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THE HINDU-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE AND THE INTERIOR DIALOGUE

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INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE necessitates not only a mutual revealing of beliefs, symbols, and values, but an interior dialogue within each dialogue partner as well. In this interior dialogue the truths which are being revealed are weighed, tested, and, it is hoped, reconciled into each person's faith and commitment. The present essay's suggestion amounts to this: though most Christians are not directly involved in the Hindu-Christian dialogue in India, or the dialogues with the other great religions, few can without loss exempt themselves from an interior dialogue of their personal faith with the world religions. For it is clear that a plurality of great religions exists and will continue to exist; and, if it is meaningful to think in terms of God's plans, or actions in history, these religions did not come about by chance, nor are they irrelevant to us. Through the interior dialogue, then, we are all connected with the interreligious dialogues taking place around the world; and they are connected with us.

Nevertheless, I want to say a good deal about the Hindu-Christian dialogue in India. For two reasons. First, the interior dialogue is best described in the context of the beliefs and values of (at least) two religious traditions in dialogue. Second, I am a participant of sorts in the Hindu-Christian dialogue, and I have some questions which were raised by the dialogue scene I observed in India in 1980 and again in 1983. Consequently I propose (1) to describe those central issues in the dialogue which raised substantive questions and (2) to present the idea of the interior dialogue, with the help of excellent writings by Raymond Panikkar and John A. T. Robinson.

THE HINDU-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Dialogue's Starting Point

My first consideration stems from the fundamental theological question which impels the whole dialogue movement, especially from the Christian side: Since God wills to save all people, how is He doing so?[1] From this religious impulse—this curiosity to see where and how God is

[1] I speak of the "Christian side" when my axiom that God wills to save all, and my dependence on the Vatican Council document *Nostra aetate*, might more exactly be considered Catholic. I hope I can be pardoned in this for being more heuristic than exact; yet I am also grateful to Monika Hellwig for the above observation.

acting—to dialogue with the other religious traditions of the world is a short step. The Second Vatican Council shows clear signs of this reasoning in the declaration *Nostra aetate*. After teaching that God alone is the final goal of all peoples as well as their origin, and stating that "His providence, His manifestations of goodness, and His saving designs extend to all," the declaration exhorts Christians as follows: "prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions . . . acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among them, as well as the values in their society and culture."[2]

One line of theological reasoning which has appeared frequently in the Christian tradition is excluded by the Council approach: the notion that God intends to save some, but not all, people. A second line, more difficult to evaluate, is the more widely held opinion that God's "plan" is to save all people through the Christian Church. A distinguished past participant in the Hindu-Christian dialogue, Robert Antoine, S.J., of Calcutta (d. 1982), has described well the picture that impresses itself upon the mind of a Christian in Asia. Christian evangelism is experiencing some degree of success there, and Christian faith is lively; but there is no question of the major Asian religions fading out before a "triumphant" Christianity. And so Antoine drew the theological conclusion: in light of the evident historical failure of the approach that would convert all to Christianity, dialogue with other faiths is the stance indicated. Put another way (still by Antoine): if God did not intend to save all people through historical Christianity, we must look at things seriously and anew, to try to see again what God's intent might be. The way in which it seems best to do this at present is through dialogue.[3]

It is also important to see this impulse to dialogue expressed subjectively, the way in which it is felt most vividly. In this context I experience my own faith in the God who works to save all as a motive force leading me directly, in a spirit of loving curiosity, to learn about the other religions of the world and to engage in dialogue with believers of those religions. George Gispert-Sauch, S.J., professor of systematic theology and Indology at Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies in Delhi, sees dialogue as growing directly out of his Christian commitment as localized

[2] *Nostra aetate* 1 and 2 (*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. [New York: America, c1966] 661 and 662–63).

[3] This "theological conclusion" and its paraphrase is a reconstruction of part of my conversation/interview with Antoine on July 24, 1980, in Calcutta. In this, as in all the interviews to which I shall refer, I did not use a tape recorder, and so I cannot cite the exact words. But I wrote down the conversations no more than a few hours after they had taken place, and so they are close to exact. For a published example of Antoine's opinions, cf. his essay "Like the Grain of Wheat," in *God's Word among Men*, ed. George Gispert-Sauch, S.J. (Delhi: Vidyajyoti Institute of Religious Studies, 1973) 139–47.

in India. The questions about God's grace and salvation vis-à-vis Hinduism (especially), he says, spring forth naturally for anyone who looks seriously.[4] And Ronald Prabhu, S.J., who has conducted many dialogue sessions at Ashirvad Retreat House in Bangalore, reports that Hindus would not, in general, be led to dialogue as something flowing naturally from their religious insight, although they are open to it when it is initiated. Rather, the need for dialogue flows straight out of his own Christian faith, in the form of a desire to see how God has manifested Himself in other religions.[5] This discovery of God in other religions, especially under the divine name "Truth," is one of the dialogue's most exciting facets. Finally, Raymond Panikkar sees dialogue as stemming from Christianity's most characteristic commandment: love of neighbor. He writes:

> Dialogue is not bare methodology but an essential part of the religious act par excellence: loving God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself. If we believe that our neighbor lies entangled in falsehood and superstition we can hardly love him as ourselves. . . . Love for our neighbor also makes intellectual demands.[6]

The Christian concern for the salvation of all, then, and the dialogue with the world's other religions which it has given rise to, are seen ultimately to stem from the foundational motives of the faith: love of God and love of neighbor.

A Soteriological Application

Against this background a question arises from my own Hindu-Christian dialogue experience. My experience has been with a learned Hindu guru, Shri Shyam M. Goswamy of Bombay, first as his student, but over many years now as a friend and informal dialogue partner as well. Shri Shyam was teaching me the doctrines of Vallabhācārya (hereafter Vallabha), the theologian/saint who founded the Hindu system of which Shri Shyam is a guru. When we came to the question of Krishna's saving grace (for Krishna is the Supreme God in this system), Shri Shyam portrayed the tradition's teaching as follows:

> Krishna's Grace is unlimited, and occurs anywhere and everywhere as Krishna wishes. Saving Grace not only occurs outside our system as well as within it, but we may even expect to be able to see traces of Krishna's Grace in other religions and cultures. What Vallabha has taught us is a Path of Grace which we are

[4] From our conversation at Vidyajyoti on July 15, 1980.

[5] Our conversation took place on July 7, 1980, in Mangalore. Several other participants in dialogue would disagree with, or qualify substantially, what Prabhu has said about Hindus not initiating dialogue. But none, to my knowledge, would disagree with his positive assertion: for Christians, dialogue springs directly from their faith experience.

[6] *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 10.

certain will lead us to salvation. In the trackless vastness of Krishna's Grace, therefore, Vallabha has demarcated this Path. It does not exhaust God's Grace, but it is our Path.[7]

In the years since, I have thought about this teaching of Vallabha's especially when my reading touches upon the traditional dictum *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. After reading one such essay,[8] the following line of questioning began to crystallize. Though the Christian faith can proclaim itself to be universal, and indeed potentially be so—i.e., it *can* save all, or, more accurately, God *can* save all through it—cannot another faith, say Hinduism or Buddhism, also proclaim that it can save all, and will try to? The point is this: Is the further conclusion which Christians usually make justified: that, since all can be saved through faith in Christ, it is God's plan that salvation actually come to all people by this one path? Might this not be jumping to an unwarranted conclusion and attempting to limit the scope of God's grace? It is natural for a way of salvation to rejoice in itself and to spread itself by preaching and conversion. In fact, Buddhism and Vallabha's as well as other traditions of Hinduism, along with Christianity and Islam, have done this systematically. But does the joyful experience that here is an assured way of salvation automatically mean that God intends all to be saved by it? Certainly, many further questions are raised by this one—for example, the nature as well as the implications, psychological, social, and religious, of felt, intimately experienced salvation. There is also the question of New Testament passages which appear to teach that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone.[9] But what has occurred to me as useful is to highlight this question against a new background. This line of thinking reminds me of Hans Küng's suggestion that we turn into a positive statement the negative dictum "Outside the Church no salvation," making it read instead "Salvation inside the Church!"[10] That this rightly joyful assurance means also that all must be saved in this way is what is questionable.[11]

[7] In line with this teaching, Shri Shyam, when he was the editor of the system's monthly journal, prepared for each issue a section which he entitled "Fragrance of Grace" (Hindi "Puṣṭi Saurabh"). Typically, the section featured a quotation from the Bible, the Qur'ān, or a saint of any tradition, which quotation showed clear evidence of God's grace and love.

[8] Joseph Neuner, "Votum ecclesiae," *God's Word among Men* (n. 3 above) 147–66.

[9] Cf. J. A. T. Robinson's enlightening discussion of several such passages in his *Truth Is Two-Eyed* (Phila.: Westminster, 1979) 105–7; cf. also Paul Knitter, "World Religions and the Finality of Christ: A Critique of Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*," *Horizons* 5 (1978) 153–56.

[10] *The Church* (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1976) 410.

[11] Some readers may find it helpful if I try to place this theological suggestion of mine among other contemporary Christian theological positions on the question of *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* and the normativity of Jesus Christ for salvation (a topic of major concern

A Thought on Inculturation

My second line of questioning relates more to the project of creating an Indian Christian theology than to the Hindu-Christian dialogue; but the two endeavors are far from separate. My consideration involves the application of a Hindu doctrine and practice, *sannyāsa* ("renunciation"), to Christianity in India. Two of the great Christian *sannyāsis* of our times, Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom Henri le Saux, O.S.B.) and Father Bede Griffiths, have participated prominently in the Hindu-Christian dialogue and have written eloquently about *sannyāsa.*[12] But for our purposes no more is needed than a statement of the essence of *sannyāsa,* so that I can then make a suggestion about its role in inculturating the Christian churches of India.

Sannyāsa, then, is the renunciation of all forms and formulations—social, cultural, religious—in order simply to "be" one with the Absolute. To this end the *sannyāsi* ritually (in his last ritual) interiorizes the sacrificial fires he had formerly fostered so carefully, dons the ochre robe, takes a new name (such as Abhishiktananda—"he whose Joy is the Anointed One"), leaves the caste system (and consequently, for example, is buried rather than cremated at death), wanders forth from home and family, etc. It is precisely his (or her, in some modern, and certainly in Christian, practice) essence to be bound by no rule, subject to no convention of this minutely ordered but provisional world. He is the pre-

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in my next section). To do this, I will use the four positions explained by J. Peter Schineller in his "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *TS* 37 (1976) 545–66. I reject position 1, which holds that "Jesus Christ and the Church are the constitutive and exclusive way of salvation" (550). I find also inadequate position 2, the "anonymous Christian" position, in which Christ and the Church are not exclusively but constitutively necessary for salvation. I see the soteriological position I have just described as falling somewhere between Schineller's positions 3 and 4 (he sees his four positions as exclusive of one another, and I disagree with respect to positions 3 and 4). Position 3's emphasis that God's grace extends to all people, with Jesus Christ and the Church having a normative but not constitutive role in the salvation of all, is nearly congruent with my present suggestion. The only difference is that I cannot "in dialogue . . . point to the superiority or normativeness of the Christian witness" (564). I say that the salvation I know in Jesus Christ is normative in that it will illumine for me, in dialogue, other ways by which God has saved and is saving people. This takes me some distance toward Schineller's position 4, an apophatic stance, yet one in which God's grace extends to all, and Jesus Christ is one of many ways of salvation. I, and this essay's soteriological position, share only to a limited degree the radical epistemological scepticism which Schineller presents as an attribute of position 4.

[12] Cf. particularly Abhishiktananda's "Sannyasa" (pp. 1–56 in his *The Further Shore* [Delhi: Indian Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1975]), which has been made required reading for even the Hindu candidates for *sannyāsa* at one of the finest ashrams in Rishikesh (the ashram is the Shivananda Ashram, and Gispert-Sauch my source for this information). For examples of Bede Griffiths' writings on *sannyāsa,* cf. his *Christ in India* (New York: Scribner's, 1966) 59–63, and his *Return to the Centre* (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate, 1977) 9–15.

eminently free one—free to embody the Absolute, the Transcendent, the Beyond—free to be what we all are potentially and hope one day to be manifestly.

My line of questioning has to do with Christian *sannyāsis*: Are the *sannyāsis* the most important people in the Indian Christian churches? Badly expressed, but put thus for this reason: perhaps only the *sannyāsis* will renounce totally the Western-church basis of their Christianity. In the case of all other Indian Christians, the Westernized Christian churches are still very much present, as a padding to fall back upon, as it were, if the attempts at inculturation do not work (or become tedious, or truly frightening). But what seems essential is so to commit oneself to inculturation that there is no other church to "come back to." In this context the *sannyāsis* may be the most important people, at least in terms of sign value, and perhaps also in fact; for a Christian *sannyāsi* would take, in effect, two *sannyāsas*, one from Indian culture and convention (i.e., from his "world") and another from Western-church convention. This latter renunciation might be characterized (to modify slightly a famous phrase from the Western tradition) as a life lived *etsi Roma non daretur* ("even though Rome"—by which I mean rhetorically to include all the Western churches—"be not assumed"). If some such thoroughness of commitment is not present in *sannyāsis* with or without the ochre robe, to speak of genuine indianization of the Church seems unrealistic.

Christology Revisited

My third consideration takes us to what, for most of the Christian participants at least, is the heart of the dialogue: the person and nature of Jesus Christ and his relation to the non-Christian religions. I do not intend to review the substantial and still growing literature which just the Hindu-Christian dialogue, not to mention the other dialogues, has generated on this subject;[13] but I note here a few ways in which Indian Christian theologians are speaking about Jesus Christ, and then make a critical comment.

Veteran dialogue participant Ignatius Hirudayam, S.J., pursued an illuminating line of thought when I spoke with him at his beautiful dialogue center, Aikiya Alayam, in Madras.[14] He pointed out that we

[13] Cf., e.g., Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (2nd ed.; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1981); M. M. Thomas' deliberately countertitled *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance* (2nd ed.; Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1976); S. J. Samartha, *The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1974); Klaus Klostermaier, *Kristvidya* (Bangalore: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1967).

[14] On August 4, 1980, under the same conditions as mentioned for the previous conversations.

Christians would be presumptuous if we assumed we knew the face of the present and future Christ and could describe him completely. This is precisely what we cannot do, he continued, with the cosmic Christ, the Christ of faith (who, I reflected, is the only Christ). Christ is present and working, with his Spirit, in every faith. And, he concluded, all salvation is through this Christ.

Again, Gispert-Sauch[15] gives us valuable background on these questions. According to him, many Indian Christian theologians would not accept the statement "Jesus is really unique as Christ" without qualification.[16] When I asked whether, in a contemplated theological conference which would have the question of the uniqueness of Christ as its focus, a uniqueness of Christ could not be taken for granted, while the modes of that uniqueness would be the conference's subject matter, Gispert-Sauch said no. A uniqueness would not be allowed to be presumed; the presumption or presupposition of uniqueness would definitely be questioned and made a subject.

Let me exemplify this tendency from an important Indian Christian theologian. Panikkar has found the distinction between "Jesus" and "Christ" fruitful for the dialogue and dialogue theology. The advantage of such a distinction can be seen in a passage where he asserts that the basis for the universalism of Christianity "lies in the Christian conception of Christ: he is not *only* the historical redeemer, but *also* the unique Son of God . . . the only ontological . . . link between God and the World."[17] But the disadvantage—which has sometimes led to Panikkar's being criticized for paying too little attention to the human, historical Jesus—may perhaps be seen in another recent passage of his. As the first among a number of theses for dialogue, Panikkar says: "Christ is the Lord, but the Lord is neither only Jesus nor does my understanding exhaust the meaning of the word."[18]

What occurs to me in this context is a criticism in the form of a caveat. I am in sympathy, indeed in solidarity, with the theological effort I have

[15] In the conversation of July 15, 1980 (n. 4 above).

[16] My understanding here is that quite a number of Indian theologians—Gispert-Sauch did not say whether he is among them—would not admit an absolute uniqueness of Jesus, although they might well hold for a uniqueness and necessity of Christ in senses which they would further define. By an "absolute uniqueness" of Jesus I mean a claim that salvation comes only through Jesus of Nazareth, who is the totality of Christ.

[17] *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* 83.

[18] *The Intrareligious Dialogue* 36 (the sentence is meant to stand by itself, although I do not find all its referents clear). Two theologians who have criticized the first edition of *The Unknown Christ* on the above-mentioned grounds are S. J. Samartha (*The Hindu Response to the Unbound Christ* 165) and John B. Chethimattam (in "R. Panikkar's Approach to Christology," *Indian Journal of Theology* 23 [1974] 219–22). I agree with their criticism of Panikkar's first edition, but find the second edition better on this question, though still occasionally problematic (e.g., 29 and 56–57).

been describing. But, as occasionally a tendency shows itself to make Jesus the "Christ for Christians," as it were, while making "the Christ" the embodiment of the Absolute's self-revelation in all religions, the following question occurs to me. Is this the Christological counterpart of the ecclesiological move: outside the Church there is no salvation, therefore we define the Church as excluding no one? Together with Küng,[19] I find untenable the notion that we must keep expanding the Church's walls so as to include all people, even those who quite consciously want no part of being, or being called, Christian. Likewise, on the Christological level we may be attempting to redefine Christ so that he belongs to every faith. The question and caveat, then: Are we expanding the meaning of Christ beyond all meaningfulness? It may be true that Christ is present in all religions; but let us not so drive a wedge between "Christ" and "Jesus of Nazareth" that our dialogue theology will ring true neither to Christians nor to non-Christians. Perhaps it is preferable to use some other theological categories, either traditional, such as the *ecclesia ab Abel* or the notion of a "cosmic religion,"[20] or new. More likely it will prove best to continue, delicately, with the distinction-in-unity between Jesus and ("the") Christ. To lose patience with the complexities would be a mistake; for, to phrase the caveat in one final way, can anyone truly believe a "Christology" that does not have Jesus as its central exemplification?

Good Effects on Ecumenism?

The final consideration in this first part stems from a question I asked Ignatius Hirudayam in Madras. I have noticed for some years that, on the Christian side of the dialogue, most of the Catholics at least seem to have a personal preference, among the Hindu systems, for the Advaita Vedanta of Shankara.[21] Yet I knew that Hirudayam, whose dialogue has involved him predominantly with the more theistic Shaiva Siddhanta tradition, would likely have a fruitful difference of opinion from the advaitic majority. So I asked him whether he thought that the preference of so many Christian participants for Shankara's Advaita constitutes a problem for the Christian side of the dialogue.

Hirudayam answered in the affirmative. He put the problem in classical

[19] Cf. esp. *The Church* 409–11.

[20] Robin Boyd, in his excellent *Indian Christian Theology* (2nd ed.; Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1975) 294, sees Abhishiktananda, "the Panikkar group," Bede Griffiths (cf. 138, n. 2), and even Hans Küng (in Joseph Neuner, ed., *Christian Revelation and the World Religions* [London: Burns & Oates, 1967]) as theologians who find the idea of a primal "cosmic religion" a useful one.

[21] This seems especially true for the monk/*sannyāsi* participants, though not for them alone. Robinson also notices this (*Truth Is Two-Eyed* 13).

Shaiva Siddhanta terms: you followers of *advaita* (say the Shaivas) have been dazzled by what you have seen (the identity between *Ātman*, "the Self," and *Brahman*, "the Absolute"), but you are like a frog which has jumped only three fourths of the way across a well! Come further, to the final union with Shiva, which is nondual but nonetheless does not destroy the I.

I found this answer partially helpful, in that it agreed with my fear that a strong preference for *advaita* might, ironically, start a new history of Hindu sectarianism among the Christians who are in dialogue; and partially unhelpful, in that it substituted a preference for another Hindu system over the *advaita* system. And the claims of these two systems cancel each other out perfectly; for just as the Shaiva theism claims to include the *advaita* experience, so does *advaita* claim to include, and then pass beyond, theism. So it could happen that one intolerant inclusivism would be exchanged for another.

But what seems more important is the further consideration which this inquiry prompted in me. Although a Christian's entry into dialogue may involve penetrating deeply into a particular Hindu system, Christians in the dialogue should not choose their personal "type" of Hinduism and act as if it is the only valid one. This would be the Hindu sectarian mistake (and a Hindu in dialogue could make the corresponding mistake by holding out strongly for one Christian sect over all the others). Perhaps, instead, one of the unexpected fruits of the dialogue will be the other religion's teaching us how to live tolerantly with the differences of doctrine, church, sect, etc., within our own religion, and our teaching them how to tolerate theirs. If our partners in dialogue can enter profoundly into our religion and yet tolerate our differences, and we tolerate theirs, perhaps we can show each other how to heal the differences within our own folds. Thus "the wider ecumenism," as Eugene Hillman calls Christianity's dialogue with the other religions of the world, would help bring about ecumenism within one's own religion. This is rather unexpected, and at least a bit idealistic, but it does not seem impossible.

THE INTERIOR DIALOGUE

Definition

Now that we have experienced something of the atmosphere and central questions of the Hindu-Christian dialogue, it should be possible to define the interior dialogue more clearly and to consider some ways of going about it. "Interior dialogue" is a term I am suggesting as a substitute for the other two terms ("inner dialogue" and "intrareligious dialogue")

by which I have seen this phenomenon designated.[22] Robinson provides some background and clarification for the first term:

> ... what Murray Rogers calls 'the inner dialogue' which is a precondition of the outer and for which the terms are the same. And it is from this inner dialogue, if not from the exposure required for the outer, that this book has been born and to which it forms an invitation.[23]

Inner dialogue, then, refers to the entire process and impulse which lead one to desire outer or interreligious dialogue. In addition, inner dialogue refers to the effects of outer dialogue on one's own faith—effects which take place before, during, and after outer dialogue. Panikkar gives us a more complete explanation of the phenomenon, which he calls the "intrareligious dialogue":

> Interreligious dialogue is today unavoidable; it is a religious imperative and a historical duty for which we must suitably prepare. But we often hear more talk about interreligious dialogue than actual dialogue. In order to sidestep this pitfall, I would like to begin by stressing the often-neglected notion of an *intrareligious* dialogue, i.e., an inner dialogue within myself, an encounter in the depth of my personal religiousness, having met another religious experience on that very intimate level. In other words, if *interreligious* dialogue is to be real dialogue, an *intrareligious* dialogue must accompany it....[24]

Inner dialogue must, then, accompany outer dialogue if the latter is to be substantial. What I propose is the expansion of the scope of this inner dialogue from those only who participate in interreligious dialogue to all searchers for the truth in this era of dialogue. This would be not an addition to but a logical consequence of my line of thinking, as Robinson has also shown when he announced his book as an "invitation" to all his readers to initiate an inner dialogue. Finally, since usage is still fluid and I think my term a bit better, I propose for this phenomenon the name "interior" dialogue. It is a word with more resonances in spiritual tradi-

[22] I am not the first to use the term "interior dialogue." Lucien Richard uses it without elaboration, but in approximately the meaning I describe here, in his "Some Recent Developments on the Question of Christology and World Religions," *Eglise et théologie* 8 (1977) 209. Eric J. Sharpe also uses the term, but in a different sense (the contemplative/mystical aspect of interreligious dialogue), in his "Goals of Interreligious Dialogue," in John Hick, ed., *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions* (Phila.: Westminster, 1974) 87–89. But I think I am the first to suggest adoption of the term both as preferred usage and in the present meaning.

[23] *Truth Is Two-Eyed* 7. Robinson cites as his reference in dialogue theologian Murray Rogers' work the chapter "Hindu and Christian—A Moment Breaks," in H. Jai Singh, ed., *Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Bangalore: C.I.S.R.S., 1967) 104–17; unfortunately this very promising book is out of print.

[24] Cf. *The Intrareligious Dialogue* 40.

tion than "inner," and simultaneously it is less complicated and unclear than "intrareligious." The interior dialogue, then, is the interaction, the testing, and, with the help of grace, the reconciliation within one's personal faith of the beliefs, symbols, and values of the different faith system which one is deeply considering.

On the Importance of Being Two-Eyed

Probably the best way to present the suggestions I make toward a theology of the interior dialogue is to divide them into two areas: how to see and how to believe. The first question is one of perception: how to view the interrelation between one's own religion and the other religion being considered. It would, of course, be dishonest to proceed in an a priori manner here, as if one could prepackage all one is going to see. Yet there is an incipient consensus among dialogue participants on how best to see. To know this way of perceiving is much more helpful than to be dropped anew, as it were, into this complicated panorama.

To be concrete: dialogue theologian Ignatius Puthiadam sees a "complementarity" between Hindu and Christian truths. It is not new to see, for example, Hinduism as stressing the eternal while Christianity stresses the historical. But it is new to perceive that this complementarity can be expected, and even described in a systematic way. Puthiadam sees such a complementarity both between the different moods he experiences while praying in a Hindu temple and a Christian church and between the major theological truths of the two religions. He perceives a "principle of complementarity" by which he discovers not only "the unknown Christ and Christianity of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, but the unknown Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism of Christianity."[25] Similarly, Ignatius Hirudayam sees, in grand historical perspective, the various world religions as mutually corrective thought systems and movements.

But the most vivid formulation of this way of seeing comes from a newcomer to the field of dialogue, John A. T. Robinson, whose *Truth Is Two-Eyed* has brought acknowledged illumination to such professionals as Antoine. Robinson's title refers to the way of seeing he proposes. But it is not actually truth that is two-eyed; rather, it is the observer who must hold two quite different, apparently opposed eyes in steady focus on truth.[26] These two eyes, present in every person's religious vision, might be named the prophetic and the mystical, or the relational (as in

[25] Page 313 in Puthiadam's "Reflections on Hindu Religious Texts," in D. S. Amalorpavadass, ed., *Research Seminar on Non-Biblical Scriptures* (Bangalore: National Biblical, Catechetical, and Liturgical Centre, 1974) 300–313; cf. 309–13 on complementarity generally; 309 on P.'s experience of the different "moods."

[26] I am indebted for this astute clarification to my student Leanne Simon.

"I-Thou") and the nondual (as in "That art thou").[27] The great virtue of the "two eyes" image is the simultaneity of different angles of vision it stresses. In this it surpasses complementarity, in which the two (or more) elements, though both essential, might be viewed one after the other. If the prophetic and mystical eyes view a religious truth simultaneously, then even the dominance of one eye over the other which often enough occurs will not distort one's religious vision.

For example, consider the uniqueness of Christ, a major sticking point of the Hindu-Christian dialogue and of other religions' dialogues with Christianity. The prophetic eye, often dominant in Christianity, stresses the historicity and uniqueness of Christ, that he is "*once* for all," while the mystical eye, so typical of Hinduism, provides the necessary scope for Christ's universality, that he is "once *for all.*" If both were not present, emphasis on historical uniqueness would render universality less and less credible. Or, conversely, Christ would be so cosmic as to lose all concreteness. So, the two-eyed view of Christ is that he is unique and universal.[28] This example should shed light on the possible problem I outlined earlier, that of separating "Jesus" from "Christ." Overemphasis of the historical and unique would leave us with only Jesus, while similar insistence on universality yields a faceless, placeless Christ. Both "unique" and "universal" are true—true, in fact, in a way analogous, and not coincidentally, to "true God and true man." But to insist on one at the other's expense would distort the truth.

Two-eyedness, as also complementarity, does not mean that everything is correct and nothing wrong, or vice versa. It is a means of weighing a religious statement, experience, etc., from each of two fruitful but different perspectives, one of which may show a richness and validity to which the other was blind. It may not be excessive to say that the epistemology of religious knowing, especially in terms of the interior dialogue, has been broadened by this simple image, which encourages us to expect both the prophetic and the mystical, in mutually illuminating and mutually corrective ways. Far from inducing spiritual schizophrenia, this two-eyedness would make each of us attend to the full range of vision of the human spirit, and not our usual, more comfortable, partial range.

One final connection with respect to this way of seeing, a synthetic insight which Bede Griffiths has expressed in his *Vedanta and Christian Faith.*[29] If Robinson's two eyes can be called the relational and the nondual, then the Gospel of John shows a kind of two-eyedness we find

[27] *Truth Is Two-Eyed* 9–10.

[28] For this example cf. ibid. 97–103. *Unique and Universal* is also the title of an introduction to Indian theology (ed. John B. Chethimattam, Bangalore, 1972) which Robinson has cited favorably here and elsewhere.

[29] Los Angeles: Dawn Horse, 1973; I shall be quoting from p. 55.

nowhere else; for there Jesus speaks of his Father, himself, and his disciples as being related in a nondual way. Griffiths explains this phenomenon (using the word "identity" as I have been using the word "nonduality," though elsewhere the two do not always mean the same) as follows:

> His [Christ's] was an experience of identity in relationship. He does not say, I am the Father—that he could never say—but "I and the Father are one" (John 10.30). It is a unity in duality, by which he can say, "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (John 14.10), which is yet based on an identity of being, by which he can say "He who sees me, sees the Father" (John 14.9). It is the experience of the Absolute in personal relationship, and that would seem to be the distinctive character of the Christian experience of God.

Thus, in John, the relational "I-Thou" and the nondual "That art thou" are not finally opposite or even separate, but mutually present in Jesus, the Father, and, ideally, all human persons. It has long been sensed that the Gospel of John is the key New Testament writing for the Hindu-Christian dialogue.[30] We have here good evidence as to how its way of seeing illumines the interior dialogue as well.

Faith and Beliefs

Thus far with regard to seeing. Now what about believing? For this kind of seeing is not yet believing; at least, the process by which this seeing becomes believing remains to be traced. Tracing this process is what must concern us now.

First we should take notice of a phenomenon that occurs in interreligious dialogue and can therefore be expected in the interior dialogue as well. Deep understanding of a particular teaching of another religion involves, for many if not for all partners in dialogue, an experience of the truth of that teaching. One reaches a conviction, often strong, with regard to the teaching. Our question is: What is the status of that conviction, that experience of truth, with respect to our religious faith? For example, what place in a Christian's faith can there be for a perception of profound truth in the central Hindu teaching that Ātman is Brahman?

Panikkar, probably the leading contemporary explorer of dialogue, presents this problem best, though without being able as yet to solve it completely. I will introduce some of his insights, then comment and ask some questions. Panikkar speaks of understanding the dialogue partner's

[30] Cf. Abhishiktananda's chapter "The Johannine Upanishads," in his *Hindu-Christian Meeting-Point* (Bangalore: C.I.S.R.S., 1969) 85–102; and, more recently, the volume of essays *India's Search for Reality and the Relevance of the Gospel of John*, ed. C. Duraisingh and C. Hargreaves (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K., 1975).

position or belief as involving assent to the truth of that position, and even as leading to conversion to that position. The following seems to constitute his fullest statement of his thesis:

> The next step [in dialogue] is to understand the other's position, and at once a tremendous difficulty arises. I can never understand his position as he does—and this is the only real understanding between people—unless I share his view; in a word, unless I judge it to be somewhat true.... When I say I understand a proposition and consider it untrue, in the first place I do not understand it because, by definition, truth alone is intelligible (if I understand a thing I always understand it *sub ratione veritatis*); in the second place I certainly do not understand it in the way of someone who holds it to be true. Accordingly, to understand is to be converted to the truth one understands.[31]

Let us look at Panikkar's major assertion and, equally important, at its language. A person in dialogue must endeavor to understand the dialogue partner's religious position as the partner himself does. If this effort succeeds, the first person assents in some way to the truth of the partner's position—and this to such a degree that it might even be said he is converted to the truth of the position. My response is that Panikkar is speaking of something profoundly true, but that the language of "conversion," though experientially correct, may be confusing theologically.

That one must, in dialogue (interior as well as interreligious), strive to understand the partner's religion as *he* understands it is the only position that makes sense upon reflection. Otherwise a person may simply read his own religious categories into a very different religion. And that, when the process of understanding succeeds, the person judges the partner's position to be in some way true, both I and many others who have been in dialogue can attest. The problem is with the use of the term "conversion," because this term has for so long connoted the abandoning of one position and the embracing of a new belief as "the truth." But I am quite certain that Panikkar means embracing a newly discovered truth without a presumptive necessity of abandoning a former belief which supposedly covered the same ground. Perhaps this is new ground that simply was not covered, or known of, before. Hence the joy of discovery and conversion to truth is real; but the idea of rejection and replacement that "conversion" often connotes is not present.

Panikkar, well aware after much feedback of the difficulty of communicating this important dialogue experience, is considering the possibilities of the idea of "conviction," perhaps especially of an archaic English

[31] *The Intrareligious Dialogue* 9.

noun, "convincement," for carrying his meaning.[32] And so the formulation of this, one of the most exciting and important experiences of dialogue, is not yet complete or satisfactory. But though the word may not yet be there, the thing is, and "conversion" is not so much a wrong term as a potentially confusing one. Lastly, for completeness' sake, it should be pointed out that Panikkar does not anticipate a hasty, unimpeded attainment by dialogue partners of "understanding" and "conversion" with regard to every belief of their respective religions. Moreover, understanding should never be pretended where it does not exist. Instead, the beliefs not understood are the matter for continuing dialogue, whose end has scarcely been contemplated as yet.[33]

To apply this line of thinking to our example: I, for one, certainly have not had the definitive experience that Ātman is Brahman, the act of complete knowledge which, according to Hindu tradition, brings final release from the round of rebirths. But it would be accurate to say that I have had a passing but profound illumination of its truth, some perception of and some effect of which remain with me. This is the truth that I "assent to," or, if the language be properly qualified, am "converted to."

Now the ground is prepared for our final question: Can I also say that I "believe" such a truth? Both the interreligious dialogue and the interior dialogue will frequently pose this question; and, as with the question of understanding and/or being converted to another's position, it may be more important to begin speaking about such a central phenomenon than to wait for perfect formulation and solution before saying anything. In fact, some excellent, though perhaps not final, formulations have been made by Panikkar and by Bernard Lonergan. These I shall explain briefly, then comment upon and apply.

Both theologians tackle the question in terms of a distinction between faith and beliefs. For Panikkar,[34] faith is a constitutive human dimension—the dimension in which a person relates to his or her destiny—while beliefs are the person's formulations to himself and others of his

[32] Learned in conversation with Panikkar, in Washington, D.C., May 3, 1981. One brief published example of the language of "conviction" combined with "conversion" and the intrareligious dialogue may be found in *The Intrareligious Dialogue* xxvi. The article in which Panikkar has thus far treated this question most thoroughly is in German: "Verstehen als Überzeugtsein," in *Neue Anthropologie* 7 (ed. H. G. Gadamer and P. Vogler; Stuttgart: Thieme, 1975) 132–67; but he indicated that more is likely to be seen.

[33] It was in the conversation just mentioned that I asked Panikkar what happens when understanding is not reached.

[34] Cf. his *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 204–6, within the chapter titled "Faith as a Constitutive Human Dimension." Besides the above chapter, Panikkar has written a book on this subject: *L'Homme qui devient Dieu: La foi dimension constitutive de l'homme* (Paris: Aubier, 1969).

faith. While beliefs composed of human language are integral to a person's expression of his faith to himself and others, and therefore integral to his faith, beliefs do not reach to and adequately express the term or object of faith, i.e., God, or the Transcendent, while faith does indeed reach and relate to its object. More briefly: faith really relates to the Infinite, while beliefs are the finite expressions of that relation, which by the very fact of being finite cannot capture the Object of faith.[35] Beliefs are necessary for faith, but they are not identical with faith. In a homogeneous cultural world, in which dogmas are often taken to be faith itself rather than dogmas *of* faith, beliefs will be thought to be identical with faith. It is in a world of dialogue that the distinction between faith and beliefs, between the transcendence of faith and the relativity, though not relativism, of beliefs, becomes important.[36]

Similarly, Lonergan contends that "by distinguishing faith and belief we have secured a basis both for ecumenical encounter and for an encounter between all religions with a basis in religious experience."[37] For Lonergan, "Faith is the knowledge born of religious love,"[38] while belief is the expression—again, a human necessity partially constitutive of faith—of that knowledge. These beliefs can be different in different cultures and epochs, and yet stem from a deeper unity of faith and love.[39] Once again, then, a distinction between faith and beliefs is seen as essential for a world in dialogue. The immediate intention of Lonergan's distinction may be to render intelligible how two very different sets of beliefs stem from a faith and love whose Source is the same. But the distinction seems applicable to our present problem too: the question of whether another religion's belief, now seen as stemming from that profound faith and love that grounds beliefs, can be affirmed as in some way true for *all* who see it.

To frame the same question, this essay's final question, with the help of Panikkar's terms: What does the distinction between faith and beliefs have to do with the interior dialogue? Precisely this: those truths which I have understood, assented to, even "been converted to" in dialogue of either kind, can now become *beliefs* which express my *faith*. These teachings, says Hindu or Buddhist, can prove to be such accurate and fruitful expressions of my pursuit of my human destiny that I can say I

[35] Cf. esp. *The Intrareligious Dialogue* 12–13 and 18–22; and, e.g., the following (from *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics* 198): "the act of faith grasps things in themselves. Its formulation is only a conceptualization of some 'thing' that transcends it."

[36] Cf. *The Intrareligious Dialogue* 18–21.

[37] Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S. J., *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972) 119.

[38] Ibid. 115.

[39] Ibid. 119.

believe in them, that they express my faith.[40]

I can anticipate an objection, and I cannot yet answer it entirely. Do I mean that everyone can believe everything that seems *to them* noncontradictory to their own religion? This possible extreme of individual interpretation must, it seems to me, be avoided. Yet I am starting from the other end: there must be some scope for believing some of the truths one discovers so genuinely in dialogue. Panikkar's and Lonergan's distinctions between faith and beliefs, and my presentation of this question for both the interreligious and the interior dialogue, may afford a beginning of discourse on this phenomenon.

What we dialogue theologians are endeavoring to do, then, is to lay a Christian theological foundation for a very important aspect of our experience: our perceived belief in teachings of religions other than our own Christianity.[41] I have used belief in the Ātman/Brahman identity as an example which applies to me, and which must have been true at a far deeper level for Abhishiktananda, among others. There is clearly much to be thought out on how the different beliefs we hold harmonize. Perhaps aesthetic thinking can help us more than discursive thinking here. Perhaps, for example, there are different moods and moments of faith experience for which different beliefs are more or less relevant, or "right." This beginning of a thought I hope to develop elsewhere. Meanwhile, the distinction between faith and beliefs makes room within Christian theological categories for an experience that is more and more frequent in dialogue: truth is being perceived, discovered, recognized; and there *must* be room for that truth in my Christian faith.

This must suffice for now. I hope that my suggestions concerning soteriology, the place of the *sannyāsi*, the crucial relation of "Jesus" and "the Christ," and the wider ecumenical possibilities of freedom from sectarianism will be found helpful by my colleagues in the Hindu-Christian dialogue. Further, I hope that those many inquirers engaged, all over the world, in what I have proposed to name the interior dialogue will find that these thoughts on how to see and how to believe, enriched by appropriation through their own experience, can combine to form an incipient theology of that same interior dialogue.

[40] My expressing this conclusion in an individualistic way reflects merely the dominant present mode of dialogue experience, and in no way intends to exclude rich communitarian insight, language, and action in dialogue.

[41] Panikkar witnesses to this: "It is precisely because I take seriously Christ's affirmation that he is the way, the truth and the life that I cannot reduce his significance only to historical Christianity. It is because I also take seriously the saying of the Gītā that all action done with a good intention reaches Kṛṣṇa and the message of the Buddha that he points the way to liberation, that I look for an approach to the encounter with religions that will contain not only a deep respect for but an enlightened confidence in these very traditions—and eventually belief in their messages" (*The Intrareligious Dialogue* 54).