 1981, pp. 264–270.

often kindling more heat than light. It incites the militant Hindus to violence. Affirming that 'there is an amazingly persistent response of Hindus to Jesus Christ in spite of the avowed self-sufficiency of modern Hinduism', Samartha argues that it is possible in future that an attitude of commitment to Christ without conversion might become more significant in India's religiously pluralistic context.⁴⁵ He calls 'those inside the hedges of the traditional church' to affirm the presence of Christ in Hindu response to Christ, even when that response is not in a familiar pattern.⁴⁶ Such an ecumenical approach sounds noble, but will not bring out the sympathies of the evangelical community which certainly would expect a genuine response to Christ to mean a total obedience to the Christ who died outside the gate, by followers who will come outside their own safety circles. While we sympathize with the many 'secret believers and admirers' of Christ, we cannot ignore the remarkable fact that many who believe are being added into the Church which Jesus claims to be building, against whom the gates of hell shall not prevail.

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Inter-Religious Dialogue

Paul Schrotenboer

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Bulletin, March 1986.*

Tracing primarily the history of dialogue in WCC circles, Schrotenboer raises several key objections to it from an evangelical point of view. He stoutly defends the idea that the evangelical claim to know the truth, Jesus Christ, is not a sign of Christian arrogance, but 'an acknowledgement of grace' which 'should be made in humility yet with conviction'.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this paper is inter-religious dialogue, not inter-confessional dialogue. The latter, which has become a very popular activity in recent decades, refers to discussions between or among different Christian traditions. The participants in such talks are presumably all committed to Jesus Christ in whom they find their fundamental identity in the fellowship of his people. The differences that exist among them are limited to the distinctions of the various confessional families, each with its own traditions and emphasis.

Inter-religious dialogue takes place between adherents of different religions, that is, between people whose fundamental commitments centre either in Jesus Christ or in some

⁴⁵ Samartha, *The Hindu Response*, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 4. Cf. Kaj Baago, *The Movement around Subba Rao: A Study of the Hindu—Christian movement around K. Subba Rao in Andhra Pradesh*, Madras: CLS (for CISRS), 1968, p. 32.