

Pontifical Council
for Interreligious Dialogue

Deepavali Messages
1995 - 2020



Celebrating 25 Years of
Hindu-Christian Fellowship

Vatican City

***Celebrating 25 Years of
Hindu-Christian Fellowship***

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Via della Conciliazione, 5
00193 Rome

Stampa: Scuola Tipografica S. Pio X - Roma

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Preface

I feel much joy in presenting the new book by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) - ***Celebrating 25 Years of Hindu-Christian Fellowship*** - which marks the quarter-century milestone of Deepavali Messages (1995-2020) sent from this Dicastery to our Hindu brethren in every part of the globe.

Started as a humble effort in 1995 in the spirit of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* (no.2) and as "an expression of the mission *ad gentes*" (cfr. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December 1990, no. 55), the annual Deepavali message has, over the years, become PCID's cherished tradition that aims at reaching out, with respect and love, to the followers of the third largest religion in the world to build fraternity, solidarity and harmony together.

These messages have forged and strengthened interreligious fellowship and social friendship between Hindus and Christians in ways big and small. Thus, this quarter-century mark, apart from being an occasion for celebrating the myriads of positive and constructive relationships—interpersonal and institutional –, also becomes for us a moment of firm resolve to take forward the countless number of discussions and deliberations these have generated for mutual enrichment, and the innumerable collaborative actions they have given rise to for "the true good of every person and of society as a whole" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants in the Tenth Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, 7 June, 2008).

In these 25 bygone years, engagement and effort of every individual and group committed to interreligious dialogue and fellowship has highly been valuable in furthering the cause of common good, human fraternity and religious harmony. Apart from His Eminence Cardinal Francis Arinze whose vision it was, as the President of the PCID, to launch this initiative, and the successive Presidents, who most zealously continued this noble tradition ensuring, through the local churches, ever more expansive diffusion of the messages in the local languages and vernaculars, there have been many individuals and organizations who genuinely sowed the seeds of interreligious relationality and responsibility by putting these messages to produc-

tive use. Hence my hearty gratefulness to everyone who has been and is engaged in the promotion of Hindu-Christian dialogue and collaboration.

Nostra Aetate, famously known today as the ‘*Magna Carta*’ of interreligious dialogue, declared that in her task of fostering unity and love among men, the Church gives primary consideration to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them (cfr. no.1). In accord with this principle, the themes and reflections of PCID’s Deepavali messages have always highlighted the shared beliefs, values and concerns that more easily connect Christians and Hindus for building reciprocally amicable relationships. Emphasis has also been laid, in all the messages, on the need for the practitioners of Hindu-Christian dialogue to be “clear and joyful in one’s own identity” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November, 2013, no. 251) and to acknowledge that diversity or differences are not a threat but a source of enrichment (cfr. Pope Francis, *Address, Arrival Ceremony*, International Airport of Colombo, 13 January, 2015). Also, as has been wont, every message along with expression of closeness to Hindu brothers and sisters, enunciates the opportunities for interreligious learning, sharing and bridge-building. Above all else, each year’s message puts in evidence the collective response that is possible in the wake of new problems caused as they may be, among others, by wilful indifference to suffering humanity or, discord in families, communities and society as against the concept of ‘the world is one family- *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*’ or, greed of a few depriving the great majority of its rightful resources as against the principle of ‘welfare of all- *loka samgraha*’ or, violence, even in the name of religion, as against the universal values of ‘nonviolence- *ahimsa*’ and ‘religious freedom’.

As co-pilgrims here on earth, a greater awareness must, more than ever before, animate us; an awareness that “everyone is connected as brothers and sisters and as such ‘we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home’” (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020). Moreover, in looking forward to a better future for all, a greater realization of our shared humanity, shared destiny and shared responsibility for one another and for the world (cfr. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’*- On Care for our Common Home, 24 May, 2015) is necessary. This realization will bring us together to unitedly overcome the challenges facing us in our efforts to build a world of “peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and co-existence” (*Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace*

and Living Together co-signed by Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019), worthy of the name.

It is my ardent desire and hope that this bouquet of Deepavali Messages from the PCID, together with ‘felicitation’ messages from some prominent personalities involved in Hindu-Christian dialogue and a few scholarly theological reflections on Hindu-Christian Collaboration, proves to be a veritable reference-source and useful tool to research students and academicians, as well as, those engaged in Hindu-Christian dialogue.

Miguel Ángel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

His Eminence Cardinal Francis Arinze
Former President, PCID (1985-2002)
*Prefect Emeritus, Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of
Sacraments*

It is a joy to recall twenty-five years of the practice of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sending a yearly message of goodwill to the followers of Hinduism worldwide.

It is not to be forgotten that Christians and Hindus form quite an impressive percentage of the world population.

The President and members of this Pontifical Council are to be congratulated for their attention to the Hindus shown by this yearly message.

Differences in religious beliefs and practices demand that the followers of the various religions pay attention to one another, meet one another, listen to one another, and ask themselves what they can do together or separately, in order to make this world a better place to live in.

I rejoice that Divine Providence gave me the honour to be part of the start of this yearly message twenty-five years ago.

May God bless all Christians and Hindus as they walk together and work together in their earthly pilgrimage, that is, life here on earth.

Religious festivals are common to all religions. Throughout the year or at particular landmark in the course of each religion's calendar, people of every religion celebrate, ritually and/or socially, joyful moments, commemorating some aspect of the respective religious belief. It also happens that there is a singular festival which becomes "the festival" of a given religious tradition. For example, Easter and Christmas for Christians who commemorate the sufferings, the death and the resurrection and the birth of Lord Jesus Christ, Eid al -Fitr for the Muslims who observe the end of the rigorous fast of the month of Ramadan, the Buddha Purnima of Buddhists who commemorate the enlightenment of *Sakhyamuni* or Deepavali/ Diwali for Hindus who celebrate the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, truth over untruth and life over death.

The joy of celebrating Deepavali comes also because it is a harvest time festival. The crops have by now produced the staple food in plenty and there is much to thank God for, and, therefore, a joyful celebration of the fruit of their labour is called for. The monsoon season concluded, good weather on its way and nature in its full flowering – such is the natural mood at the time of Deepavali among Hindus in India.

The Deepavali Message from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has been a great encouragement to the Christians, particularly those who live in India. It is true that people of all religions share the same kind of earthly life and, given the deep significance of Diwali, the Christians could not remain away from their Hindu neighbours and friends who celebrated it. Christians also believe, according to their faith, that evil is overcome by good, death leads to eternal life, truth prevails, light overpowers darkness around it. Encouragement from the Holy See has been the greatest gift when Christians felt encouraged to go to meet their Hindu neighbours and friends and share their joy of celebration. As a young boy, son of a farmer who grew up with Hindu neighbours and friends, my joy multiplied during Diwali festival. Since it is also a time for harvest vacation, I went to the Church early morning for the Holy Mass, prayed for all my neighbours and friends, especially those

who were Hindus and then came home to mingle with children who celebrated the festival with fire-works, distribution of sweets and folklore singing and dancing. After all, it is like a nationwide celebration: little handmade oil lamps of burning flames which are arranged around the houses and streets (*Deepavali*: *deep*, i.e. light; and *avali*, i.e. rows= row of lights), the space in the house entrance decorated with artistic designs of coloured powder; lighted sky lamps hanging high on housetops, etc., all these create a festival mood. But there was nothing to speak of religious traditions of one another. So, when the Deepavali Message came from the President and the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, it added a special joy to one and all. Individual Christians and Christian families had a reason to meet their neighbours and friends on this festive occasion. They were happy to share the Message which came from the Pope's Office in the Vatican; by now, it has become the pride of Christians who joyfully approach their Hindu neighbours and friends. Hindus also most appreciate this gesture.

The Deepavali Messages have been cherished by many Hindus. When received in a diocese through the National Bishops' Conference, it is translated into local languages (as India has over twenty-two officially recognized languages and thousands of dialects). The Diwali Message is sometimes published in local or national newspapers, church-bulletins, read out in small and informal public village gatherings or town squares or it happens that some Christians carry the Message to their friends as a formal and visible way of sharing Diwali greetings with their Hindu neighbours or friends.

Generally, the themes of Diwali Messages are culled out from the current Papal document; that helps bringing people together for some common action. Simple yet deep enough to engage people in a meaningful common reflection the Deepavali Messages have helped dissipate stereo-type ideas across religious boundaries or to clean up the prejudiced minds of partners in dialogue.

On the occasion of the "quarter century" of Diwali Message, I wish H. E. Cardinal Miguel Ayuso, President, and Monsignor Indunil, Secretary, as well as the entire staff of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, God's special blessings for their untiring efforts and for carrying forward the cherished tradition of greeting our Hindu brethren on the occasion of this most popular Hindu festival. Yes, faithful to the declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, of the

Second Vatican Council and committed unswervingly to dialogue with Hindus, the Catholic Church is firmly convinced that (the Church) must look with sincere respect upon the Hindu believers, their ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what the Church holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men (cf. n. 2).

Deepavali is a festival of light, happiness and wellbeing. It signifies the human journey from “untruth to truth, darkness to light, and death to immortality which will get us to the coveted goal of peace” (*Brihadāranyaka Upanishad* 1.3.28). It is also a festival of sharing gifts with family, friends and neighbors.

Hinduism has an enviable history of sharing with and learning from other cultures, especially the various religious traditions because of its adherence to the ancient wisdom of the Vedic seers which says “*Let noble thoughts come to us from all directions*” (आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः। *Rig Veda* 1.89.1). It is in continuance of this spirit of openness that we, the Hindus, look forward, every year, to receiving the Deepavali Messages from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The wisdom shared through the Deepavali Messages by the PCID admirably reflects the spiritual treasures and noble values present both in the Christian and Hindu religious traditions. Appreciation of these values and spiritual riches, besides removing the darkness of ignorance and prejudices, renders us mutually enriched and leads us on the path of dialogue and collaboration for the good of humanity. The Hindu scriptures exhort, “May you move in harmony, speak in one voice; let your minds be in agreement” (संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम्। -*Atharva Veda*, 6.64.1); “Let our aim be one and single! Let our hearts be joined as one. United be our thoughts. At peace with all, may we be together in harmony” (समानी व आकूतिः समाना हृदयानि वः। समानमस्तु वो मनो यथा वः सुसहासति।। -*Rig Veda* 10:192:2).” When Jesus prays “that all may be one” (*Holy Bible*, John 17:21), it does unmistakably imply unity of minds and hearts to establish harmony and peace in the world for the welfare of human family. I do believe that *Dharma* which connotes values like truthfulness, righteousness, non-violence, compassion, service, contentment etc., is present in every religion though its expressions may vary one from the other.

With these affirmations, I would unhesitatingly acknowledge that my association and interactions with the brothers and sisters of Christian faith

have made me understand my own faith better, besides helping me learn more about their faith. During my involvement in inter-faith dialogue for nearly half a century, the highlight of which was my participation in the Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World Meet in Assisi in 2011, I have learnt a lot about Christianity and about the virtues of love, sharing and selfless service as practiced by the Christian brethren. I am sure that they too have learnt about my faith through my person, words and works. These have perhaps made them live their Christian faith better! Learning from one another we become better Hindus, better Christians. The Deepavali messages have, no doubt, contributed in their own way towards enhancing mutual respect, understanding, appreciation and acceptance between Hindus and Christians and united us in seeking and working for the wellbeing of all.

As I congratulate the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue for the yeoman service it has been doing for the cause of inter-religious dialogue, I wish to offer a prayer for the whole of humanity in these times of Coronavirus pandemic: “May all be happy; may all be free from illness. May all see what is auspicious; may no one suffer” (सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः। सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद् दुःख भाग्भवेत्। - Believed to be inspired by *Brihadāranyaka Upanishad*, 1.4.14). It is also my ardent desire that “Together may we subsist; together may we relish; together we may perform...Peace, Peace, Peace ॐ सह नाववतु। सह नौ भुनक्तु। सह वीर्यं करवावहै... ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः (*Katha Upanishad* 19).

All these twenty-five years since the start of Deepavali greetings in 1995, the bond of friendship and dialogue between Christians and Hindus, in particular, between the Hindus belonging to the Italian Hindu Union (IHU)-(*Sanatana Dharma Samgha*), the umbrella body of Hindus in Italy and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) has grown in an increasingly fraternal and collaborative atmosphere.

All PCID Presidents - from His Eminence Cardinal Francis Arinze, under whose Presidentship of the PCID this initiative was taken, to the current President, His Eminence Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ - have shown spiritual sensitivity by offering us, through these greetings, inspirational reflections on relevant themes, year after year. We hail all these enlightened “men of dialogue” with profound gratitude.

The IHU’s first contact with the PCID happened when His Eminence Cardinal Arinze was its President and His Excellency Michael L. Fitzgerald, Secretary. We recall with great affection and esteem Cardinal Jean- Louis Tauran of revered memory, who was a man of God and immense spiritual and intellectual richness, during whose dynamic stewardship of the PCID, the friendship and collaboration between the IHU and the PCID increased manifold, which is being strengthened now by his worthy successor in office His Eminence Cardinal Ayuso.

IHU’s successful efforts in making Deepavali the official religious feast of the Hindus in Italy through an agreement with the Italian Parliament in 2012 were motivated by the primeval significance of the feast which transcends religions, castes, class etc. Though there are different and distinct expressions in each religious tradition, there is general agreement on “light” symbolising victory of goodness over evil, of righteousness over injustice - *dharma* over *adharma* – and, of hope over despair. The festival of lights, therefore, is the festival of all those who believe in God, the Supreme Light who is the source of all goodness, righteousness and hope and who dispels all kinds of darkness. Driven by this conviction, the IHU not only shares the messages from the PCID with the maximum number of Hindus in Italy but

also organizes an interreligious celebration of Deepavali every year in the heart of Rome.

The central focus of the messages from the PCID right from the beginning has been, apart from communicating the festal greetings, to encourage both the Hindus and Christians to mutually strengthen relationships of respect and understanding and to join hands with one another for the common good. The yearly themes, moreover, reflect the needs of the times we live in and get elaborated in the message with careful analysis of the context, followed by reflections on working together, with a sense of co-responsibility, to uphold values that promote peace, harmony and integral development of all, paying particular attention to the poor, the weak and the most vulnerable of the society. The messages end with the invitation to draw inspiration and strength from the depository of spiritual wisdom found in the religious traditions of Hindus and Christians so as to contribute one's mite to make the world more humane and a better place to live in. IHU is hopeful that the seeds of encouragement and hope sown by these messages year after year will continue to take roots and spread far and wide, yielding more and more fruits of interfaith harmony, fraternity and solidarity in our 'common home'.

Besides being the festival of lights, Deepavali is also the festival that dispenses grace, which like honey sweetens human lives with ***love, wisdom and awareness***. While *love* arises in the unity of the family, a family as vast as the world family (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*) where one grows by sharing in the joys and sorrows of others, *wisdom* arises from seeking unity in diversity, whereby one considers himself or herself as a drop in the ocean of Divine Consciousness. Finally, *awareness* arises as a light that enlightens the spirit about the **ONE** who in *His* pure will moves the whole world, from the blade of grass to the farthest star ever seen.

May Christians and Hindus continue to engage with one another, enriched by mutual *love, wisdom and awareness*, to spread a luminous hope among the people particularly during these days of fear, anxiety and insecurity due to Covid-19 pandemic!

The 25 years of Deepavali messages from the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue add up to a signal accomplishment that will not be soon forgotten. They mark the indispensable work of reaching out to our religious neighbors - in this case, Hindus everywhere in the world - not just once or twice or with great fanfare, but in a patient and consistent manner over the years, and in a way that offers not just good words, but also promises a deeper and enduring commitment to speak and learn, and to engage and collaborate inter-religiously. The Hindu-Catholic dialogue certainly merits a place in the front rank of efforts at dialogue, since it brings together two of the largest religious traditions on earth. In fact, real differences in history, theology and practice notwithstanding, Hindus and Catholics have much in common, including widely shared beliefs: a single source for the world; divine presence in the world and within us; a sacramental view of reality in this world, as even sense experience speaks to us of God; esteem for the human mind and its inquiries; a mystical instinct for union with a God who is beyond the limitations of every human word and idea.

From Cardinal Arinze's first greetings written in 1995 up to Cardinal Ayuso Guixot's 2020 greetings, the messages have signaled the willingness of the Church to learn from Hindus, even as the messages themselves have been enriched with quotations from Hindu scriptures and insights of wise Hindu teachers. So too, these messages recognize and draw attention to common ground already shared by Hindus and Catholics in the realms of piety and mysticism, moral virtues and a shared sense of respect for life. Deepavali has always been a most fitting day for these messages, since it is the annual festival of light, of family and community, in celebration of universal values shared by people of all faiths.

The Pontifical Council is therefore to be congratulated for faithfully offering these greetings each year. Of course, each greeting is an invitation to further and deeper connection among Catholics and Hindus, and so there is much to do. By the use of the latest social media, the greetings can be disseminated ever more widely, throughout India and also in every country where Hindus and Catholics are neighbors. The Council extends greetings

from Rome, but communities in India and elsewhere must then do what is possible locally to foster shared celebrations of religious holidays, and to work together on matters of shared concern all year round. The theological and philosophical, moral and civic topics raised in the greetings must also be explored in greater depth. And, of course, the dialogue must be realized by deeper reciprocal communication, as Hindu communities find ways to take note of and celebrate with us holy days sacred to the Catholic community.

In the year 1999, the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, issued a call to its members, on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Deepavali (Diwali), to pray for the millions of Hindus who are “lost in the hopeless darkness of Hinduism.” Thousands of booklets were distributed on Diwali calling for the conversion of Hindus. Hindus were described as worshipping a false God and of having no understanding of personal responsibility and sin.

This call from the Southern Baptist Convention, coinciding with the celebration of the largest Hindu annual festival, was perceived by the Hindu community as insulting and disrespectful. The effort to reach Hindus by denigrating their beliefs was thought to be odd and not conducive to dialogue, relationship and mutual respect.

Four years earlier, in 1995, Cardinal Francis Arinze, then President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, issued the first greeting to the Hindu community on the occasion of Deepavali. The tone and content of Cardinal Arinze’s statement stand in significant contrast to the initiative of the South Baptist Convention. It exemplified an understanding of fundamental Hindu teachings and affirmed a shared commitment to values that include non-injury, the common good, and human unity as a single family. Cardinal Arinze offered his greetings to the Hindu community in the context of the threats presented by the degradation of our environment and commended the relevance of Hindu practices that include moderation, austerity, discipline and sacrifice. He lifted up the significance of Hindu reverence for the great natural elements that nurture and sustain our lives (*panchamahabhuta*).

Cardinal Arinze’s historic first greeting to the Hindu community defined the approach that characterizes these greetings over the past 25 years. At the heart of this is (i) the affirmation of shared values between Hindus and Catholics and (ii) the call for cooperation in the face of urgent common challenges. The approach, I believe, promotes mutual understanding, mutual learning and friendship, without overlooking the

uniqueness of our traditions and respecting differences. It offers a direction for the deepening of Hindu-Catholic relationships by continuing the quest for common ground, and urging cooperation for overcoming the causes of human suffering.

Good interreligious relationships do not require that we conceal our core theological commitments and values. These do require trust, openness and mutuality of receiving and giving. Our friendship as Hindus and Catholics is deepened by affirming and reminding ourselves, as these annual greetings do, of our shared values. Our relationship also grows stronger and more meaningful through our common obligation to justice and to the service of the oppressed, and marginalized.

25 years of annual messages to the Hindu community on the occasion of Deepavali a powerful expression of friendship, goodwill and recognition of our shared lives in communities across the world. As a Hindu, I welcome these messages as invitations to continue growing in friendship and I reciprocate with my participation in the dialogue work of the Pontifical Council.

Reviewing the themes of the Diwali messages over past 25 years, I hear a call for Hindus and Catholics to stand together for the dignity and equal worth of human beings. I hear a call to stand together against injustice and the commodification of human life. I hear a call for reverence for our common home, the earth, and for ecological responsibility in our nations, communities and corporations. I hear a call for lives of compassion and joyful self-giving.

I firmly believe that these callings, at the heart of a quarter century of Deepavali greetings, remain even more relevant for us today. In responding together, we can celebrate the gifts of our shared obligations and our differences.

It is indeed commendable that the Church way back in 1964 had found it necessary to set up a department for interreligious relationships and since then has been reaching out to people of other faiths with initiatives of dialogue and collaboration. It is surely a sign that the official church desires to promote fellowship with others in a concrete way, in this instance with the Hindu community the world over.

As is well known, making bridges across religious divides had already been undertaken decades before Vatican Council II opened the doors of the Church to this much needed move. In fact, we have the example of St. Francis of Assisi and his encounter with the Muslim Sultan in Egypt. Even though Francis's move may not be considered a formal inter-faith activity then, yet it exemplifies for us the very qualities that are necessary for initiating good relationships with people of different religious affiliations, namely, deep experience of God, humility and peace. In our own days, well known pioneers from the Christian community like Robert De Nobili, Swami Parama Arubi Ananda (Jules Monchanin), Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux), Swami Dayananda (Bede Griffiths), Raimon Panikkar, Vandana Mataji, Father Ignatius Hridayam, SJ, Sadhu Sadanand, Swami Joseph Samarakone, OMI, Swami Ishwar Prasad, IMS, Father Albert Nambiaparampil, CMI, and others, grounded as they were in a strong faith, have doggedly and humbly pursued this path, convinced that the Spirit is imperceptibly working in our world. These laid the foundations on which we today continue to build in our ministries and relations with our Hindu co-pilgrims. We owe much gratitude, therefore, to our predecessors for their single minded, fearless and mostly solitary efforts towards a new creation in the eschatological sense.

In India, the very existential pluralism poses a challenge to those of us who are more specifically engaged in the inter-faith milieu. We are continually called to display genuine openness in a complex Hindu context. Our inter-religious relationships have awakened us to fearless friendships to further harmony, devoid of any show of superiority on our side. We also

realize that we need to learn more and more from one another since the profound God-consciousness and spiritual exercises in both our traditions certainly offer a path to a deep spiritual experience in the One God whom Jesus witnessed to in his life. Our experience also shows that using contemporary connotations of terminologies found in the '*darshanas*' and other Hindu scriptures has led to fostering harmony and discovering similarities between our faiths since many terms are common in the local languages of India and in the spiritual consciousness of people the world over. A surprising understanding thus ensues, making it easy for a faith-bonding beyond the words. We are convinced that only with openness and in fellowship can we genuinely embrace and strengthen human solidarity. Devoid of a foundational experience of the God of all as a substratum to human bonding which goes beyond the limits of theorizing about the Divine, our interreligious activities will solely be an intellectual pursuit that is sterile, without a soul, lacking the transforming Spirit needed for the vision of a "new heaven and new earth".

Consequently, our approach is humble. In Rishikesh in particular, where some of us are in constant contact with our Hindu friends, our greetings are short, simple, often colourful and affectionate on festivals like Deepavali or Dussehra. We also respond to invitations of celebration on these festive times. We too invite them for common fellowship in our ceremonies and feasts like Christmas, religious commitments, etc. In fact, the main ashrams celebrate the birth of Jesus. We participate in common cultural and social activities for the good of the neighbourhood. Besides, we share in the *satsangs* and spiritual conversations of inspired and holy teachers. We also learn much from the uninhibited exuberance of the pilgrims who undertake hardships with much devotion. Above all, we have the constant reminder in the renounced and disciplined monks and saints whose lives are often dedicated to charitable works without watering down their primary commitment as witnesses to union with God. Besides these, there are those who live in isolation by the rivers and caves in the mountains, who are open to receiving seekers on their spiritual path from all faiths. With these seekers, the monks share their journey and practices for deeper union with the Divine. Their joy and welcome are in themselves testimony to a purity of heart and union with the Divine in all persons. For many of these, Francis of Assisi is the true face of Christ Jesus. It has been my experience that as we listen to one another and share our own experiences of the Divine, we grow

into becoming more and more co-pilgrims and co-sojourners on the earth, giving testimony to our own respective faiths.

May our efforts at reaching out to our brothers and sisters of other faiths be brought to fruitfulness in the Spirit of Jesus, who has asked us to worship the God of all in spirit and in truth!

Swami Chidananda
President, FOWAI FORUM
Solan, Himachal Pradesh, India

Every time I receive the beautiful letter from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), carrying a “Message for the Feast of Deepavali,” I am delighted to go through it, and I say to myself, “This is truly a collector’s item!”

In addition to the warm goodwill that the annual greetings carry, the content always has noble thoughts which address the real, contemporary needs of humanity. The broad spectrum of topics that these messages cover is amazing. From an appeal to keep away from selfish activities - which can be a matter of everybody’s personal ethics -to urge all of us to cultivate ‘ecological virtues’, which have implications for global well-being, these greetings form the basis for a truly responsible living in the holistic sense of the word. Apart from taking us closer to God, the heart of all religions, they help us wake up to our duty towards God’s creation.

As a Hindu spiritual teacher, I am especially impressed by the apt remarks in these messages where the views of my ancient religion and those of vibrant Christianity are shown to be in harmony with each other. “Your tradition stresses the oneness of nature, humanity and the divine,” says, for example, the ‘Message of 2015’ and continues, “The Christian faith teaches that the created world is God’s gift to all human beings.” This way of touching upon certain common ground can surely go a long way in inspiring Hindus and Christians to work together as ‘brothers and sisters,’ and achieve peaceful coexistence wherever they are.

The values expressed in these communications serve as a basis for the resolution of all conflicts between various communities. “We are all God’s creatures,” says the ‘Message of 2018’ and highlights the fact that “we are equal in dignity, with responsibility for one another.” Such views and sentiments go so well with certain teachings in the Geeta, the most popular Hindu scripture. For example, “*He is the best yogi who sees others’ joys and sorrows as his own*” (6.32).

It is really heartening to see in these greetings friendliness and generosity, combined with great ideas that reinforce eternal and universal values. We see right stress being laid upon the importance of families and family values. “Every effort should be made to ensure that no one feels unwanted, unloved, ignored or left out,” says the Message of 2018.

As the examples I have cited above show, many are the valuable observations and inputs that enrich these Messages, which create an elegant framework of spiritual and religious education in this new millennium. I unhesitatingly express praise for the PCID for releasing these precious communications in the ‘Inter-religious Space,’ with some special reference to the Christian-Hindu dialogue. May God shower His blessings upon the team at the Pontifical Council which has so thoughtfully and relentlessly been preparing and sending these messages for the past twenty-five years.

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It is a matter of great joy that the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) is publishing a handy volume containing its *Deepavalli (Diwali)* Messages to Hindu brethren since 1995. The historic practice of sending annual messages which has continued ever since is not merely a goodwill gesture but a concrete proof of the Church's commitment to her "duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among peoples" (*Nostra Aetate* (NA), 1:1) and, of her determination to build up "solidarity and respectful affection for the whole human family to which it belongs" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3:1).

The choice of the festival too deserves appreciation since *Deepavali* is the most popular festival celebrated by all Hindus across and outside India. All the myths behind Deepavali, moreover, point towards "victory of light over darkness, of good over evil," which is most universal and acceptable to all religions and cultures. One can thus note that the PCID made a *prudent* choice of this festival to enter into dialogue with Hindu brethren, bearing in mind the mandate of the Second Vatican Council: "The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into dialogue ... while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture" (NA 2:3a).

A further point of accreditation is that these Messages aimed 'to reflect what peoples have in common and to promote fellowship among them' (NA 1:1). So, every year, on receipt of the Message we would translate it into Tamil, and with a covering letter by our Archbishop of Madurai, circulate it to all the important persons, organizations, schools and colleges in and around the city. Often, we incorporated these Messages in our interreligious celebrations focussing on formation of young people by making them aware of the basic teachings of Hinduism pertinent to the Festival and also of their parallels in Christian scriptures.

Having served as the Head of the Department of Interreligious Relations at Madurai Kamaraj University and, as Secretary of the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue, Archdiocese of Madurai, for nearly a decade and a half, I can vouch for the fact that the Messages helped us nurture and strengthen mutual relationships of friendship and fraternity between Christians and our Hindu brethren, since these Messages were not just formal wishes rather they all contained rich reflections on common themes, concerns and problems. For instance, in the maiden Message of 1995, the noble goals of life such as *Vasudevakudumpakam*, *Lokasangraha* and *Ahimsa* were brought out along with their corresponding Christian ideals such as universal brotherhood, nonviolence and human family, respectively. It also pointed out that failure to recognize them has resulted in many negative consequences such as energy crisis, environmental disasters, and dangerous trends of modernity like hedonism and consumerism. In 1996's message, the theme of Tolerance was taken for reflection, which drew on notions from Hindu holy texts such as *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads*, so also from the New Testament.

Like this, every year's Message contributes to a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's religious tradition and the many spiritual and ethical values of life present in them. I am confident that a single volume with all these Messages will not only shed light on the unitary focus, namely, 'victory of light over darkness and of good over evil' but also put in evidence its various facets having universal relevance and application. I am also hopeful that this volume will certainly serve as a powerful beacon to guide the posterity to walk in the path of dialogue, inspiring them to take concrete actions, individually and together, and joining hands with others for the good of humanity. Above all else, I fondly hope that this book will be made available in most vernaculars and languages so as to ensure its wide and wise use wherever Hindu and Christian brethren co-live.

With hearty congratulations on completing a quarter century of "cherished" tradition, I remain.

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Deepavali is the festival of lights. Light is the symbol of knowledge that dispels ignorance. It is also the symbol of divinity that is enshrined in our hearts. When that light is experienced, it transforms a human being into a harmonious being. That harmony is reflected into day-to-day behavior and arouses the idea of fellow-feeling. It gives a new perspective to inter-religious and inter-cultural relations by nurturing brotherhood in today's world which is divided into individual and social identities with the wrong notion of superiority over the 'other religion' or 'other culture.' The true meaning of "Love thy neighbor..." (Holy Bible, Mathew 22:39) is not limited to my neighbor who is from my own religion or who belongs to the culture I belong to, or the nationality I possess. Love has no boundaries. This universal vision sees no 'other'. It embraces in its fold all beings without discriminating on the basis of color, gender, religion, culture, nationality etc.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) has widened the horizon of love through the benign and genuine gesture of sending message on celebration of Deepavali every year. This act of love has boosted the spirit of fraternity by sharing the joy of others and by dispelling the ignorance of false notion of 'mine' and replacing it with 'ours' to make dialogue among followers of different religions fruitful.

Deepavali, the festival of lights is also for a fervent prayer to Goddess of Wealth, Lakshmi, whose grace brings happiness and prosperity in life. She bestows wealth on devotees. What is this wealth meant for? The *Atharvaveda* tells us, "Earn with hundred hands and distribute with thousand hands" (3.24.5). The excessive wealth earned to satisfy insatiable greed brings peril. Earned righteously and shared for the progress of human society, it infuses light in the life of those who are bereft of basic needs - food, clothing and education. It is not an ordinary light. It illumines innumerable lives and hearts.

Thus, Deepavali is imbibing of values of sharing what one has with others, especially the needy, and of dispelling the darkness of divisions. It

removes barriers that divide and builds bridges as light has no barriers; it spreads everywhere. The initiative of the PCID is 'Dialogue in Action' that seeks to promote unity in diversity. Among many gifts we get from our near and dear ones, the message we receive from the PCID is a precious one as it gives us a sense of unity.

Deepavali Messages
1995-2020

Dear Hindu Friends,

Peace and blessings to you all!

I am happy to greet you on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican, as you celebrate Deepavali (Diwali), the feast commemorating the victory of light over darkness, of good over evil. I think particularly of the Hindu dharma whose “rishis have contemplated the divine mystery and expressed it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry” (Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, 2).

Today I want to share in your joy and reflect on some of the teachings of Hinduism which also find an echo in the Christian Gospel. I think particularly of those concerning *ahimsa* (non-violence), *lokasamgraha* (universal brotherhood) and *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (human family). Hindu dharma has always upheld the interconnectedness between all beings and taught that the whole universe, with all *pranimatre* (living beings) in it, is a single family.

Ignorance of the teachings of our respective religions such as these and inattention to their injunctions have led our world to certain negative consequences: the gradual destruction of the ozone layer, air and water pollution, the poisoning of the earth, excessive deforestation, the possible disappearance of some plant and animal species. Our world runs the risk of seeing some of its natural resources depleted. The danger caused by industrial and nuclear waste should also be mentioned. Some people have begun to speak of an ecological crisis and of environmental insecurity. Such an ecological crisis is also a problem of a moral kind.

In the face of such a situation, one cannot remain passive. Believers of all religions and all people of good will have to show concern. Hedonism and the excessive urge to consume have negative effects on our way of life. Far from remaining indifferent, in the course of thousands of years, the Hindu dharma has, time and again, emphasized the practice of austerity, moderation, discipline and the spirit of sacrifice. Christianity also inculcates these virtues.

The safeguard of the environment and natural resources concerns the entire human community: individuals, associations, States, international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. Could we not work together for the good of future generations, so as to respect what the Hindu dharma calls *panchamahabhuta* (fundamental elements of life), i.e. the earth, the air, the water etc.? Would it not be appropriate or even necessary to arouse the awareness of the public and especially of political leaders? Education in ecological responsibility and respect for life, in the family, at school, by the media would be a precious aid to the youth of all religions, by bringing them matter for thought and motives for action at the same time as developing their ecological awareness. A new solidarity would likewise foster peace between nations, for many ethical values linked to respect for the environment are of great importance for the development of a peaceful and harmonious society.

Dear Hindu Friends, these are the thoughts some of which I have shared with Muslim and Buddhists on similar occasions and would also like to share with you. With my warmest greetings for the feast of Diwali, I wish you joy and prosperity. May God bless you all.

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

Dear Hindu Friends,

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I wish to participate in your joy as you celebrate this year the feast of Diwali. Religious feasts, such as Diwali, are also opportunities for us to draw closer as people belonging to different religious traditions; they are providential occasions to reflect together in the light of and in fidelity to our respective religious beliefs. This year, for our common reflection and mutual enrichment, I would like to suggest to you the theme of *tolerance* which both Hindu and Christian traditions value dearly.

Hindu sages have often communicated to the generations of Hindus the need to be tolerant. In the book of *Mahabharata* it is said, "This is the sum of duty; do not do to others what would cause you pain if done to you" (5, 15, 17). The *Pranagnih Upanishad* asks, "Non-violence be all the offerings" (46). The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches, "Let a man feel hatred for no contingent being, let him be friendly, compassionate" (XII, 13).

As a Christian, faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, I am reminded of His injunction in the Gospel: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5, 44). His Apostle, Saint Paul, also admonishes: "Bless those who persecute you; never curse them, bless them...Resist evil and conquer it with good" (Romans, 12:14, 21).

But the pluralistic society in which we live demands more than mere tolerance. Tolerance is usually thought of as putting up with the other, or at best as a code of polite conduct. Yet this resigned, lukewarm attitude does not create the right atmosphere for true harmonious coexistence.

The spirit of our religious traditions challenges us to go beyond this. We are commanded in fact **to love our neighbour as ourselves**. Such love implies recognition and respect for others, with their differences. On the occasion of the 50th General Assembly of the United Nations, Pope John Paul II, in his address, called attention to this respect for differences: "The fact of *difference* and the reality of *the other*, can sometimes be felt as

a burden, or even as a threat. Amplified by historic grievances and exacerbated by the manipulations of the unscrupulous, the fear of **difference** can lead to a denial of the very humanity of **the other**: with the result that people fall into a cycle of violence in which no one is spared, not even the children". In the Hindu tradition it is, I believe, the concept of "non-violence" (**Ahimsa**) which suggests this respect for differences. It requires great courage to practise non-violence, i.e. respect for life. For Christians, the command of Jesus **to love one's neighbour as oneself** is both demanding and rewarding.

In our world torn apart by violence and hatred let us collaborate to create a society built on the **civilization of love**. The words of Pope John Paul II can serve as an encouragement in this regard. This is what he says, "... only in mutual acceptance of the other and in the resulting mutual respect, made more profound by love, resides the secret of a humanity finally reconciled...we wish to oppose the wars and conflicts, with humility but also with vigour, with the demonstration of our harmony that respects the identity of each one" (Prayer Vigil for Peace in Assisi, 9 January 1993).

Once again I wish you, my Hindu friends, a Happy Feast of *Diwali*.

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

Christians and Hindus: Communities of Forgiveness and Compassion

It gives me great pleasure, as President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, to present to you once again my heartfelt greetings on the occasion of *Deepavali*, the feast which glorifies and celebrates God through the symbol of light.

This feast offers an opportunity for Christians to visit their Hindu neighbours and friends to exchange greetings, and this helps to strengthen bonds of friendship that already exist and to create new ones. This annual message thus becomes like a bridge between Hindus and Christians which is constantly being built and consolidated. I thank God for this and pray, on my part, that the relations between Christians and Hindus may continue to grow stronger.

In three years' time, people all over the world will be celebrating the coming of the new millennium. For Christians, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will commemorate the Birth of Jesus Christ. For us, as Pope John Paul II has said, "this time of expectation is a time of reflection, inviting us to make an assessment, as it were, of mankind's journey in the sight of God, the Lord of history". Echoing this call of His Holiness, I would like to invite Hindus and Christians to set out together on a true *pilgrimage of peace*. Starting from the concrete situation in which we find ourselves, let us *seek peace along the paths of forgiveness* by drawing upon the genuine patrimony of our religious traditions.

Time and again, the *Vedas* remind us of the words of the ancient *rishis* who were inspired by the logic of non-violence, compassion and love. The *Atharva Veda* admonish, "*Never may brother hate brother or sister hurt sister*" (III, 30, 3) In another place, they implore, "*...if we have offended mother or father...from that may (God) absolve us*" (VI, 120, 1). The *Rig Veda* teaches, "*United your resolve, united your hearts, may your spirits be at one that you may long together dwell in unity and concord*" (X, 191, 4).

Amidst the situations in our world marked by revenge, violent hatred and destructive wars, we need to encourage people to ask and grant forgiveness

because it is by its nature liberating. “Forgiveness, in its truest and highest form, is a free act of love. But precisely because it is an act of love, it has its own intrinsic demands: the first of which is *respect for the truth*...Where lies and falsehood are sown, there suspicion and division flourish...Another essential requisite for forgiveness and reconciliation is justice...There is no contradiction between forgiveness and justice. *Forgiveness neither eliminates nor lessens the need for the reparation* which justice requires, but seeks to integrate individuals and groups into society, and States into the community of Nations” (Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 1997). Could we who belong to the Hindu and Christian communities not meet more often in order to remind our respective members of the important contribution all are called to make to world peace by becoming people of compassion and forgiveness?

While extending to you, on behalf of the Catholics in the world, cordial wishes of peace and joy, I renew the expression of my friendship.

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

Christians and Hindus: Together in Hope

Dear Hindu Friends,

Once again it is *Diwali*, the Hindu feast which is eagerly awaited by young and old, small and great, rich and poor alike. As President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I wish to express to you on this happy occasion the best wishes of Catholics throughout the world.

Improvements in friendly relations between Hindus and Christians, particularly in India, encourage us to pursue our dialogue in order that we continue to grow in respect for each other's religious traditions. Mutual visits and dialogue on common issues and on the challenges which our world faces as it stands on the threshold of the new millennium can help Christians and Hindus come to a greater realization of their shared responsibilities.

Dramatic crises are not lacking in the world of today: armed conflict between different countries, civil wars, acts of terrorism, injustice which is all the time widening the gap between rich and poor, hunger, the lack of shelter, unemployment especially among young people, globalization without solidarity, the heavy burden of external debt, the problem of drugs, immorality, abortion. The list could be extended. Despite these difficult situations, the lamp of hope must always remain alight, indicating the path to a better future.

Both our religious traditions allude to the theme of hope in our sacred books. We, Christians believe that "...sufferings bring patience, as we know, and patience brings perseverance, and perseverance brings hope, and this hope is not deceptive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (*Letter to Romans*, 5:4-6). In your tradition the *Rig Veda* sings: "God ever true, we faint with despair. Source of all treasure, grant us hope of blessings to come. Subdue the malevolent spirits that haunt, the kindly awaken. Grant to us hope of blessings to come" (I, 1-2; 4).

Hope rescues us from discouragement. It enables us to begin anew by perceiving around us numerous "signs of hope": growing solidarity among

people in our time, especially with the poor and destitute; greater desire for justice and peace; voluntary service; the return of the search for transcendence; greater awareness of human dignity and of the rights which flow from it; attention to the environment; etc. I wish to mention here a particular sign of hope which His Holiness Pope John Paul II has underlined in today's context, namely interreligious dialogue.

We, Christians and Hindus, each on our respective spiritual paths, can work together to give increased hope to humanity. Yet, first we must accept our differences and show each other mutual respect and true love. This will render us more credible as a clear sign of hope for the human family.

It is in this spirit that I convey to you once again, dear Hindu friends throughout the world, my best wishes for the feast of *Diwali*.

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

Christians and Hindus: Pilgrims in Dialogue for the Good of All

Dear Hindu Friends,

As you celebrate the religious festival of *Diwali*, which symbolically suggests the victory of truth over untruth, light over darkness, life over death, good over evil, peace over conflict, I wish all of you abundant divine blessings and happiness throughout the new year which you begin according to your tradition. The popular Hindu festival of *Diwali* offers people from different religious traditions a joyful occasion to come together in a spirit of friendship and collaboration to reflect on the common origin and destiny shared by all, and to engage in constructive dialogue in order to address the many religious and social questions now facing the world.

The Hindu tradition strives to answer the restless searchings of the human heart by proposing ways which include teachings, rules of life, and sacred ceremonies. This ancient religious tradition often recognizes a Supreme Divinity to whom are attributed qualities characteristics of fatherhood.

The Christian faith also is essentially built on fundamental openness to the Transcendent. The mystery of Jesus Christ reveals fully *the religious nature of the human person*. The Christian faith presents Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of the human heart's restless searching: "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:18). In the person of Jesus Christ, God is revealed to humanity. "Jesus does not in fact merely speak 'in the name of God' like the Prophets, but he is God himself speaking in his Eternal Word made flesh" (Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 6). This is why Christians throughout the world will soon be celebrating the Year 2000 as the *Yesu Christa Jayanti*. This occasion is a suitable moment to reflect together on the human family's common pilgrimage and to seek ways of ensuring a future of peace and solidarity among all people.

Drawing on the spiritual themes we have in common and opening our hearts to the divine reality beyond us, our collaboration can do much to alleviate suffering in our world. For example, theme of *agape* or *caritas*

(unselfish love) in the Christian tradition can have certain points of correspondence with the theme of *Dâna* (self-gift) in the Hindu tradition, since both stress “self-giving” and “compassionate love” for the good of others who are always our brothers and sisters.

Our world can boast great achievements, but it is also marked by many painful and alarming conditions which are often the result of human selfishness and greed. We, Christians and Hindus, meeting in a spirit of friendly, sincere and respectful dialogue, which recognizes the profound differences existing between us but sees also how much we hold in common, must seek to respond to the great challenges now facing humanity. It is necessary to become more and more aware of our shared responsibilities in this world, so that together we may embark upon the new Millennium in a way that provides greater hope for the coming generations.

May Diwali this year be an anticipation of what God wants the history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which God himself puts before us. Wishing you, my dear Hindu friends, an abundance of divine blessings, I renew the assurance of my friendship and esteem.

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

Christians and Hindus: In Mutual Respect, Esteem and Friendship

Dear Hindu Friends,

I am pleased to offer my cordial greetings to all of you on the occasion of the joyful feast of *Diwali*. Children, young adults or older persons, you all await with great longing for this feast because every year, like fresh air, it restores your religious vigour and enhances in you a renewed purpose to continue on the path which is prescribed by your religious tradition. I believe that such feasts are not purely social events but are, so to speak, meaningful junctures in the life of human beings who are essentially religious by nature. Feasts, such as *Diwali*, are therefore particularly a time to reflect on the deeper and ultimate purpose of our life.

According to our calendar, which is also widely followed in the world, this year is an important one for us Christians, as we commemorate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Many celebrations are being held throughout the world, but especially in Rome and in the land where Jesus was born, and where he taught, suffered, died and rose again. In the celebration of this event, people who do not share the same faith in Jesus Christ are not forgotten. Indeed the Catholic Church lays special emphasis on deepening friendship between Christians and people of other religious traditions. We are convinced that together we can achieve much for the good of the world. We see, for example, that our two religious traditions, Hindu and Christian, each according to its distinctive teachings, give the mystery of God the highest place in human life.

Referring to the Ultimate Truth, the *Sanatana Dharma* states: "Permanent among the impermanent, Conscious among the conscious, the One among the many...the surveyor of all actions, dwelling in all creatures, the witness...the unique, free from all attributes; Eye cannot see him, nor words reveal him...he is utter fullness" (cf. *Katha Upanishad*, V, 13; *Svet. Upanishad*, VI, 11; *Mund. Upanishad* III, 1, 8; *Brihad. Upanishad* V, 1, 10).

Christians believe that Jesus Christ reveals the fullness of God's mystery: He is "the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace...grace

and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (*John* 1:14-18). Jesus taught love of neighbour and showed compassion, particularly for the poor. He called for a spirit of forgiveness and forgave those who were putting him to death. He showed himself to be the Redeemer, liberating those who are in the bonds of ignorance and sin. Is not Jesus thus a model and permanent message for humanity?

It is my sincere wish and prayer that we Hindus and Christians, through our mutual respect, esteem and friendship, may become concrete examples and a proof of harmony and peace for many others throughout India and beyond. May the world around us, particularly the world of the oppressed, the marginalized, the forgotten ones and the innocent victims of injustice, feel the warmth of our growing friendship. May both Christians and Hindus continue to grow in mutual respect and understanding and be enriched together in order that they may contribute to building peace and harmony in our world. A spirit of openness and dialogue has been characteristic of both our respective traditions. While acknowledging the fundamental differences in our two religions, if nevertheless we show each other respect, this will help not only for our own mutual enrichment but will serve as an example and an encouragement to the religious world at large.

It is Pope John Paul II who, during his last journey to India, reminded us once again that the "Catholic Church wants to enter ever more deeply into dialogue with the religions of the world. She sees 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" (*Second Letter of St. John*, 4:16, 19-20) [*Meeting at Vigyan Bhavan with Representatives of Other Religions and Christian Confessions*, 7 November 1999).

It is in this spirit that I renew my greetings and send best wishes for a life of peace and serenity.

Happy *Diwali*!

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

**Hindus and Christians: Educating their respective communities
to dialogue**

Dear Hindu Friends,

As you celebrate the Feast of Diwali, I send greetings and good wishes in my own name and on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. May your celebration bring you much joy and happiness.

Mutual respect and esteem for our respective religious traditions lead to a greater awareness of our responsibility to cooperate in promoting social peace and harmony. War and violence waged in the name of religion are contrary to the true spirit of religion and can endanger its very existence. Education for dialogue, greater communication and practical cooperation will contribute to overcoming the causes of violence and to promoting a spirit of mutual understanding and respect. I propose that we intensify our efforts to foster relations and promote dialogue between our communities.

This proposal echoes that of the representatives of various religious traditions at the Interreligious Assembly held in the Vatican in 1999: "Education is a key for promoting interreligious harmony, religious freedom and respect for people of different religious traditions...Above all, education is committed to seeking truth, justice, peace and reconciliation. A very practical programme, which already exists in various places, is the joint examination of textbooks, not only of religion, but also-and perhaps especially-of history. The lamentable ignorance and misinformation with which we sometimes bring up our children concerning other people's religious traditions need to be rectified. We must strive to present all religious traditions in an objective manner so that individuals belonging to these traditions can recognize themselves in that representation" (*Final Report*, 28 October 1999).

Education and training in promoting better relations between the followers of religions is an urgent priority. Growing awareness of religious pluralism should not lead to indifference. Dialogue, while respecting the religious traditions of others, requires us to be firmly rooted in our own

religious tradition and to acknowledge the objective differences between religions. Each religious community should devise its own approach to educating its followers in a spirit of dialogue, and indicate how they believe an attitude of dialogue could be best fostered in our respective communities. Furthermore, dialogue should be complemented by joint efforts to uphold the family, form the consciences of the young, defend fundamental moral and spiritual truths and values, increase the awareness of the need for a deeper spiritual life and promote exchange of accurate information about each other's beliefs and practices.

Together, let us look forward to the future with hope that it will bring lasting peace for all.

Happy *Diwali*!

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

Christians and Hindus: Committed to Promote Human Life

Dear Hindu Friends,

Once again it is time for you to light tiny lamps, hang colourful lanterns on your homes, offer prayers to God, with friends and neighbours and celebrate around the family table the joy which the festival of *Diwali* brings. I wish to extend my heartfelt greetings to all Hindus on this happy occasion. May the external joy which will be manifest throughout the Hindu world be an expression of a genuine religious sense, the fruit of genuine religious beliefs and convictions.

It has become customary for me to invite friends of different religious traditions, on the occasion of their respective feasts, to joint reflection on various aspects of our life, in society and in the world at large. This year, on the occasion of *Diwali*, I should like to ask whether religious festivals, in the first place, are not also expression of the desire of human beings to conquer over darkness by light, evil by good, untruth by truth and death by life? The mystery of life, from the moment of conception onwards, through the stages after the birth of a child, is attended by prayers and ritual actions in the Hindu tradition. We, Christians attribute particular value to human life because the Bible teaches us that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God. This gift of God is sealed by Christ's blood which he shed out of his love for every human being. Thus, every individual is precious in the eyes of God.

Technology has made great progress in our days. Life has become safer, easier and longer. But what answers can we give to the following questions: Has technology helped better the quality of human life? Does technology help us to value human life? With the progress of technology life paradoxically seems to be more threatened than ever. Pope John Paul II observes that "In addition to the ancient scourges of poverty, hunger, endemic diseases, violence and war, new threats are emerging on an alarmingly vast scale" (*Evangelium Vitae, On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life*, 3). The Pope continues: "with new prospects opened up by scientific and technological progress, there arise new forms of attacks

on the dignity of the human being” (ibid.4). Modern genetic science has become a tool in the hands of man. He can use it or abuse it. Tempted at times to become a manipulator of life, or even an agent of death, man needs to rediscover his fundamental place in creation, namely, that he is created by God and that God is the sole Creator of all that exists.

Representatives of different religions gathered in Assisi last January to pray for world peace. The Hindu participant, in her testimony, described the meeting as a sign of the unity of the human family under the Fatherhood of God (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*). Although the participants belonged to different religious traditions, they made a common commitment in favour of promoting each single life and the whole of life. We could do well to focus our attention on the second commitment, which declared: “We commit ourselves to educating peoples to mutual respect and esteem, in order to help bring about a peaceful and fraternal coexistence between individuals and among peoples...”. Through our respective communities and institutions we could devise our own approach to educating people to promote respect for life. Here I would like to make special mention of young people, whose hearts are scandalized by and suffer from the tragic events they see with their own eyes. Education, particularly of youth, in respect for life should be one of our urgent priorities, so that strong ethical convictions and a culture of life may prevail among them. Only to the degree that ethical and religious considerations will prevail in the whole of society, can we hope that the principle of respect for life will be enshrined in society’s attitudes and laws.

Dear Hindu friends, I would like to conclude my sharing with you the strong impression which the image of lighted lamps made on me during the Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi last January. The representatives of different religions held lighted lamps in their hands and after their common commitment, they placed the lamps on a common stand, symbolizing the convergence of hopes and efforts for peace. The Pope blessed them, saying, “Go forward into the future holding high the lamp of peace. The world has need of light!”.

Happy *Diwali*!

Cardinal Francis Arinze
President

Hindus and Christians: In Promotion of Human Dignity

Dear Hindu Friends,

This year again, I am pleased to greet you and share with you a short message on the occasion of *Diwali*, the feast which you celebrate according to your venerable religious tradition. I know that among many Hindu festivals which are celebrated by you throughout the year, this one in particular, has a special place and deep relevance for you and your families. *Diwali* is a time for families to get together, and celebrate in a meaningful way the rites prescribed by the ancient *dharmā*. To all these families and to every one of you, I offer my very best wishes.

Religious feasts invite us not only to renew and strengthen our belief in God, the Supreme Good of every human being, and to revitalize our relationships with one another, but they also invite us to rediscover, respectfully reaffirm and bravely defend our own dignity and that of every person as human beings created by God. I have always been impressed by the fact that on the occasion of *Diwali*, there are some Hindus who make every effort to bring about reconciliation within families and between neighbours, friends and acquaintances. Could not Catholics and Hindus extend these efforts to bring about wider reconciliation and a more lasting peace in our towns and villages and indeed throughout our countries and the world at large?

‘Love for God and love for neighbour’ lies at the heart of the Christian faith. As a religious leader, I would lose credibility were I to allow this fundamental truth to be obscured. Do not your various Hindu traditions (*sampradaya*) eloquently speak not only of God’s love for us and our love for God but also of the love that human beings must have for one another? The dignity of every person derives from God, the Creator of all, and to promote, protect and defend this dignity forms an integral part of every believer’s life. The occasion of the festival of *Diwali* provides us with ample food for thought when the Hindu tradition informs us of how light overcomes darkness, how the victory of good is achieved over evil and how hatred gives way to love through forgiveness.

What can we, Christians and Hindus, do together to promote and protect the dignity of every human person? Does not an offence against even one person, when done in the name of religion, mean that an entire religious tradition is abused? Neither the Hindu *dharma* nor the Christian faith teaches hate, contempt or disrespect for others. Hatred or disrespect on the part of religious believers only brings discredit on religion and its role in society. But the more we commit ourselves to promote the dignity of every human person, the more our religious traditions will become credible in the eyes of others.

Your suggestions on how to accomplish this would be most welcome. They could be given directly to this Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the office of His Holiness, the Pope for relations with people of different religious traditions, or to the leaders and members of the Catholic Church in your area. Let us come together and share our common concerns, making an effort to listen to one another attentively. Let us speak honestly, aware of our own responsibility with regard to the choices that have to be made to resolve current problems in the world today.

Dear Hindu friends, may you, your families, friends and even the strangers in your midst experience joy, peace, serenity, and light on the feast of *Diwali*, as symbolized by the innumerable flames, the *Deepavali*.

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald
President

**Collaboration between Hindus
and Christians with Special Regard to Children**

Dear Hindu Friends,

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, is one of the oldest and most important feasts which you celebrate in your religious tradition. During these festive days, you recall the victory of good over evil. This is symbolized when your homes are lit up by lamps to chase away the darkness of the night. Renewed hope can be seen on many faces; there are signs of great joy in the hearts of many Hindus; and in those who have been weighed down by the pre-occupations and worries of daily life, there is a renewed determination to begin afresh. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, entrusted by His Holiness Pope John Paul II with the task of promoting harmonious and friendly relations with people of all religions, I wish you happy *Diwali*.

In all religions, the ones who particularly long to see feast days arrive are the little children. Their enthusiasm for taking part in the celebration of a fest is truly striking. It is they who bring boundless joy to the celebration because they enliven the spirit of the adults. Children bring shape and colour, taste and flavour, inspiration and aspiration, hope and promise of perseverance to the celebration. Indeed, no celebration truly deserves this name unless a central place is given to children, the more so since the festive spirit requires everyone to acquire a childlike heart. Is this not true also of the festival of *Diwali*?

During this year's celebration of Diwali, my thoughts turn to children, for whom Jesus had a particular love because of "their simplicity, their joy of life, their spontaneity, and their faith filled with wonder", as the Holy Father reminds us (*Angelus Message*, 18 December 1994). One day when his disciples were discussing who was the greatest, Jesus called to himself a child and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me; but whoever causes,

one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (*Gospel of Matthew*, 18:3-6).

You will agree with me, in recognizing that one of the purposes of religious feasts is to make us better human persons. During this season of *Diwali*, as you strive to overcome darkness through light, evil through goodness and hatred through love; I would like to propose to you, as one of your Christian friends, that we focus our attention on the evils in our society that afflict children: forced labour, forced conscription, breakdown of the family, trafficking in organs and persons, sexual abuse, forced prostitution, AIDS, the sale and use of drugs, etc. What have children done to merit such suffering? Could not the dialogue between Hindus and Christians take concrete form by working together in support of underprivileged children, who are often the innocent victims of war and violence, inadequate food and water, forced immigration and the many forms of injustice present in today's world? I am fully aware that such cooperation between the followers of our two religious traditions already exists, but we could and should do more, as the problem is serious, indeed it is tragic. Your suggestions as to what could be done to give children their rightful place in society would be most welcome. Our children are our future; they are the future of humanity.

Dear Hindu friends, the celebration of *Diwali* is inconceivable for you without the joy brought to it by children. Could you not give added meaning to this year's *Diwali* by highlighting the plight of children, in your own neighbourhood, in your town, in society in general and, more broadly, throughout the whole world? Imagining myself surrounded by these children, I wish you again: Happy *Deepavali*!

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald
President

Hindus and Christians in Solidarity

Dear Hindu Friends,

As you celebrate *Diwali* again this year, I wish every one of you much joy and happiness. May this holiday season bring you refreshment in mind and body and renew you in spirit to continue meeting the difficulties of daily life with courage and hope.

It is only natural for us to hope that the joyful character of religious celebrations may extend to every moment of our existence. Yet we know that, unfortunately, life is not like this. We experience it as a mixture of joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, wellbeing and sickness, comfort and grief. Religious feasts, recalling to us the spiritual dimension of life and the search for true meaning, provide us with an opportunity to reflect on the significance of tragic events in our own lives or in those of people around us. This reflection is inspired by the occurrence of “tsunami”, the “killing waves” caused by the earthquake in the Indian Ocean at the end of last year. The forces of nature wrecked great havoc, many lives were lost, countless homes were destroyed, sources of livelihood ruined and families, including many children, were left destitute.

Many of you who are receiving this message may, like myself, not have been personally affected by the “tsunami”. We have learnt about the suffering of the victims at second hand. We have nevertheless wanted to express our sympathy and show our solidarity. And we have been able to do this together. Through the bonds of friendship forged by dialogue over the years, we, Christians, have come to discover that you, as Hindus, are greatly concerned about those who are suffering. For your part, you may have come to realize that the Christian faith teaches that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and is thus deserving of attention and concern. In this context, I should like to quote from *Nos-tra Aetate*, the declaration of the Second Vatican Council on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions. This document, whose fortieth anniversary we are celebrating this year, states: “We cannot in truthfulness call upon God the Father of all if we refuse to act in a brotherly way

toward certain men, created though they be to God's image. A man's relationship with God the Father and his relationship with his brother men are so linked together that Scripture says: 'He who does not love does not know God' (1 John 4:8)" (NA 5).

In places affected by the "tsunami", solidarity across religious boundaries has helped to bring hope to many of the victims. Teams of relief workers belonging to different religious traditions have been tireless in working to alleviate immediate suffering and to initiate reconstruction. At a time when aggressive secularism would seem to be on the increase and respect for basic human values often appears to be on the decline, such cooperation among people of different religions can bring about a new respect for religion in today's world.

Dear Hindu friends, let us continue to collaborate in finding solutions to the problems we face, whether they be small or great, whether local or international. *Diwali* celebrates light, goodness, reconciliation, peace, harmony and happiness. I wish you all a very happy feast.

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald
President

Overcoming hatred with love

Dear Hindu Friends,

As people seeking for the Absolute, you will pause for a short while on your spiritual journey and celebrate joyfully *Deepavali*, your ancient religious feast, which for you signifies the victory of truth over untruth, light over darkness, good over evil and life over death. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I wish Hindus all over the world, a happy feast of *Diwali*.

The reality of love is closely connected to truth, light, goodness and life. I would like to reflect on this theme of love, through which believers of different religions are invited to overcome the evil of hatred and distrust in contemporary society. The recent terrorist bomb attacks in Mumbai, India, are yet another example of these phenomena which so often end in brutal violence. I am sure that, enriched in the light of our particular religious traditions, our resolve to invite all believers to overcome hatred by love will benefit society at large. My own reflection is inspired by the first Encyclical letter of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est (God is Love)*. The Pope wrote this letter, convinced that his message is both timely and significant “in a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence” (no.1)

The importance and demands of love can be best learned from God who, the Christian faith professes, is Himself Love, and whose eternal Son, for love of us, became incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ. God is the source and fullness of all love. Our love for one another becomes worthy of its name only when it has its source in God and is nourished by our union with the same God. Blessed (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta, for example, constantly renewed her love of neighbour and her selfless service to the poor in her encounter with God in incessant daily prayer.

God loves us all without exception and his love is unconditional. Our human response to God’s love must be spelt out in concrete stewardship of God’s creatures, especially to human beings. It is urgent and necessary that

believers of different religions manifest jointly to the world that hatred can be overcome by love. In today's complex societies, is it not possible for us to join hands and collaborate in seeking justice for all, working together on common projects, for the development of the downtrodden, the marginalized, the destitute, the orphan and the weak? "Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual" (*Deus caritas est*, no.30). Moral and spiritual poverty, which are caused by breeding hatred in one's heart, can be eradicated by believers who are filled with love and compassion. Love creates trust, which in turn, promotes genuine relationships among believers of different religions.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI ends his letter, *Deus caritas est*, with the following words: "Love is the light-and in the end, the only light-that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working" (no.39). The Pope's words obviously refer to Jesus Christ who is the Light of the world. However, these words can also draw your attention since for you the meaning of your feast, *Diwali*, is symbolized by light. May our love finally overcome the darkness of hatred in the world!

Happy *Diwali* to you, my dear Hindu friends!

Cardinal Paul Poupard
President

Christians and Hindus: Determined to walk the path of Dialogue

Dear Hindu Friends,

As *Diwali* approaches, your religious feast, I am sure all of you in your respective families, neighbourhoods and communities will be taking time to share your joy with one another. On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I am happy to have this opportunity, for the first time since taking office, to send you my greetings. Sensitive to your religious feelings and respectful of your ancient religious tradition, I sincerely hope that your search for the Divine, symbolized through the celebration of *Diwali*, will help you to overcome darkness with light, untruth with truth and evil with goodness.

The world around us is yearning for peace. Religions promise peace because they trace their origin to God who, according to Christian belief, is our peace. Can we, as believers of different religious traditions, not work together to receive God's gift of peace and to spread it around us so that the world becomes for all people a better place to live? Our respective communities must pay urgent attention to the education of believers, who can so easily be misled by deceitful and false propaganda.

Belief and freedom always go together. There can be no coercion in religion: no one can be forced to believe, neither can anyone who wishes to believe be prevented from doing so. Allow me to reiterate the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which is quite clear on this point: "It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man's response to God in faith must be free. Therefore, no one is to be forced to embrace the faith against his own will" (Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 10). The Catholic Church has been faithful to this teaching as Pope Benedict XVI reminded recently to the Ambassadors of India and other countries to the Holy See: "...Peace is rooted in respect for religious freedom, which is fundamental and primordial aspect of the freedom of conscience of individuals and of the freedom of peoples" (18 May 2006). Forming believers first of all to discover the full dimensions and depth of their own religion, and then encouraging them to know other believers as well constitutes an important

challenge for religious communities committed to building world peace. Let us not forget that ignorance is the first and, perhaps, the principal enemy in the life of believers, while the combined contribution of every enlightened believer provides a rich resource for lasting peace.

Like all human relationships, those between people of different religions need to be nourished by regular meetings, patient listening, collaborative action, and above all, by an attitude of mutual respect. Accordingly, we must work to build bonds of friendship, as indeed must the adherents of all religions. "Friendship is nourished by contacts, by a sharing in the joy and sadness of different situations, by solidarity and mutual assistance" (Pope John Paul II, *Message to the participants of the International Convention "Matteo Ricci: for a dialogue between China and the West"*, 24 October 2001, 6). In situations of misunderstanding, people need to come together and communicate with one another, in order to clarify, in a fraternal and friendly spirit, their respective beliefs, aspirations and convictions. Only through dialogue, avoiding all forms of prejudice and stereo-typed ideas about others and by faithful witness to our religious precepts and teaching, can we truly overcome conflicts. Dialogue between followers of different religions is the necessary path today; indeed it is the only appropriate path for us as believers. Together in collaboration, we can do much to build a society of harmony and a world of peace.

Dear Hindu friends, the hand I warmly extend to greet you on the occasion of your feast is also a gesture of willingness on the part of the Catholic Church to meet and collaborate with you, your families, your community leaders and all followers of the *Sanatana dharma*, in order to promote harmony in society and peace in the world. Once again, I wish each one of you a happy *Diwali*.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Together in favour of Non-violence

Dear Hindu Friends,

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, I am pleased to send you and your communities my cordial greetings as you prepare to celebrate *Diwali*, the festival of light.

Traditionally on this occasion, we share a reflection on a matter of common interest. I would like to propose then considering together how we can live harmoniously in today's society, witnessing to the truth, light and hope that *Diwali* celebrates. While religions are often blamed for society's ills, we know that it is rather the manipulation of religion, contrary to its fundamental beliefs, that is used to carry out so many forms of violence.

In this regard, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI said, "In the world there is *too* much violence, *too* much injustice, and therefore this situation cannot be overcome except by countering it with *more* love, with *more* goodness". He added, "This *more* comes from God. Thus by the mercy of God...it is possible to tip the balance of the world from evil to good, when we recognize that it begins in that small and decisive 'world' which is the human heart" (Address, "*Angelus*", 18 February 2007). For Christians, in the "Sermon on the Mount", Jesus called on his disciples to love their enemies, to pray for those who hate them, to do good to those who wrong them, to walk the extra mile with their opponents (cf. Matthew, 5).

In the Hindu tradition, non-violence is one of the most important teachings. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Indian nation, is respected and held in high regard by people of different generations around the world for his complete dedication to the service of humanity. During the course of his struggle for freedom, he realized that "an eye for an eye, and soon the world is blind". Throughout his life, he developed among others, the concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence). He is model for non-violence and he led by example to the point of laying down his life because of his refusal to engage in violence.

Non-violence is not merely a tactical manoeuvre but is the attitude of the one who, as the Pope affirmed, “is so convinced of God’s love and power” (*ibid.*) that he is not afraid to tackle evil with the weapons of love and truth alone. Love of one’s enemy is the revolution of love, a love that does not rely ultimately on human resources but is a gift of God.

Non-violence is encouraged by many other religions. Non-violence is central to our beliefs as the way to promote truth, light, mutual respect, freedom and harmony. As religious leaders called to uphold the truth found in our respective religions, let us help to foster non-violence among our followers and support it in their actions. Let us do all we can to promote the sacredness of human life, the good of the poor and lowly in our midst and collaborate, through dialogue, to foster the dignity of the human person regardless of race or caste, creed or class. As Hindus and Christians, especially in the present situation, let us be won over by love without reserve, with the conviction that non-violence is the only way to build a global society that is more compassionate, more just and more caring. It is our hope and prayer!

Once again, let me wish you peace and joy as you gather with your loved ones and your community to celebrate the gift of Light that illumines all hearts.

Happy *Diwali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata
Secretary

Hindus and Christians: Committed to Integral Human Development

Dear Hindu Friends,

It is my joy to greet you all, once again, in the name of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, a happy *Deepavali*! Religious festivals enable us to revitalize our relationship with God and one another. May this Festival of Lights, while elevating our minds and hearts towards God, the Supreme Light, strengthen fellowship among us and bless us all with happiness and peace.

Honouring the tradition of this Pontifical Council to share a thought on matters of common concern, I would like to propose this year that we reflect on the need to work together for integral human development.

Integral human development implies the advance towards the true good of every individual, community and society, in every single dimension of human life: social, economic, political, intellectual, spiritual and religious. Pope Paul VI described it as “development of the whole man and of all men” (*Populorum Progressio*, 1967, no.42) “from less human conditions to those which are more human” (ibid. no.20). And Pope Benedict XVI wrote recently that “integral human development presupposes the responsible freedom of the individual and of peoples” (*Caritas in veritate*, no. 17).

Such authentic development can be achieved only by assuming a shared responsibility for one another and by seriously engaging in collaborative action. This springs from our very nature as human beings and our belonging to one human family.

In the process of integral development, protection of human life and respect for the dignity and fundamental rights of the person, are a responsibility of everyone, both individually and collectively.

Respect for others therefore implies the recognition of their freedom: freedom of conscience, thought and religion. When persons feel respected

in their primary choice as religious beings, only then are they able to encounter others and cooperate for the progress of humanity. This shapes a more peaceful social order conducive to development.

Integral human development also requires the political will to work towards ensuring greater protection of human rights and peaceful co-existence. Development, freedom and peace are inextricably linked together, and they complete one another. Lasting peace and harmonious relations emerge in an atmosphere of freedom; so also, integral human development is accomplished in an environment of peace.

Let us all, as people of good will, join together to dispel every darkness that hinders a true vision of co-existence, religious harmony and integral development for each and every person.

May *Deepavali* be an occasion to celebrate our friendship and boldly proclaim the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and work together to bring about an era of true freedom 'for all' and integral development 'of all'.

My best wishes, once again, for a splendid and joyous *Deepavali*.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Archbishop Pier Luigi Celeta
Secretary

**Christians and Hindus: Towards enhancing of mutual respect,
trust and cooperation**

Dear Hindu Friends,

As in the past, we join you in the celebration of *Deepavali*, sending you my sincere greetings and congratulations on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. May God, the Supreme Light illumine your minds, enlighten your hearts and strengthen the human bonds in your homes and communities! We wish you all a joy-filled *Deepavali*!

On this occasion, I would like to reflect on how best we can strengthen our friendship and cooperation by mutually ensuring and enhancing respect and trust.

Respect is the proper regard for the dignity which naturally pertains to every person irrespective of any external recognition. Dignity implies the inalienable right of every individual to be protected from any kind of violence, neglect or indifference. Mutual respect, therefore, becomes one of the fundamentals for peaceful and harmonious co-existence as well as progress in society.

Trust, on the other hand, nourishes every genuinely human relationship, both personal and communitarian. Mutual trust, besides creating an environment conducive to growth and the common good, shapes a shared conviction that we can depend on each other to achieve a common purpose.

This shared conviction creates in individuals and communities a readiness and willingness to enter into productive cooperation not only in the area of doing good in general, but also, addressing the grave and unresolved challenges of our times.

Applying the above to our engagement in appreciating and promoting interreligious dialogue and relations, we well know that respect and trust are not optional extras but the very pillars on which the edifice of our engagement itself stands. This engagement involving all of us, believers and people

who seek the Truth with a sincere heart, in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, is “...together to become artisans of peace, in a reciprocal commitment to understanding, respect and love” (*Address to delegates of other Churches and Ecclesial communities and of other Religious Traditions*, 25 April 2005).

Thus, the greater our engagement in interreligious dialogue, the fuller our respect and trust become, leading us to an increase in cooperation and common action. Pope John Paul II, of happy memory, on his first visit to India, said: “Dialogue between members of different religions increases and deepens mutual respect and paves the way for relationships that are crucial in solving the problems of human suffering” (*Address to non-Christian leaders*, Madras-Chennai, 5 February, 1986).

As people who hold in common the well-being of individuals and communities, may we give greater visibility with every means in our power to a culture that promotes respect, trust and cooperation.

Once again, most cordially, I wish you a happy *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Together in promoting Religious Freedom

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue is pleased to send you its cordial greetings as you celebrate *Deepavali* on 26 October of this year. May God, the source of all light, illumine your hearts, homes and communities for a life of peace and prosperity.

Maintaining our tradition of sharing a reflection on this occasion, we propose this year the theme of Religious Freedom. This subject is currently taking centre stage in many places, calling our attention to those members of our human family exposed to bias, prejudice, hate propaganda, discrimination and persecution on the basis of religious affiliation. Religious freedom is the answer to religiously motivated conflicts in many parts of the world. Amid the violence triggered by these conflicts, many desperately yearn for peaceful coexistence and integral human development.

Religious freedom is numbered among the fundamental human rights rooted in the dignity of the human person. When it is jeopardized or denied, all other human rights are endangered. Religious freedom necessarily includes immunity from coercion by any individual, group, community or institution. Though the exercise of this right entails the freedom of every person to profess, practise and propagate his or her religion or belief, in public or in private, alone or in a community, it also involves a serious obligation on the part of civil authorities, individuals and groups to respect the freedom of others. Moreover, it includes the freedom to change one's own religion.

When respected and promoted, religious freedom allows believers to be more enthusiastic about cooperating with their fellow citizens in the building of a just and humane social order. But wherever and whenever it is denied, suppressed or violated, "the growth of the authentic and lasting peace of the whole human family" is stifled and frustrated (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 2011). There are many fields in which a specific contribution can be made to the common good, such as the defence of life and the dignity of the family, the sound education of

children, honesty in daily conduct, and the preservation of natural resources, to name a few. Let us strive, then, to join hands in promoting religious freedom as our shared responsibility, by asking the leaders of nations never to disregard the religious dimension of the human person.

The very day after you celebrate *Deepavali* this year, many religious leaders from across the globe will join Pope Benedict XVI in a Pilgrimage to Assisi to renew the pledge made twenty-five years ago, under the leadership of Blessed John Paul II, to make religions channels of peace and harmony. We will be spiritually united with them, confident that believers will always be a blessing for the whole world.

We cordially wish you a joyful celebration of *Deepavali*.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Forming the young generation into Peace-makers

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends its warmest greetings and congratulations on the occasion of this year's *Deepavali* celebrations. May fellowship and fraternity shine forth more and more in your families and communities.

At this point in time in human history, when various negative forces threaten the legitimate aspirations in many regions of the world for peaceful co-existence, we would like to use this cherished tradition of sharing with you a reflection to explore the responsibility that Hindus, Christians and others have in doing everything possible to form all people, especially the young generation, into peace-makers.

Peace is not merely absence of war, nor is it a pact or treaty which ensures a tranquil life; rather, it is being complete and intact, a restoration of harmony (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecclesia in Medio Oriente*, 9) and a fruit of charity. Parents, teachers, elders, religious and political leaders, peace-workers, those in the world of communications and all those who have the cause of peace at heart are called to educate the young generation, and are called to foster such wholeness.

To form young men and women into people of peace and builders of peace is an urgent summons to collective engagement and common action. If peace is to be authentic and enduring, it must be built on the pillars of truth, justice, love and freedom (cf. Pope John XIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 35), and all young men and women need to be taught above all to act truthfully and justly in love and freedom. Furthermore, in all education for peace, cultural differences ought surely to be treated as richness rather than a threat or danger.

The family is the first school of peace and the parents the primary educators for peace. By their example and teachings, they have the unique privilege of forming their children in values that are essential for peaceful

living: mutual trust, respect, understanding, listening, sharing, caring and forgiving. In schools, colleges and universities, as young people mature by relating, studying and working with others from different religions and cultures, their teachers and others responsible for their training have the noble task of ensuring an education that respects and celebrates the innate dignity of all human beings and promotes friendship, justice, peace and cooperation for integral human development. With spiritual and moral values as the bedrock of education, it becomes their ethical imperative also to caution the students against ideologies that cause discard and division.

While states and individual leaders in the social, political and cultural fields, generally have their own important roles to play in strengthening the education of the young, religious leaders in particular, by reason of their vocation to be spiritual and moral leaders, must continue to inspire the young generation to walk the path of peace and to become messengers of peace. Since all means of communication greatly shape the way people think, feel and act, those involved in these fields must, to the utmost possible extent, contribute to promoting thoughts, words, and works of peace. Indeed, young people themselves ought to live up to the ideals they set for others, by employing their freedom responsibly and by promoting cordial relationships for a culture of peace.

Evidently, the wholeness which peace conveys will shape a more fraternal world and a “new kind of fraternity” among people in which “a shared sense of greatness of each person” will prevail. (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Apostolic Journey to Lebanon, Meeting with Members of the Government, Institutions of the Republic, the Diplomatic Corps, Religious leaders and Representatives from the world of culture*, 15 September 2012).

May all of us seek, always and everywhere, to adhere to the moral and religious imperative to inspire the young as they strive to become peace-makers.

Wish you all a Blessed *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Father Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

**Christians and Hindus: Fostering human relationships
through friendship and solidarity**

Dear Hindu Friends,

In a spirit of friendship, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue extends to you best wishes and cordial greetings as you celebrate *Deepavali* on 3 November next. May God, the source of all light and life, illumine your lives and deepen your happiness and peace.

In this highly competitive world where increasingly individualistic and materialistic tendencies adversely affect human relationships and often create divisions in families and society as a whole, we wish to share our thoughts on how Christians and Hindus can foster human relationships for the good of all humanity through friendship and solidarity.

Relationships are fundamental to human existence. Security and peace in the local, national and international communities are largely determined by the quality of our human interaction. Experience teaches us that, the deeper our human relationships, the more we are able to advance towards cooperation, peace-building, genuine solidarity and harmony. In short, the ability to foster respectful relationships is the measure of authentic human progress and essential for promoting peace and integral development.

Such relationships ought to flow naturally from our shared humanity. Indeed, human relationships are at the heart of human existence and its progress and naturally give rise to a sense of solidarity with others. Regardless of our ethnic, cultural, religious and ideological differences, all of us belong to the one human family.

Sadly, with the increase of materialism in society and a growing disregard for deeper spiritual and religious values, there now exists a dangerous trend to accord the same value to material things as to human relationships, thereby reducing the human person from a “someone” to a “something” that can be cast aside at will. Furthermore, individualistic tendencies engender a false sense of security and favour what His Holiness Pope Francis

has described as ‘a culture of exclusion’, ‘a throwaway culture’ and ‘a globalization of indifference’.

The promotion of a ‘culture of relationship’ and ‘a culture of solidarity’ is thus imperative for all peoples, and calls for the fostering of relationships based on friendship and mutual respect for the benefit of the entire human family. This requires a common recognition and promotion of the intrinsic dignity of the human person. It is evident then that friendship and solidarity are closely related. In the end, a “culture of solidarity means seeing others not as rivals or statistics, but brothers and sisters” (Pope Francis, *Visit to the Community of Varginha (Manguinhos)*, Rio de Janeiro, 25 July 2013).

Finally, we wish to share our conviction that a culture of solidarity can only be achieved as “the fruit of a concerted effort on the path of all, in service of the common good” (Pope Francis, *Meeting with Brazil’s Leaders of Society*, Rio de Janeiro, 27 July 2013). Sustained by the teachings of our respective religions and aware of the importance of building genuine relationships, may we, Hindus and Christians, work individually and collectively, with all religious traditions and people of good will, to foster and strengthen the human family through friendship and solidarity.

Wish you a happy celebration of *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Father Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Together to foster a culture of 'inclusion'

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue joyfully greets all of you on the festive occasion of *Deepavali*, celebrated on 23 October this year. May the Transcendent Light illumine your hearts, homes and communities, and may all your celebrations deepen the sense of belonging to one another in your families and neighbourhoods, and so further harmony and happiness, peace and prosperity.

We wish to reflect with you this year on the theme "Fostering together a culture of 'inclusion'. In the face of increasing discrimination, violence and exclusion throughout the world, 'nurturing a culture of inclusion' can be rightly seen as one of the most genuine aspirations of people everywhere.

It is true that globalization has opened many new frontiers and provided fresh opportunities to develop, among other things, better educational and healthcare facilities. It has ushered in a greater awareness of democracy and social justice in the world, and our planet has truly become a 'global village' due in large part to modern means of communication and transportation. It can also be said, however, that globalization has not achieved its primary objective of integrating local peoples into the global community. Rather, globalization has contributed significantly to many peoples losing their sociocultural, economic and political identities.

The negative effects of globalization have also had an impact on religious communities throughout the world since they are intimately related to surrounding cultures. In fact, globalization has contributed to the fragmentation of society and to an increase in relativism and syncretism in religious matters, as well as bringing about a privatization of religion. Religious fundamentalism and ethnic, tribal and sectarian violence in different parts of the world today are largely manifestations of

the discontent, uncertainty and insecurity among peoples, particularly the poor and marginalized who have been excluded from the benefits of globalization.

The negative consequences of globalization, such as widespread materialism and consumerism, moreover, have made people more self-absorbed, power-hungry and indifferent to the rights, needs and sufferings of others. This, in the words of Pope Francis, has led to a “‘globalization of indifference’ which makes us slowly inured to the sufferings of others and closed in on ourselves” (*Message for the World Day of Peace*, 2014). Such indifference gives rise to a ‘culture of exclusion’ (cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the Apostolic Movement of the Blind and the Little Mission for the Deaf and Mute*, 29 March 2014) in which the poor, marginalized and vulnerable are denied their rights, as well as the opportunities and resources that are available to other members of society. They are treated as insignificant, dispensable, burdensome, unnecessary, to be used and even discarded like objects. In various ways, the exploitation of children and women, the neglect of the elderly, sick, differently-abled, migrants and refugees, and the persecution of minorities are sure indicators of this culture of exclusion.

Nurturing a culture of inclusion thus becomes a common call and a shared responsibility, which must be urgently undertaken. It is a project involving those who care for the health and survival of the human family here on earth and which needs to be carried out amidst, and in spite of, the forces that perpetuate the culture of exclusion.

As people grounded in our own respective religious traditions and with shared convictions, may we, Hindus and Christians, join together with followers of other religions and with people of good will to foster a culture of inclusion for a just and peaceful society.

We wish you all a Happy *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tuaran
President

Father Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Promoting Human Ecology Together

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you warm greetings as you celebrate *Deepavali* on 11 November 2015. May your celebrations across the globe lead you to an experience of happiness and harmony in your families and communities.

His Holiness Pope Francis, in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, has recently addressed the environmental and human ecological crisis threatening our planet. Thus we deem it opportune to share, in keeping with our cherished tradition, some thoughts on the need to promote human ecology, and to foster a rediscovery of the interconnectedness of creation. Human ecology points to the relationship and responsibility which humans have towards the earth and to the cultivation of “ecological virtues”. These virtues include a sustainable use of earth’s resources through the adoption of policies, at national and international levels, which respect the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings and nature. These issues, as we know, have a direct bearing not only on the current health of our earth-the home of the human family-but also for generations to come.

Human selfishness, as evidenced in consumerist and hedonistic tendencies in some individuals and groups, nurtures an insatiable desire to be “masters” and “conquerors” rather than “guardians” and “stewards” of nature. We are all called, regardless of religious belief or national identity, to live with a greater responsibility towards nature, to nurture life-giving relationships and, most of all, to reorder our lifestyles and economic structures according to the ecological challenges facing us. Your tradition stresses the “oneness” of nature, humanity and the divine. The Christian faith teaches that the created world is God’s gift to all human beings. As stewards of the created order, we are called to care for it responsibly and resolutely.

There is an inseparable link between our harmony with creation and our peace with one another. If peace is to prevail in the world, we must, together and as individuals, consciously give ourselves to “protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity” (*Laudato Si*, 201). Promotion of human ecology requires formation and education, at all levels, in ecological consciousness and responsibility, and in the wise stewardship of the earth’s resources. This begins in the family, “the first and fundamental structure for ‘human ecology’...in which man receives his formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person” (Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 39). Educational and governmental structures have a responsibility to form citizens in a proper understanding of human ecology and its relationship to the future of humanity and the created world.

United by our humanity and mutual responsibility, as well as our shared values and convictions, may we, Hindus and Christians, together with people of all religious traditions and good will, always foster a culture which promotes human ecology. In this way, there will be harmony within us, and in our relationships with others, with nature and with God, which will “favour the growth of the ‘tree of peace’” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 2007).

Praying for a healthy ecology and creating awareness of the various ways to care for creation is a truly ennobling work. Pope Francis has instituted, therefore, an annual ‘World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation’ to be observed on 1 September. It is hoped that this initiative will increase awareness among all people of the need to be good stewards of creation and, thereby promote a true human ecology.

With these sentiments, we wish you all a joyous *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Father Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Promoting hope among families

Dear Hindu Friends,

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we offer our best wishes as you celebrate *Deepavali* on 30 October 2016. May your celebrations around the world deepen your familial bonds, and bring joy and peace to your homes and communities.

The health of society depends on our familial bonds and yet we know that today the very notion of family is being undermined by a climate that relativizes its essential significance and value. So too, family life is often disrupted by harsh realities such as conflicts, poverty and migration, which have become all too commonplace throughout the world. There are, however, strong signs of renewed hope due to the witness of those who hold fervently to the enduring importance of marriage and family life for the wellbeing of each person and society as a whole. With this abiding respect for the family, and keenly aware of the global challenges daily confronting us, we wish to offer a reflection on how we, Christians and Hindus together, can promote hope in families, thus making our society ever more humane.

We know that the family is “humanity’s first school” and that parents are the “primary and principal” educators of their children. It is in the family that children, led by the noble example of their parents and elders, are formed in the values that help them develop into good and responsible human beings. Too often, however, the optimism and idealism of our youth are diminished by circumstances that affect families. It is especially important, therefore, that parents, together with the wider community, instil in their children a sense of hope by guiding them towards a better future and the pursuit of good, even in the face of adversity.

Providing a formation and education in hope is thus a task of paramount importance for families (cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 274-275), as it reflects the divine nature of mercy which embraces the disheartened and gives them purpose. Such an education in hope encourages the young themselves to reach out, in charity and service, to others in need, and so become a light for those in darkness.

Families, therefore, are meant to be a “workshop of hope” (Pope Francis, *Address at the Prayer Vigil for the festival of Families*, Philadelphia, 26 September 2015), where children learn from the example of their parents and family members, and experience the power of hope in strengthening human relationships, serving those most forgotten in society and overcoming the injustices of our day. Saint John Paul II said that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family” (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 86). If humanity is to prosper and live in peace, then families must embrace this work of nurturing hope and encouraging their children to be heralds of hope to the world.

As Christians and Hindus, may we join all people of good will in supporting marriage and family life, and inspiring families to be schools of hope. May we bring hope’s light to every corner of the world, offering consolation and strength to all in need.

We wish you all a joyful *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Going beyond tolerance

Dear Hindu Friends,

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, we offer cordial greetings to all of you as you celebrate *Deepavali* on 19 October 2017. May this festival of lights illumine your minds and lives, bring joy to your hearts and homes, and strengthen your families and communities.

We can rightfully acknowledge the many wonderful things that are happening throughout the world, for which we are grateful. At the same time, we are also mindful of the difficulties which confront our communities and which deeply concern us. The growth of intolerance, spawning violence in many parts of the world, is one such challenge we face today. On this occasion, therefore, we wish to reflect on how Christians and Hindus can together foster mutual respect among people-and go beyond tolerance, in order to usher in a more peaceful and harmonious era for every society.

Tolerance certainly means being open and patient with others, recognizing their presence in our midst. If we are to work for lasting peace and true harmony, however, tolerance is not enough. What is also needed is genuine respect and appreciation for the diversity of cultures and customs within our communities, which in turn contribute to the health and unity of society as a whole. To see pluralism and diversity as a threat to unity leads tragically to intolerance and violence.

Respect for others is an important antidote to intolerance since it entails authentic appreciation for the human person, and his or her inherent dignity. In the light of our responsibility to society, fostering such respect demands showing esteem for different social, cultural and religious customs and practices. It likewise demands the recognition of inalienable rights, such as the right to life and the right to profess and practise the religion of one's choice.

The path forward for diverse communities is thus one marked by respect. While tolerance merely protects the other, respect goes further: it favours

peaceful coexistence and harmony for all. Respect creates space for every person, and nurtures within us a sense of “feeling at home” with others. Rather than dividing and isolating, respect allows us to see our differences as a sign of the diversity and richness of the one human family. In this way, as Pope Francis has pointed out, “diversity is no longer seen as a threat, but as a source of enrichment” (*Address at the International Airport of Colombo*, 13 January 2015). On yet another occasion, the Pope urged religious leaders and believers to have “the courage to accept differences, because those who are different, either culturally or religiously, should not be seen or treated as enemies, but rather welcomed as fellow-travellers, in the genuine conviction that the good of each resides in the good of all” (*Address to the Participants in the International Peace Conference*, Al-Azar Conference Centre, Cairo, Egypt, 28 April 2017).

We are challenged then to go beyond the confines of tolerance by showing respect to all individuals and communities, for everyone desires and deserves to be valued according to his or her innate dignity. This calls for the building of a true culture of respect, one capable of promoting conflict resolution, peace-making and harmonious living.

Grounded in our own spiritual traditions and in our shared concern for the unity and welfare of all people, may we, Christians and Hindus, together with other believers and people of good will, encourage, in our families and communities, and through our religious teachings and communication media, respect for every person, especially for those in our midst whose cultures and beliefs are different from our own. In this way, we will move beyond tolerance to build a society that is harmonious and peaceful, where all are respected and encouraged to contribute to the unity of the human family by making their own unique contribution.

We wish you once again a joyful celebration of *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: In defence of the vulnerable of society

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you most cordial greetings and prayerful good wishes as you celebrate *Deepavali* on 7 November this year. May the celebrations surrounding this festival strengthen the spirit of friendship and fraternity among you and enhance peace and joy in your families and communities.

We know from news bulletins and web portals, as well as from direct experience, the daily hardships endured by the vulnerable members of our society: the poor, infirm, elderly, disabled, destitute, abandoned, migrants; those socially, religiously, culturally and linguistically marginalized and excluded; and the victims of abuse and violence, especially women and children. Largely helpless and defenceless, discarded and ignored by a society increasingly indifferent and even callous in the face of human needs and sufferings, the vulnerable everywhere in our time suffer greatly. It is in this troubling context that we wish to share with you a reflection on how we, Hindus and Christians alike, can engage in efforts to defend, protect and assist them.

The moral duty to care for the vulnerable springs from our shared belief that we are all God's creatures and, as a result, brothers and sisters, equal in dignity, with responsibility for one another. It also stems from the realization that we too at times feel vulnerable, looking for someone to offer us a helping hand. A healthy awareness of our common human condition and our moral duty towards others inspires us to promote their cause by doing all that we can to alleviate their sufferings, defend their rights and restore their dignity.

There is no doubt that, in this regard, many praiseworthy efforts are being made by individuals, groups and communities in different parts of the world. Yet given the great numbers of the vulnerable, and the complexities often involved in meeting their needs, those efforts can appear no more than a few drops in a great ocean. Still, opportunities for service are all around us, since the vulnerable can be found in every community and

society. Greater efforts, inspired by a sense of solidarity, are needed so that they can feel “the presence of brothers and sisters, who are concerned for them, and, by opening the doors of their hearts and lives, make them feel like friends and family” (Pope Francis, *Message for the Second World Day of the Poor*, 18 November 2018). In the end, the true measure of civilization of any society is the way it treats its most vulnerable members.

Attentiveness and cooperation are needed, not only to defend the legitimate place and rights of the vulnerable in society, but also to cultivate a culture of care and concern in their regard. In our families too, every effort should be made to ensure that no one feels unwanted, unloved, ignored or left out. Every level of society-especially political and government leaders, and those best equipped to provide practical assistance-needs to display a human face and heart to the vulnerable of our society and to reach out to all those suffering marginalization and oppression. Such generosity should not appear as a token gesture, but as one divinely inspired and aimed at the true emancipation and welfare of the vulnerable and the defence of their cause.

As believers grounded in our own respective spiritual traditions, and as individuals with shared concerns for the wellbeing of all, may we join hands with the adherents of other religious traditions and all people of good will, and make collective and concerted efforts to secure a joyful present and hopeful future for our vulnerable brothers and sisters!

We wish all of you a happy *Deepavali*!

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
Secretary

Believers: Builders of fraternity and peaceful coexistence

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends you cordial greetings and sincere good wishes as you celebrate *Deepavali* on 27 October this year. May this festival of lights illumine your hearts and homes and bring to your families and communities joy and happiness, peace and prosperity. At the same time, may it strengthen your spirit of fraternity with one another.

Alongside the experience of unprecedented advancement in many fields, we live at a time when, on the one hand, efforts are being made towards interreligious and intercultural dialogue, cooperation and fraternal solidarity. On the other hand, there is apathy, indifference and even hatred among some religious people towards others. This is often caused by a failure to recognize the ‘other’ as a brother or sister. Such an attitude can arise from misguided, ungenerous or unsympathetic sentiments, which upset and unsettle the very fabric of harmonious coexistence in society. It is with concern about this situation that we deem it fitting and beneficial to share with you some thoughts on the need for every individual, particularly Christians and Hindus, to be builders of fraternity and peaceful coexistence wherever they are.

Religion fundamentally inspires us “to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved” (*Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, co-signed by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019). It teaches us, moreover, to respect the inviolable dignity and the inalienable rights of others without any unwarranted bias towards their creed or culture. Only when adherents of religions demand of themselves a life consistent with their religious ethic will they be seen to fulfil their role as builders of peace and as witnesses to our shared humanity. For this reason, religions are to sustain the efforts their adherents make in leading an authentic life so as to “bring forth the fruits of peace and brotherhood, for it is in the nature of religion to foster...an increasingly fraternal relationship among people” (Pope

John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1992). As such, living in a spirit of fraternity and fellowship through constant dialogue should be a natural corollary of being a religious person, Hindu or Christian.

Though negative news dominates the headlines, this should not dampen our resolve to sow seeds of fraternity, for there is a hidden sea of goodness that is growing and leads us to hope in the possibility of building, together with the followers of other religions and all men and women of good will, a world of solidarity and peace. The conviction that building a world of fraternity is possible is reason enough for us to engage all the more in efforts towards building the edifice of fraternity and peaceful coexistence, keeping “the good of everyone at heart” (Pope Francis, *Message for the Opening of the Annual Interreligious Prayer Meeting for Peace, “Bridges of Peace”, Bologna, 14 October 2018*).

It is a happy coincidence that the beginning of this month marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, “an outstanding and courageous witness to truth, love and nonviolence” (Pope John Paul II, *Prayer for Peace at the Conclusion of the Visit to Rajghat, Delhi, 1 February 1986*) and a valiant protagonist of human fraternity and peaceful coexistence.

As believers grounded in our own religious convictions and with shared concern for the welfare of the human family, may we join hands with those of different religious traditions and all people of good will, and strive to do all we can-with a sense of shared responsibility- to build a more fraternal and peaceful society!

Wishing all of you a joyful celebration of *Deepavali*!

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
President

Rev. Msgr. Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakaratne Kankanamalage
Secretary

Christians and Hindus: Rekindling Positivity and Hope during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond

Dear Hindu Friends,

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue offers its warmest greetings and best wishes to you on the occasion of Deepavali, which you are observing this year on 14 November. Amid the difficulties of the Covid-19 pandemic, may this very meaningful feast dispel every cloud of fear, anxiety and worry, and fill your hearts and minds with the light of friendship, generosity and solidarity!

With this year's Deepavali Message, the Pontifical Council charged with promoting interreligious dialogue and cooperation continues its cherished tradition of sending you festive greetings and a few timely reflections. This is the twenty-fifth of such Messages, which seek to acknowledge, maintain and cherish the good things present in both of our religious traditions and spiritual patrimonies (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2). Albeit a small step in the direction of interreligious appreciation and cooperation, these Messages have, over the years, enhanced and promoted Hindu-Christian dialogue and harmony at various levels. We readily continue this noble tradition for the sake of forging, fostering and furthering mutual relationships between Hindus and Christians as a means of working together for our good and for the good of all humanity.

This year, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we wish to share with you some thoughts on the need to encourage a positive spirit and hope for the future, even in the face of apparently insurmountable obstacles, socio-economic, political and spiritual challenges, and widespread anxiety, uncertainty and fear.

Our efforts to do so are surely based upon our conviction that God, who created us and sustains us, will never abandon us. An encouragement to be optimistic may well sound unrealistic to those who have lost their loved ones or livelihoods or both. Even the boldest hope and positivity can dissipate in the tragic situations caused by the present pandemic and its grave

effects on daily life, the economy, healthcare, education and religious practices. Yet it is precisely trust in God's providence that inspires us to remain optimistic and to work to rekindle hope in the midst of our societies.

The pandemic has in fact brought a number of positive changes in our way of thinking and living, despite the unprecedented suffering it has caused worldwide and the lockdowns that have disrupted our normal life. Experiences of suffering and a sense of responsibility for one another have brought our communities together in solidarity and concern, in acts of kindness and compassion for the suffering and those in need. Such signs of solidarity have led us to appreciate more deeply the importance of coexistence, the fact that we belong to one another and that we need one another for the well-being of all and that of our common home. As Pope Francis has rightly noted, "solidarity today is the road to take towards a post pandemic world, towards the healing of our interpersonal and social ills", and "a way of coming out of the crisis better" (*General Audience*, 2 September 2020).

Our respective religious traditions teach us to remain positive and hopeful even amid adversity. In cherishing those religious traditions and teachings, may we strive in the midst of this global crisis to spread what Pope Francis delights in calling "the contagion of hope" (*Urbi et Orbi Message*, 12 April 2020) through gestures of care, affection, kindness, gentleness and compassion which are more contagious than the coronavirus itself.

Based on those religious traditions and teachings, our shared values and our commitment to the betterment of humanity, may we, as Christians and Hindus, join all people of good will in working to build a culture of positivity and hope in the heart of our societies, not only in these difficult days but also in the future that lies before us.

To all of you we wish a Happy Deepavali!

Miguel Ángel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
President

Monsignor Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakaratne Kankanamalage
Secretary

Hindu-Christian Collaboration Theological Reflections

Hindu-Christian Collaboration: Some Theological Reflections

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At the very outset, I would like to state a perhaps common and acceptable axiom: action is guided by thought and thought is guided by a worldview¹. Beneath these worldviews, there is an a priori expectation immanently present in each one of us for love, justice, peace, and security coupled with a desire, sometimes known and sometimes unknown, for the Ultimate that is beyond our comprehension. Any Hindu-Christian collaboration must presuppose these a priori desires scripted by our worldviews. It is our worldview that makes us Hindu or Christian where our Scriptures and traditions play the primary role. Furthermore, according to modern psychology, there are implicit biases in each one of us that do not disappear so easily²; biases perhaps created by our Scriptures and traditions. Nonetheless, by frequent awareness and interactions, the influences of those implicit biases could be weakened. To weaken biases between people of different religions, collaboration is essential.

¹ The discourse about “worldviews” is old and diverse which many authors of religion, psychology, philosophy, and theology have used in their unique way. I would prefer, here, Jung’s understanding of a “worldview” which is perceived as not only forming the intellectual but also the emotional dimension of human beings. See Carl Gustav Jung, “Psychotherapy and a philosophy of life” in R. F. C. Hull (tr.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 16, New York: Princeton University Press 1954, 81-82 (76-83).

² “An implicit bias is any prejudice that has formed unintentionally and without our direct knowledge – and it can often contradict our explicit beliefs and behaviors. Usually, it reflects a mixture of personal experience, attitudes around us as we have grown up, and our wider exposure to society and culture – including the books we read, television we watch, and news we follow”. In <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200827-is-it-possible-to-rid-police-officers-of-bias> (accessed: 31/08/2020)

When Hindus and Christians come together to collaborate on any humanitarian project, as it is happening in the present pandemic created by covid-19 or may happen with any other situation, they come together with their religious worldviews. Wouldn't the diversity of worldviews create problems in collaboration? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. If a Hindu and a Christian come together to work for the welfare of the world, there could be differences in the understanding of welfare itself due to differences in the understanding of salvation or God or other connected themes. But if we speak of collaboration, an interaction of worldviews will have to take place, or rather, it will take place. Keeping aside our doctrines and working together with a humanistic perspective does not work at least among staunchly religious people. We need to grapple with our doctrines together placing them on a common platform if that is possible and even if that appears as a highly academic and sometimes impractical exercise, observing the similarities and the dissimilarities; a collaboration ofologies is required even when we work for eco-human wellbeing.

In the present paper, we shall try to do just that with some of the Christian theological themes which resonate with some Hindu "theological" themes. This exercise is not entirely new but requires a re-visitation for ongoing interreligious reflections. Besides, it is oftentimes the case when non-academic Hindus and Christians work together for human and social upliftment, they have no clue of the beliefs of the other that coincide in some subtle way with their own beliefs. Collaborative work thus goes on devoid of an understanding of the other's fundamental perspectives which are intrinsically linked to his or her religion. A "cross-theological" encounter, therefore, is indispensable³.

³ In its document "Dialogue and Proclamation" no. 42 in 1991, 25 years after *Nostra Aetate*, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PCID) proposed four forms of interreligious dialogue where one of the forms is "the dialogue of theological exchange". We would like to call it here a "cross-theological" encounter to facilitate entry into the other's worldview, intellectually or otherwise, which not only means, as it is explained in the document, deepening our understanding of our respective religious heritages, but also appreciating each other's spiritual values. The document is found here: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (accessed: 23/08/2020).

Before we proceed, it must be stated that due to the constraints of space, detailed discussions of topics have been avoided.

1. The Reign of God

The symbol “reign of God” presupposes the presence of God. If God is present in each one of us, as practically all theistic spiritualities affirm, then the reign of God is “within” us (Luke 17:21). This was Jesus’ answer to those Pharisees who had a geographical or physical conception of the reign of God when they asked him “... when the kingdom of God was coming” (Luke 17:20). Jesus, who had inherited the “kingdom”⁴ symbol from the Judaic tradition was transcending it or rather taking it to a profound level of immanence. It is at this level that the spirituality of Advaita Vedānta functions. If Brahman (God) is realized within one’s soul, or if the soul itself is realized as Brahman then the reign of God is already present in oneself and the activities that flow from such a realization display values having propensity for the reign of God. Truth, justice, love, sacrifice, and other values are present in Hinduism and Christianity differing sometimes in significance due to the “horizon of understanding” under which each religion functions, as stated before, but more or less sharing concomitant comprehension at a more universal level. For instance, when a Hindu leader like Gandhi speaks of “truth” in his spiritual journey, it is generally looked at favorably by people of other religions as well.

On reading the passages dealing with the “kingdom of God” attributed to Jesus in the Gospels, it becomes evident that, for the most part, Jesus is inviting the hearers to a spiritual and ethical renewal. To give a few examples: Matthew (Mt): 5:3 – “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”; Mt 5:20 – “For I tell you that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”; Mt 18:23-35 – The parable of the unforgiving servant – where the practice of forgiveness was the central virtue; and Mark (Mk) 9:35 – “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant

⁴ The word “kingdom”, when it does not appear in a quote, will be put in inverted commas to avoid the impression of gender bias. It is also used interchangeably with the word “reign” to maintain the original usage of the term.

of all.” Many more examples can be given where love, humility, justice, forgiveness, repentance and righteousness, hope, and prayer are extolled in Jesus’ preaching and living of the reign of God.

In the case of the symbol Rāmrajya of the Vaiṣṇavite tradition, a symbol that has in many instances been compared to the reign of God symbol of Christianity - a detailed presentation of which is therefore not required here - an ethical hermeneutic is applied to it even though the symbol is understood in a political language of the king Rāma who comes victorious after defeating Rāvaṇa and rules with justice and righteousness. It was like having God’s reign on earth since Rāma is God. A similar perception concerning Yahweh’s “kingdom” was prevalent among the Pharisees which Jesus debunks. The Rāmrajya symbol also attains an ethical interpretation of the victory of Good over Evil. During the fight for Independence, combining ethics and politics, Mahatma Gandhi interpreted this symbol politically as a secular state but based on the authority of ethical and moral principles. In noting these principles, certain affinities between the Hindu and Christian symbols of the reign of God can be recognized. It may rather be easy to discover affinities at the level of spirituality and virtuous living, but when it comes to fundamental faith-claims of Christianity about the reign of God certain tensions may arise that Christians interested in dialogue normally tend to avoid. For a fruitful dialogue and collaboration, in my opinion, we need not avoid these tensions. We need to place the Christian understanding of the reign of God as conceived by the Church in all honesty before our Hindu friends who, most if not all, cannot be said to be unaware of these conceptions.

The reign of God is a salvific symbol in Christianity which is identical to the person of Jesus. The presence of Jesus is the presence of God’s reign (*Redemptoris Missio* 13). In the presence of Jesus according to Mt 11:5 – “the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them.” Jesus’ response to the Pharisees who question the power by which he casts out demons in Luke (Lk) 11:20 – “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come to you,” is a clear indication of the identity that is presumed in the various passages of the Gospels between Jesus and the “Kingdom”. Jesus, who is confessed as “messiah” the “Son of the living God” by Peter (Mt 16:16), is considered as God himself who by his liberative activity of healing people and forgiving their sins is

the “kingdom” in person in whom salvation is received. There was an exaggerated tendency in the past to perceive salvation only in eschatological (other-worldly) terms. However, Jesus’ activity involved human wellbeing as is evident in the physical and psychological healings and in the denunciation of structural oppression of the poor and “outcastes”⁵ manifesting the unconditional love of God. Bearing this in mind, an awareness of the “kingdom” activity as struggle against social oppression, exploitation, injustice, and inequality comes to the fore in the Catholic Church from the 1960s thanks to the liberation theologians of Latin America (Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría and others). In this regard, we could quote St. Paul’s letter to the Romans 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” However, the other-worldly salvation in the eschatological sense is not ruled out especially when Jesus replies to the criminal who was crucified beside him and who had asked Jesus to remember him in his “kingdom”: “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). Integral salvation of health and wellbeing here on earth besides participation with God in paradise is the promise of Jesus’ “kingdom” activity. We, therefore, cannot dissociate Jesus from the kingdom. But it is not in the name of the kingdom that people receive salvation but in the name of Jesus.

Theoretically, the above understanding could be plausible to a Hindu. But the Hindu could question the necessity of a strict identification of the reign of God with Jesus Christ. Why can’t the reign of God be a neutral symbol? Should the reign of God strictly be the reign of Christ? In the same way, the Christian may ask whether the symbol Rāmrājya could be neutralized. Going back and forth with such questions may be helpful only when we realize that neutrality as a psychological state may be possible but not as a religiously conditioned state even though religion and psychology are intrinsically related. Religiously speaking, Rāma and Christ will have to remain; but psychologically, to the

⁵ The word “outcastes” would be a Hindu reading of the groups favored by Jesus. The word is used by G.M. Soares Prabhu who refers to the unconditional love of God for the outcastes in his article “The Kingdom of God: Jesus’ Vision of a New Society”, in *Theology of Liberation an Indian Biblical Perspective: Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu*, S.J. vol. 4, Francis X. D’Sa (ed.), Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth 2001, 225-226.

extent that it is possible, neutrality can be practiced in any Hindu-Christian collaboration.

I shall end this section with a quote from John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* also cited in *Dominus Iesus* (DI) which I think sums it all up for a Christian wishing to collaborate with others under the "kingdom" of God symbol:

Therefore, one must also bear in mind that 'the kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness' (DI 19; RM 15).

2. Incarnation – Avatāra

Without the resurrection, Christian incarnation cannot be believable. This point is not stated because of a Christian subjective preference to proclaiming the truth of only one divine incarnation. Any divine incarnation requires a physical continuity otherwise it appears mythical in the sense of imaginary. No one tends to surrender oneself in total belief to an imagination. The incarnation of Christ was never the kerygmatic priority; it was rather the resurrection. The "Logos Christology" of John was, indeed, also the "implicative Christology" of John, because it presupposed or implied the resurrectional truth (Jn 11:25-27). However, Christian incarnation in time to come was reversed and then applied to other ideas of the incarnation in an isolated way. This is where interreligious incarnational theology terminates in arriving at placing the Christian incarnation, like all the other divine incarnations, at the level of myth.

Here we do not want to contest the truth of myths. However, a religious myth is a pointer to God. It will never give us the essential knowledge of God. The Christian incarnation (fully God and fully man) is not mythical because it gives us an *essential* knowledge of God and even of man that may apparently go beyond rationality, but therefore does not mean that it is superstitious because it could very well be "special" knowledge unreachable to philosophy. We could call it a theological truth.

Incarnation, in mythical language, is arguable since creaturely manifestations of God are not unimaginable. God uses a creaturely reality for salvation or liberation and leaves that reality once the task is complete. God cannot be exhausted in a human being. This is the “Avataric” understanding of incarnation and needs to be couched within a mythic and not a historical language because history is supposedly full of imperfections within a non-historical worldview. Whereas, when God becomes human in such a way that he cannot give up that humanity and so has to rise with it, then that event ratifies the truth of the incarnation in a way that is not mythical but historical requiring the “whole” and not “part” of God to be present and therefore goes beyond historical imperfections.

In any case, for the purpose of our paper, the interreligious question that we could ask is, can history and myth co-exist? Could an historico-mythical perspective on Divine incarnation become an implicit awareness in Hindu-Christian collaboration?⁶ Asking questions as to how can God be exhausted in a creaturely body is a futile exercise because it cannot be answered. To categorically say that God cannot fully, qualitatively, and quantitatively, be exhausted in a human body, is to show that one enjoys full comprehension of God. This intellectual exercise begins with a philosophical impossibility to end in another human impossibility; that is, one philosophically presupposes that God cannot be exhausted in a human body but that very presupposition betrays a comprehension of God that is humanly speaking impossible.

The Christian theological truth of the resurrection leads to the conviction of the theological truth of the incarnation. Philosophy may not accept the two realities as understood by Christianity, but if it accepts them, then it can reach

⁶ Theologians like John Hick and Paul Knitter insist on the mythical nature of the Christian incarnation and resurrection to interpret Christian uniqueness anew which is unholistic, in my opinion, in a Hindu-Christian dialogue. See John Hick (ed.), *God and the Universe of Faiths*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1973, 165-179; Id., *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press, 1993; John Hick & Paul Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, London: SCM Press 1988, vii. Because of its vastness, we cannot enter into the scholarly discussion of “myth” here. Suffice it to say, that the word “myth” has accrued meanings that have gone far beyond the common connotation of a fictitious story.

unimaginable heights on the very question of Being (and being) itself which is the central component of reflection of Western and for that matter of Indian philosophy (*Advaita Vedānta*) as well where Being could be associated with Brahman giving more a spiritual prominence to it.

Going further and calling Jesus an Avatāra as some theologians have done, from what we have tried to explain before, would it not appear disrespectful to the Christian understanding of incarnation (Avatāra) on the one hand and the Hindu understanding of Avatāra on the other?⁷ Absolutely not; if we are talking about a Hindu-Christian collaboration at this level of a philosophico-theological exchange then we must venture into such exercises to creatively render concepts of one religion intelligible to the other with all the contextual diversities that may make the task extremely difficult but not impossible.

As Christians, and especially as Indian Christians we want to ask the following question to ourselves, perhaps at the risk of being misunderstood as arrogant by our Hindu brethren but in the pure conscience of not desiring to hurt their feelings nevertheless: If Jesus Christ could be seen as the culmination of the historical and the mythical where the myth of the incarnation is historically realized *only* in him; if Jesus Christ could be, with a cross-religious exegesis, associated to the Īśvara of Advaita Vedānta who is intrinsically linked to the Brahman (*Mandukya Upanishad* 6)⁸ then as the Brahman or Īśvara, could Jesus Christ be considered as the Real Avatāra who precisely because he became fully human, has the right to be called a true Avatāra or the Supreme Avatāra (Para Avatāra)? Here we do not want to belittle the other Avatāras or take recourse to the fulfillment theories of the some theologians, although that possibility could exist before the reader, or to convince the Hindus by such a proposal. Instead, we intend to visualize Jesus Christ for ourselves as Christians as the Avatāra different from the other Avatāras in whom the miracle of the divine transformation

⁷ For an excellent comparative study of this theme see Noel Sheth, "Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison. I", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 67 (2003), 181-193; Id., "Hindu Avatāra and Christian Incarnation: A Comparison. II", *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 67 (2003), 285-302.

⁸ See Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1964, 129.

takes place in the very assumption of the human nature to the extent that it is a scandal to the great intellectuals and in precisely that, it is divine truth.

To enforce our claim specified above, we shall take a leap backward entering the Vedic literature taking, at the same time, help from previous theologians who have done theological reflections in India and also abroad, and apply the Vāc⁹ of the Vedas to Jesus Christ following in the footsteps of the Evangelist John in his liberty to apply the Logos of Greek philosophy to Jesus Christ. Here, again, we cannot get into a detailed discussion of this theme¹⁰. However, the supreme divinity of Vāc is clear from the hymns dedicated to Vāc in the R̥g Veda (10.71 e 125). Can we with Gispert Sauch write the following giving a twist to the Prologue of John 1:1-18?: “Vāk ‘was in the world, and the world came into being through him’ (her). Unfortunately, the world did not recognize her (him). However, to all who received her (him), who believed in ‘her’ (him) name, God ‘gave power to become children of God, who are born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God’”¹¹. We do this to feel a certain affinity with the Hindus in their śrutis maintaining at the same time the rootedness in the unique divinity of Christ.

Apart from these doctrinal issues, in our collaborative efforts with Hinduism, Jesus Christ could very well be portrayed as a man committed to doing the will of God in self-giving love and surrender. These two virtues are found in both Christianity and Hinduism. Love leads to commitment for the wellbeing of the other (human beings and the whole of creation). Surrender to the will of God leads to peace, justice, and morality. We may have our

⁹ Vāc is a feminine noun written also as Vāk and Vāg. For a brief research on this aspect see Bryan Lobo, “Il Logos cristiano e l’Induismo”, <http://www.cortiledeigentili.com/il-logos-cristiano-e-linduismo/>.

¹⁰ For some articles for further reading on this theme see the bibliography in *Ibid.*, 1 ft.nt. 1. In this bibliography, the reader will find other articles on the specific topic of Vāc and some related themes as well.

¹¹ George Gispert-Sauch, “Vāk”, in *Gems from India*, Delhi: ISPCK, 65. Masculine pronouns in brackets mine. Already in the Upanishads, we find a linguistic transposition from Vāc to Śabda. The advantage of using “Śabda” is that it is a masculine noun and would not create gender problems for its usage for Jesus (*ibid.*). When linked to Brahman, it is pronounced as Śabda Brahman. We cannot enter into a detailed discussion here about the advantages and disadvantages of using such terms for Jesus Christ in a Hindu context.

doctrines correct and may live our Faith boldly with scriptural loyalty, but if we do not have love then our very doctrines will sound like a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal (1 Cor 13:1). The doctrinal differences and similarities between Hindus and Christians need to be pervaded by the love consciousness of Jesus which is foundational to all Christian doctrine. Based on this foundation, the Hindu concepts of *Ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *Lokaśaṃgraha* (universal brotherhood), *Vāsudhaiva kutumbakam* (the whole world as family), *Sarvodaya* (universal upliftment), and *Niṣkāma karma* (selfless service) are virtues that every Christian cannot but follow with diligence and sincerity.

3. God

A few reflections on God separately at this point of the paper may come as a surprise especially after we have treated briefly certain aspects of Jesus Christ who is God himself. In our general reflections on God, however, the Trinity becomes a rich dialogical meeting point both for Christianity and Hinduism, especially in Advaita Vedānta. Within a pure monotheistic or a polytheistic culture, a triune God will not make sense. The Trinity is not a monotheistic nor a tritheistic doctrine but a tri-monotheistic doctrine. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is one God but three persons (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). Each person is God but there are no three Gods but one God. These three persons are united by one divine essence and distinguished by relations. Such a concept of God may sound heretical to the Vedāntic doctrine because God or Brahman is one-only-without-a-second (*ekam eva advitiyam*: *Chāndogaya Upaniṣad* 6.2.1,2). Taking our cues, however, from Keshab Chandra Sen and Brahmabhāndhab Upādhyay¹² we could find, in our spirit of collaboration between Hinduism and Christianity, that Brahman can be interpreted in a triune way hoping that such an interpretation would make us feel close to the Hindus and vice versa.

¹² Both Sen and Upadhyay were staunch Hindu Brahmins. The former did not convert to Christianity but the latter did and declared himself as a “Hindu-Catholic” – Hindu in culture and Catholic in belief. See Hans Staffner, *Jesus Christ and the Hindu Community: Is a Synthesis of Hinduism and Christianity Possible?*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash 1988, 33.

The first to conceive of the triuneness of the Brahman was Keshab Chandra Sen. For Sen, the *Sat, Cit, Ānanda* affirmation of the Brahman of Advaita Vedānta was in a way the affirmation of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit of the Christian Trinity. *Sat* is Being – the Father; *Cit* is Consciousness – the Son; *Ānanda* is Bliss – the Holy Spirit. Sen did not carry this fruitful doctrinal exchange further but, it was Upadhyay who was to build his own edifice in giving a tripersonal reading to the Nirguṇa Brahman of Advaita Vedānta assisted by the insights of Sen and Thomas Aquinas¹³. The outcome of such doctrinal symbiosis was that Christians were able to see the Brahman of Hinduism in a tripersonal way. From an analysis of Hindu polytheism to the discovery of the monotheism of the Hindu Brahman to a re-reading of the Brahman in Trinitarian terms one notices the apex of interreligious doctrinal collaboration. The Hindus in general would not accept such an interpretation, but for the Christian missionaries in India, it was a great breakthrough towards Hindu-Christian relations. To name a few who profited from such a Trinitarian reading of the Brahman were Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), Bede Griffiths, and others. However, Hindu scholars and spiritual leaders like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Swami Vivekananda relegated the understanding of a personal God to the second rung of the divine hierarchy. The Nirguṇa Brahman (the impersonal God) was the higher principle than the Saguṇa Brahman (the personal God). “Radhakrishnan maintains that understanding God as personal does not fully satisfy our religious needs. Therefore, the worship of the Absolute is higher than that of a personal God.” Vivekananda is quoted to have said, “The highest ideal in our scriptures is the impersonal and would to God every one of us here were high enough to realise that impersonal ideal”¹⁴. Modern Christian scholars of Hinduism, with the help of the Puruṣa sukta (Ṛg Veda 10.90) argue just the opposite¹⁵. There are also attempts of maintaining a personal brahman in the thought of Śaṅkara, with differing phil-

¹³ For a detailed discussion of this topic see Bryan Lobo, “Tripersonalising the Hindu God of Advaita Vedānta – Parabrahman”, *Gregorianum*, 92, 1 (2011), 159-182. The following brief discussion with footnotes on the Nirguṇa-Saguṇa divide is taken from this article.

¹⁴ For the quotations of Radhakrishnan and Vivekananda see Subhash Anand, *Hindu Inspiration For Christian Reflection*, Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2004, 10-11.,

¹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 10-14.

osophical and theological arguments¹⁶. Malkovsky asserts that Richard De Smet had written two articles on the personal interpretation of the nirguṇa Brahman, “to counteract the tendency of Western Sanskritists and Indian thinkers since the nineteenth century to render nirguṇa as ‘impersonal’ and Saguṇa as ‘personal’...”¹⁷.

The polytheism of the early writings in the Vedas, which finally rises to the monotheism or even “monism” of the Upanishads, is the sign of divine plurality discovering its oneness in deep spiritual silence. The *neti neti* apophatic language of the Upanishads is not destructive of the kataphatic language of the early Vedas. Divine plurality and oneness co-exist in the Vedas and similarly in the Trinity plurality and oneness co-exist. The Trinitarian God of the Christians and the *Sat, Cit, Ānanda* Brahman of the Hindus, looked at from a Christian point of view, are not all alone like the Aristotelian God – thought thinking about itself, instead, they are expressions of a God who is in relationship: a relationship, *ad intra* and *ad extra* with one’s devotees. The Vedāntic Hindus would see relations in Brahman as a limitation but in collaboration with the Christian perspective, relations could be seen more as a completion rather than a limitation in Brahman.

In the Vaiṣṇavite tradition, when we look at the great Hindu saints like Mirabai, Tukarām, Kabir, and many others, we are struck by their mutual intimate relationship with a personal God. To give just one example, Mirabai shared an intense marital love with Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa worked miracles for her not letting her down even when there were attempts at getting rid of her¹⁸. Similar stories of a loving relationship with one’s God are found among Christian saints. Fundamentally, then, these stories speak of a God whether Hindu or Christian, who is in love with his devotees. With all the doctrinal differences that exist between the Hindus and the Christians about God, when it comes to sharing the different and profound spiritual experiences

¹⁶ See Bradley Malikovsky, “The personhood of Śamkara’s Para Brahman”, *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 77 (1997), 541-562.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 559.

¹⁸ See Bryan Lobo, “The Hindu Saints: Some Missiological Reflections”, *Studia Missionalia*, vol. 61 (2012), 414 (411-443). For more information on the other two saints mentioned above see pages 418-429.

embedded in an intense loving relationship between God and the devotees, the striking similarities are astonishing.

4. Person – Anthropology

Any anthropology that considers a Person's intrinsic reality as the soul not inclusive of the body, is unholistic and incomplete. In Christian anthropology, the human being is conceived as an integral whole - body, and soul. Even after death, the soul does not perish but awaits reunification with the body at the final resurrection (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 366). In Hinduism however, the body, which is always karmic material, limits the final liberation (mokṣa) of the soul. Finality in Christianity includes the body, while finality in Hinduism neglects the body. However, the science of the body discovered in ancient Hindu literature (Āyurveda and the Yogasūtras of Patañjali) is highly advanced and presupposes importance given to the body. Through the Āyurvedic and Yogic systems of holistic medicine and exercises the human being is promised a healthy psychosomatic life from which Christianity has a lot to learn. It is therefore through the body that a person's wellbeing is achieved but for final liberation or "salvation", one needs to ascetically sublimate all bodily cravings, desires, and senses to allow the purity of the soul, where God exists, to shine forth in all its splendor. Can the human body in Hinduism in collaboration with Christianity acquire a meaning that goes beyond carnality and enter the realm of spirituality?

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is what gives Christian anthropology its meaning (GS 22). Divine incarnation is ultimately a pointer towards the wonder of the human being ascertaining the divine capacity of the human being itself which the second person of the Trinity could become. Anthropology, according to Rahner, must therefore become the starting point for theology¹⁹. Furthermore, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ testify to the fact that there can be no reversal of the human-divine unity realized in Jesus Christ. The human body of Jesus Christ becomes part of Divinity forever as hinted above. The body that undergoes a transformation and is spiritualized is

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, "Theology and Anthropology" in *Theological Investigations IX*, London: Darton Longman & Todd, 28.

not discarded. It is as though in the salvation offered in Jesus Christ the whole person – body and soul – is redeemed and divinity is restored to the human person. It is no wonder then that Athanasius could exclaim that God became man so that man may become God²⁰. The divinity of the human person (body included) which is presumed in the divine incarnation and resurrection, could be appreciated by Hinduism as well. Why can't the body form part of final mokṣa where it is affirmed that even the subtle matter (sūkṣma śārīra) needs to disappear? There are experiences where the body of the dead Guru is experienced by the devotee but not in the way the body of Jesus was touched by the Apostles with whom the Risen Jesus ate food as well. The experience of Paramahansa Yoganand of his Guru Yuktेशwar after his death is quite revealing in this regard who in his narration uses “resurrectional” language to verbalize his unique experience. We can note it in the following dialogue between Yogananda and his “resurrected” Guru:

But is it you, Master, the same Lion of God? Are you wearing a body like the one I buried beneath the cruel Puri sands?” “Yes, my child, I am the same. This is a flesh and blood body. Though I see it as ethereal, to your sight it is physical. From cosmic atoms, I created an entirely new body, exactly like the cosmic-dream physical body that you laid beneath dream-sands in Puri in your dream-world. I am in truth resurrected – non on earth but on an astral planet. Its inhabitants are better able than earthly humanity to meet my lofty standards. There you and your exalted loved ones shall someday come to be with me²¹.

The Guru then gives the following mandate to Yogananda:

I have now told you, Yogananda, the truths of my life, death, and resurrection. Grieve not for me; rather broadcast everywhere the story of my resurrection from the God-dreamed earth of men to another God-dreamed planet of astrally garbed souls! New hope will be infused into the hearts of misery-mad, death-fearing dreamers of the world²².

²⁰ See his “De Incarnatione” 54, *Source Chrétiennes* 199, C. Kannengiesser (ed.), Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf 1973.

²¹ Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Bombay 1980, 408.

²² *Ibid.*, 425.

On the one hand, we could easily discover differences in both the resurrections of Jesus and Sri Yukteswar to finally ask whether Sri Yukteswar's was a resurrection like the one of Jesus where the tomb was found empty? We find that in the narration of Yogananda, the "resurrection" experience was after the burial of Sri Yukteswar²³ and there was no "empty grave" experience and Yogananda does not go out proclaiming that Sri Yukteswar has truly risen with utter conviction to the point of being considered a lunatic like the Apostles. On the other hand, and this is our point here, in Hinduism one can or does find an experience of continuity of the body, perhaps a spiritual body, even after the physical death of a Guru. It is here that the resurrection of Jesus that is unique to Christianity can be inclusive of the Hindu "resurrection" experiences however different and incompatible they may seem to the resurrection of Jesus. Those experiences could still be part of our collaborative effort of making sense of this spiritual but existential and meta-historical reality. The resurrection, that still remains an enigma for many Hindus and Christians as well who tend to look at it in mere symbolic ways has elevated the status of the human body. It is here that we may have to allow our rationalism to play second fiddle to our faith experiences allowing these experiences to guide our lives to meaningfulness in collaboration with other experiences of meaningfulness. The point to note, however, in this theological collaboration is that Hindus including Christians who do not fully believe in the resurrection must accept the divinity of the body. It is the recognition of this divinity that will lead to real respect, love, justice, and brotherhood among people. There is always a recurring tendency to stress the sinfulness and karmic origins of humankind. But, it is time that we stress more the divinity of humankind. The more goodness and virtue are recognized, the more will evil, sinfulness, and karma lose their hold on us.

²³ Sri Yukteswar was not cremated but buried. Bodies of householders are cremated but not the bodies of swamis and monks, exceptions notwithstanding. See *Ibid.*, 404 especially the first footnote.

**Hindu-Christian Collaboration: Theological Reflections
(Towards A Spiritual Paradigm)**

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Christianity in India: Jesus Christ in Hindu View

If we accept the St. Thomas legend as a historical fact, Christianity must have reached India around the same period when it reached Rome, if not a little earlier. The Syrian Christians of Kerala in South India have a tradition that they received their faith directly from St. Thomas. The later advent of Europeans in India's political landscape gave a new momentum to the spread of Christianity in the subcontinent.

In modern times, the admiration of the poet Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Dr. Radhakrishnan for Christian mysticism was no less than the admiration that great Western philosophers and thinkers like Schopenhauer had for the Upanishads or the reverence that the Anglican missionary, J.C. Winslow felt for India's spiritual heritage. (He spoke about "the light which the Indian religious genius will be able to throw upon Christian thought...") [Quoted in 'The Indo-Asian Culture' Page: 133]

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were scholars who thought that Christian and Hindu religious ideals are essentially alien to each other and that they can never converge. This idea may be true so long as we interpret religions exclusively on the basis of their external practices or on the basis of social and anthropological factors.

Interestingly, great Hindu thinkers and social reformers like Ram Mohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen thought that one can become a true Christian through spiritual evolution and by obtaining Christian experience rather than by becoming a member of a church. But they did not fully represent the best of the spiritual tradition of orthodox Hinduism because their idea of religious universalism did not have its roots in the Vedantic heritage of

the Upanishads as expounded by the great spiritual epoch-makers of India like Shankaracharya and others.

At the theological level, Both Christianity and Hinduism grew and evolved without any apparent historical reference with each other. Their similarities can only be understood in terms of man's search for higher spiritual experience. Great Hindu admirers of Jesus Christ like Dr. Radhakrishnan, Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi could look at the teachings of Jesus beyond their social, anthropological and historical contexts and recognize the deeper spiritual undercurrents that they recognized and related to their own Vedic heritage. It is true that many of the well-known Hindu leaders like Mahatma Gandhi looked upon Jesus more as a spiritual ideal than as the founder of a particular religion, that is - beyond the historical Christ. But, it is important to note that they all accepted and recognized the divinity of Jesus.

There were several Indians who tried to imbibe the deep spiritual elements of Jesus' teachings without joining any church or undergoing formal conversion. Most of them made important contributions to Indian Christology in the nineteenth century and continued to practice Hinduism. Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772 – 1833), the founder of Hindu reform movements of the nineteenth century was an example. You find in his writings a portrayal of what might be called the universal Christ in contrast to the historical figure. Keshab Chandra Sen (1838 – 1884), a great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a prominent intellectual Brahma Samaj leader of the 19th century, in one of his lectures says: "Behold, Christ cometh to us as an Asiatic in race, as a Hindu in faith, as a kinsman and a brother..." [Christianity in India Through the Centuries – 6: Indian Christian Theology – K.M. George, Page: 262] He could appreciate the common grounds between the Hindu and Christian spiritual traditions and heritage.

Both Hinduism and Christianity have a rich heritage in spiritual and philosophical literature and mythology. Both have produced outstanding saints, scholars, theologians, and mystics who have experienced God's presence in their lives and have recognized the spiritual common ground of their faith systems. Their lives and teachings inspire us to appreciate the universality of each other's traditions. Both have built up religious

hierarchies that have preserved the tradition and heritage of their respective religions. Both the faith systems have produced thousands of celibate monks and nuns and have built up monastic traditions and founded monastic orders that have survived for centuries and have greatly contributed towards the advancement of theology, philosophy, art, and culture. We should be able to look beyond their social anthropological differences and conventions and focus on their eternal spiritual teachings. These universal teachings should form the platform for Christian-Hindu collaboration.

In the light of various undercurrents that emerged in the course of Hindu-Christian encounters in India, it is clear that the foundation of Hindu-Christian collaboration should be based on the highest ideal that both these traditions represent, going beyond the diversities at the social, cultural, ritualistic, institutional, and organizational levels. Modern Hindu spiritual leaders such as Swami Vivekananda, who looked upon Christ as a divine incarnation ('*avatara*' in Hinduism), taught that this is possible and necessary and is the need of our times.

Spirituality: The Centre of Hindu-Christian Collaboration

In Hinduism spiritual experience is the ultimate goal and purpose of theological and philosophical discourses. There are four regulating principles that act as four goals in life. They are *Dharma* (the ethical regulating principle), *Artha* (wealth and material well-being), *Kama* (fulfillment of desires), and *Moksha* (the supreme goal of human life i.e. spiritual freedom and emancipation). Of these, *Moksha* is the highest and ultimate goal of life. Spiritual freedom is attained through renunciation. Professor Hocking in his well-known book "Living Religions and the World Faith," considers this ideal of renunciation as Hinduism's greatest contribution to world religious culture.

But the most important contribution of Hinduism to world religious thought might be the belief that the light and truth emanating from God are the common inheritance of all and are available to all who practice devotion to God and compassion for His children. When we practise *Dharma* (the universal ethical values), *Rtham* (the universal principle of harmonious life conducive to the welfare of all), and *Satyam* (truthfulness)

we become God's children irrespective of whatever religious tradition we profess.

For a beginner, God is only an idea. God becomes a reality and an actual experience through the practice of spiritual disciplines laid down in the scriptures and in the teachings of saints and mystics. These ideas are accepted in both Hindu and Christian traditions.

According to Vedic tradition, which forms the spiritual foundation of Hinduism, we evolve from gross to subtle, from external rituals and ceremonies towards mythology, then to philosophy, and, finally, towards experience. There can be no complete unity between different religious traditions at the level of external practices and mythologies. There may be some doctrines and rituals common to all major religions and though the external practices are an integral part of every religion, Vedanta looks upon them as secondary details of religious life. When we reach the highest spiritual level of evolution we will realize that the real temple of God is within ourselves. We experience God's presence in our hearts and this enables us to look upon the whole humanity as one spiritual family. It is this inner experience that transforms religion into spirituality. This mystical experience is the goal of man's spiritual journey. From a Hindu perspective, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Teresa of Avila are examples of the highest devotion as defined by the great Hindu devotional philosophers such as Narada and Shandilya.

“Sa tvasmin parama-premarupa” (devotion means supreme love towards God) [*Narada Bhakti Sutras* – 2] and “paranurakti isware” (devotion is the highest love for God) [*Shandilya Bhakti Sutras* – 2]

The well-known thinkers, philosophers, and system builders like St. Thomas Aquinas and Shankaracharya and innumerable saints of Hindu devotional heritage like Mirabai and the women saints of Christian tradition were supreme examples depicted by the Parable of the Good Samaritan who looked upon the whole humanity as their neighbors. One of the most striking examples of how two great religious traditions separated by difference in culture, tradition, geography, and social conditions can have very similar spiritual ideals at the highest level can be found in the case of Shankaracharya and Meister Eckhart.

“Both Shankara and Eckhart are teachers of Salvation – in that lies their most fundamental point of agreement,” says Rudolph Otto in his “Mysticism: East and West” (P:29). That, in a broad sense, can be said about both Hinduism and Christianity. And that is the essence of the spiritual paradigm that should be the basis of spiritual collaboration between Hinduism and Christianity.

From a spiritual standpoint, there are striking similarities in Hindu and Christian scriptures. Sincerity, purity of heart, unselfishness, self-imposed poverty, austerity, obedience and reverence for one’s vows, respect for tradition and hierarchy, and spiritual affinity between God and his creation are emphasized in both traditions. Moreover, there are innumerable teachings in the theological traditions of Hinduism and Christianity, which are strikingly similar.

The Hindu scriptures emphasize the union between the individual soul and the all-pervading Supreme Self (*Jivatman* and *Paramatman*) as the ultimate supreme goal of our spiritual journey. When we read in the Bible, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; The same was in the beginning with God,” (St. John I:1-4, I:14) we are reminded of innumerable similar statements in the *Swetaswatara Upanishad*, the *Chandogya Upanishad*, the *Katha Upanishad*, and the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* where the word “OM” is referred to in similar terms.

The sanctity and sacredness with which traditional Hindus look upon their spiritual hierarchy of *Avataras* and *Acharyas* are echoed in the Christian belief that Jesus came to fulfill and not to destroy. A student of Advaita philosophy can easily relate it to the fundamental Vedantic teaching of his own spiritual tradition, which declares that *Atman* (God) is the indweller and the driving force residing within our heart, when he reads in the Bible, “The Kingdom of God is within you.” [St. Luke 17:21 Bible: King James Version (1611)]. Compare Jesus’s statement: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God,” [St. Matthew 5:8 KJV] with a similar teachings from the Upanishads: “By pure mind, you are able to realize the Supreme Reality” [*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: 4.4.19] “I am the vine and ye are the branches,” [St. John 15:5, King James Version] is a saying of Jesus that is reminiscent of the Indian Vishishtadvaita philosophy. “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy

kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” [St. Matthew 6:9,10, King James Version] is very much in keeping with Indian devotional philosophies.

Hindus believe that there is an inner evolution and gradual transformation taking place both at the level of the devotee as well as at the level of his understanding and interpretation of God. In fact, this is true with regard to all religions. We all begin our spiritual journey with some form of external practices. Gradually we are able to feel the reality of God even in the context of our secular life. God becomes a physical reality and we feel His presence every moment of our life. Eventually, even the line of demarcation between the secular and the spiritual disappears. In other words, the secular merges with the spiritual and the whole life becomes spiritualized. An ancient Sanskrit verse tells us “prathama pratima puja, japastotrani madhyama uttama dhyana bhava syat; soham bhavottamottama.” [*Mahanirvana Tantra*: XIV: 112] The first stage in spiritual life is image worship; the next stage is prayer and repeating the holy name of God. Still higher is meditating on God. At the final stage, the devotee begins to feel and experience God’s presence in his heart and everywhere. We bring an element of sacredness and sanctity in our speech, thought, and action. This, according to Hindu devotional philosophy, is the highest reach of spiritual evolution. A traditional Hindu devotee, reading the lives and teachings of St. Theresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross would not fail to see a reflection of this exalted state of devotional experience in Christian tradition.

But this reverence for an alien religious tradition was not at the cost of their faith in their own religion. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi: “I believe in the Bible as I believe in the Gita. I regard all of the faiths of the world as equally true with my own. I want the cultures of all the lands to blow about my house as freely as possible, but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people’s houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave.” [Quoted in ‘Adventures in Religious Life’ by Swami Yatiswarananda, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, India.] If a traditional Hindu like Mahatma Gandhi ever visited Jerusalem or Assisi he would have felt the same air of sanctity and sacredness that he would have felt while visiting Varanasi or Kedarnath.

A Hindu devotee who is practising the most sublime teachings of the Bhagavad Gita would readily recognize the meaning of the words of Broth-

er Lawrence ('The Practice of the Presence of God, London: the Epworth Press, 1957, P:23):

“The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, when several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament.”

The *Bhagavata Purana* defines the dearest devotee of God as the one who dedicates his every movement as an offering to God: “Whatever a man does with his body, speech, intellect, sense organs, or will and whatever he does following his instincts and natural impulses he should make an offering of all these to the Lord Narayana.” (XI.2.36). In actual practice, the ideal of total surrender to God’s will (*‘prapatti’* in Sanskrit) is not different from Jesus’ teaching: “Thy will be done.” [St. Matthew 6:10, King James Version]

The *Bhagavad Gita* teaches how to bring God into every moment of our life, into every thought and deed (BG: V.8,9,10): “The knowers of Truth (true devotees of God), their minds focused on God (Atman) should think they are doing nothing at all, God is doing everything, though seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, travelling, sleeping, breathing, speaking, opening and closing the eyes... With the mind focused on God, they think it is the senses that are acting” --- like Meister Eckhart’s “*Homo nobilis*” (deified man, the one who has realized Godhead).

Swami Brahmananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna used to instruct spiritual seekers of the importance of total dependence on God, a familiar theme found in Christian mystical literature. (“We can only learn to know ourselves and do what we can – namely, surrender our will and fulfill God’s will in us” – Saint Teresa of Avila.) [Selected Quotations from St. Teresa of Avila]

“Hold onto the pillar of God.”

In the rural parts of India, small children will hold onto a pillar and spin around it. They are not afraid of falling because they firmly hold onto the pillar. Similarly, we should firmly hold on to the holy name of God. Then, we can live in the world without being worldly minded like a boat moving on the

surface of water without the water entering it. The ideals of renunciation (“Take no thought for tomorrow”, [St. Matthew 6:34, King James Version] “You cannot serve God and Mammon,” [St. Luke 16:13, King James Version] according to the Bible) and total surrender to the will of God can be readily understood by any Hindu who is familiar with the Upanishadic teaching, “Immortality can only be obtained through renunciation” [*Mahanarayana Upanishad* XIV:14, Krishna *Yajur Veda*].

In modern times, great spiritual teachers like Sri Ramakrishna echoing the teachers of Bhakti movement (who emphasized total surrender to God and prayer as the most effective methods of overcoming obstacles in spiritual life) have emphasized prayer as the means to remove obstacles in spiritual life. This idea is a recurring theme in the works and lives St. Theresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and “The Way of A Pilgrim”, the well-known work from the Russian Orthodox tradition.

Hinduism offers four different approaches to spiritual life called the four yogas, namely, *Jnana Yoga* (path of knowledge), *Bhakti Yoga* (path of devotion), *Karma Yoga* (path of duty), and *Raja Yoga* (path of meditation and psychic control). They can be considered to be different doorways to spiritual awakening. Each of these, when practised with devotion and sincerity can lead the aspirant to deeper spiritual levels of experience. In other words, when we lead a more spiritually oriented life we become better human beings in our interactions with others. The practice of any of the yogas will develop in our hearts a natural appreciation for identical spiritual practices found in other traditions.

This does not mean that both Hinduism and Christianity are exactly similar to each other or that they teach the same doctrines in the same way. What it implies is that when we look at the fundamental teachings of both of these traditions we find some common universal and spiritual truths that unite humanity at a deeper level; like the teachings of compassion towards our fellow human beings, love of God (*Bhakti*), the ideal of total surrender to God’s will, certain common monastic principles and vows, and so on, these teachings should be the real basis of Hindu-Christian collaboration.

According to Vedanta, which embodies the most sublime teachings of Hindu philosophy and spirituality, Truth or the Absolute Reality is

One without a second. It is the universal spiritual reality which transcends time, place, and personality though it does not reject the latter. For example, the problem of evil is interpreted differently in Vedanta philosophy. From a Vedantic perspective, the Christ ideal, taken beyond the historical, social and anthropological dimensions is one universal spiritual Truth. Taken as a historical person, Hinduism looks upon Christ as one of the incarnations of God. But for Christians, Christ is the only begotten Son of God, the only incarnation of God, represents the Christian ideal and is unique as a Spiritual Teacher and Savior to the total exclusion of all the teachers of other religions. This may not be readily understood by Hindus. But we have to admit that, while a non-Christian may not be willing to accept this exclusivistic approach, and may look upon Christ beyond the historical perspective, Hindus admit that the traditional believers are fully justified in holding on to this uniqueness theory.

Christ: A Universal Spiritual Ideal

A Hindu is more likely to accept Christ as a universal spiritual ideal rather than just an historical event. Perhaps, this is the only logical approach for a non-baptized, non-Christian towards a great spiritual teacher like Jesus Christ. Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Radhakrishnan and several others have emphasized this approach. They thought that like Jesus Christ, the saints of Christian tradition who wrote works such as the “Imitation of Christ” and “Philokalia” and great mystics like St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, and Meister Eckhart were men and women of the highest spiritual accomplishment. Vivekananda’s words reflect the typical Hindu view of Christ in its most exalted aspect:

“If I as an oriental, have to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way left for me, that is only to worship Him as God and as nothing else.” (*Inspired Talks* – P:147).

The plurality of God’s incarnations is not accepted in Abrahamic traditions without a clear emphasis on the finality of any particular one. But a Hindu believes that God’s manifestations, as an ongoing process, can occur in every tradition in various degrees as a response to the needs

and demands of the age. A student of the Bhagavad Gita, the sacred book of Hindus will find in the personality of Jesus, the embodiment of all the characteristics of a spiritually enlightened person outlined in the second chapter of the text (verses 55-72).

Christ is accepted as an incarnation but the Hindus believe he is not the only one. There were incarnations before him and there will be more incarnations in the future wherever and whenever there is a decline of *dharma* (moral and spiritual values) and the rise of unethical practices (*adharma*).

As an ancient religious tradition which gives a lot of freedom to its adherents in spiritual matters and much less freedom in social practices, Hinduism can learn a lot from Christianity which, by contrast is somewhat rigid in spiritual matters and liberal in social conventions.

Some of the fundamental teachings of Hinduism such as the belief that the different religions of the world all are pathways to God, that everyone is a born seeker of God, consciously or unconsciously, that God is present in all of us as one immanent divine principle, that we can unfold and manifest this divinity within us through spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, etc., that everyone is destined to realize his own spiritual essence may appear to be in sharp contrast to the views of the more conservative sections of Christianity who tend to take a more exclusivistic approach to other faith systems but such ultra-conservative groups can be found in Hindu society as well.

But when we recognize the common thread of spirituality that runs through all the higher mystical teachings of the Christian tradition and the teachings of the Upanishads we will see a harmony and unity behind and beyond all the diversities.

Spiritual Inclusivism: Some Examples of Christian Universality

The inclusive approach of Hinduism is founded on the understanding of the immanence of divinity. God as spirit is present in all of us. This basic idea of the spiritual oneness of humanity underlines the traditional Hindu approach to other religions that came to India right from the 1st century AD

onwards - the early migrations of Jews, the Syrian Christians, the followers of Zoroastrian religion, and so on. The idea that humanity is spiritually one is based on the concept of the divine immanence, which has helped Hindus to look upon all religions with a sense of respect and reverence. We should remember that the early Indians who welcomed the Jews and Christians in the first century AD knew nothing about either of these faith systems. Still they looked upon them not with just toleration but with the full instinctive conviction that they are also on paths leading to God. ("Truth is One. Sages call it various names." Rig Veda I.164.46)

An inclusivistic approach to interreligious understanding in Christian tradition was brought out and emphasized by many modern scholars, saints, and theologians. We should remember that the Sermon on the Mount is one of the greatest documents of spiritual universalism known to mankind, and if it has an enduring message of compassion, the Cross represents an eternal promise of salvation and emancipation. A message like, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Soul, and with all thy mind," will have a natural appeal to any devotee of God of any religious persuasion.

The German theologian Karl Rahner, Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux), Dom Bede Griffiths and several other modern Christian theologians and thinkers tried to project this inclusivism of the Biblical tradition in modern times. Swami Abhishiktananda, Dom Bede Griffiths and several others who appreciated their work made a tremendous contribution to the gradual evolution of a new spiritual paradigm of interreligious understanding between Hinduism and Christianity. In fact, today we find an increasing number of theologians and thinkers coming forward to emphasize the universal dimension of Christ's teachings and Christian experience. They emphasize that the Biblical teachings refer to God's relationship with the whole of humanity rather than any particular group.

Harmony in Spirituality: Universal Spiritual Humanism

A union of India's ancient spiritual heritage as taught in the Bhagavad Gita and the teachings of Jesus as reflected in the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables constitute the essence of a unique paradigm of harmony and spiritual fellowship. A blending of the Christian ideal of self-sacrifice,

love and service, and the Hindu-Vedantic ideal of the spiritual unity and oneness of the whole humanity (and not just human beings alone) can be a wonderful platform for interreligious relations. When we realize that the whole humanity is one spiritual family we cannot hate anyone or any religious tradition. It is impossible to worship God on the one hand and not to love his children. As we make progress in spiritual life by loving God we also look upon others as God's children. In other words, before we pray to God we must make peace with His children. As Swami Vivekananda emphasized, 'The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted – let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion.' [*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* – Vol VI – Page: 298] The outward expression of God-realization is silent service to our next door neighbors – the whole humanity. As Lord Krishna declares in the Bhagavad Gita, "I (God) am the thread that runs through the pearls, as in a necklace." (BG VII.7)

Modern exponents of Hinduism, such as Vivekananda, have projected Advaita philosophy as a universal ethical principle. On the one hand, it teaches the essential spiritual oneness of existence. On the other hand, it considers service to our fellow human beings as the highest form of spiritual practice. It means that, if Advaita is the most exalted and the most intellectual expression of Hinduism, universal humanism is its most visible expression. As a doctrine of universal morality and ethics Advaita helps us to overlook the social anthropological differences between religious traditions and look upon all the devotees of God in all religions as a global spiritual family.

Today, the modern world is looking for the healing and unifying touch of practical spirituality which rises above institutionalized rituals and dogmas. We need to define religion in the language of practical spirituality. Religion should express itself as spiritual humanism with a healing touch for man's practical problems in everyday life. Inter-spirituality movements, the increasing popularity of interfaith dialogues, the spread of meditation groups including people from all religious traditions -- all these are healthy signs for our times. As two religious traditions which are immensely rich in spiritual culture with a long tradition of great mystics and spiritual men and women, Hinduism and Christianity can together project a new spiritual paradigm for humanity in the twenty-first century.

In Gratitude...

Interreligious Dialogue, at the deepest level, is “a journey of faith” (Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to Participants in the Tenth Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, 7 June, 2008). This spiritual journey, when undertaken in sincerity and humility, opens up new vistas, brings in new insights, fosters new friendships, builds genuine fraternity, and promotes social friendship. More than all else, this journey shapes individuals into authentic “brothers and sisters” to all people, irrespective of their differences.

We believe that PCID’s Deepavali messages of all these twenty-five years have been helpful to both Hindus and Christians, in some way, in their spiritual journey. It is our wish and prayer that this faith-journey leads us all, believers and people of good will, to a greater commitment to work “as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions” (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, 3 October 2020, no. 8), for the welfare of humanity and for peace and harmony in society.

We express our thanks to all those who have contributed to this book, most especially, the eminent scholars for their theological reflections on Hindu-Christian Collaboration on this momentous occasion. We are also profoundly grateful, in particular, to all the esteemed ‘interreligious dialogue personalities’ for their encouraging messages of ‘felicitations’ on the occasion of 25 years of Deepavali Messages from the PCID.

May we continue our journey of friendship and fraternity to become a beacon of light to our fragmented world!

Rev. Monsignor Indunil Janakaratne Kodithuwakku Kankanamalage
Secretary
Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue