

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**

**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**MISSION DEPARTMENT**

**JOSEPH LELIO PRUDENCE, C.S.Sp.**

**THE IMPLICATIONS OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE  
WITH HINDUISM**

**An Analysis of the Pont-Praslin  
Interreligious Dialogue Centre, Mauritius**

Moderator:  
**Rev. Dr. Fritz Stenger MAFr.**

A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Bachelor of Arts in Sacred Theology.

**NAIROBI – 2005**

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## DEDICATION

To every Mauritian of any religion and background, may God illuminate the journey of our history. To our ancestors who came from Europe, Africa and Asia, let your heart rejoice on the day when forgiveness, reconciliation, understanding and dialogue would have replaced suspicion, fear and racial discrimination in our country. To all missionaries and persons of goodwill may your efforts to dialogue permeate our society and foster our way of life. In a special way to my brother Claudaman, his wife Brinda and their two children, may your love for one another express the incarnation of interreligious dialogue.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank all those who have helped me in achieving this essay and pray so that God lavishly bestows his grace upon them. Blessed be God forever!

Special thanks to my brother-in-law Cheoramun, who inspired me to consider the theme of Interreligious dialogue with Hinduism. I lavishly thank my Father, my mother, my brothers and sisters for their moral support and uncountable contributions to my being.

Lots of thanks to Father Wenceslas Rabé and the Spiritans of the Indian Ocean Foundation who have given me the possibility to drink from the fountain of knowledge of Tangaza College. Special thanks go to all the confreres of the Spiritan community of Langata Nairobi, especially Father Paul Chuwa, from whom I have tasted the goodness of unity in diversity. Thanks to all the formators who have moulded my personality development. Their love and affection has been a source of stamina and encouragement in moments of difficulties. I say: "thank you." to Father Macdonald and Father Peter Asenga who with a critical mind read and corrected my work.

I extend my sincere gratitude to Father Raymond Zimmerman C.S.Sp of Pont Praslin Interreligious Dialogue Centre and Sister Mila of the Brahma Kumari Centre. They willingly sent me some vital information for my long essay, and sincerely shared their rich experience of interreligious dialogue.

Special thanks go to Reverend Doctor Fritz Stenger, my moderator who has patiently given me his generous assistance, counsel and encouragement so that I can realise this essay.

*Ki Bondié béni zot, e Protez zot!* May God always bless and protect you!

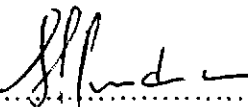
## EPIGRAPH

“Our home is not where we live, but where we feel accepted. Let us make our country a homeland, where Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, believers or non-believers can leave in peace and harmony and feel at home. Are we ready to pay the price?”


Joseph Lélío Prudence C.S.Sp.

## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Sacred Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credits. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged:

Signed: .....  .....  
Name of student: ..... Joseph Laho PRUDENCE, CSSp .....  
Date: ..... 03.02.2005 .....  
.....

This long essay has been submitted for examination with the approval as the college supervisor.

Signed .....  .....  
Name of Supervisor: .....  
Date: ..... 3 Feb 2005 .....  
.....

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### *The Motivation for Choosing This Topic*

Mauritius has a population of about one million two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. Fifty eight percent of the inhabitants are Hindus, fourteen percent are Muslims and twenty-eight percent are Christians. People of different ethnic group and religions meet in the street, at work and some in places of pilgrimage (examples Grand Bassin and the sanctuary of blessed Father Laval). Mixed marriages<sup>1</sup> are increasing. We have awarded ourselves titles such as “La nation arc en ciel” (“The rainbow nation”) and “the multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural country.”

Experiences show that we are still a juxtaposition of ethnic groups rather than a united nation. In February 1999, because of the death of a Creole singer “Kaya”, war broke out between Hindus and Creoles. Three persons were killed. Police stations were destroyed and houses burnt. Many people feared of a new racial war like in 1960-1968. After this event many people lack confidence in the persons of other ethnic groups and religions. Now we can hear people saying: “never again such a situation like February 1999.” These situations show that we have to make an effort to understand and know each other better. We have to overcome our prejudices. We are confronted with a situation that should be altered.

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<sup>1</sup> N.B. Mixed marriage is used in the Mauritian context to define a marriage between two persons of different faith. The term is not restricted to marriage between two Christians of different Churches as in the Code of Canon Law.

However, on the 30 September 2003, Mr Paul Bérenger, was the first Creole to become the prime minister of Mauritius.<sup>2</sup> From the independence of Mauritius (12<sup>th</sup> March 1968) up to 2003, the prime minister of that island has always been a Hindu from the *Vaish* caste.<sup>3</sup> This is a sign of hope. Our island Mauritius that appears to visitors as the 'star and the key of the Indian Ocean' is gradually becoming a point of encounter where European, African and Asian civilisation collaborate to create a new homeland and build our destiny in accord. This situation is part of the design of the Divine Providence calling Mauritians to replace the climate of suspicion and fear by an atmosphere of understanding and dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

### ***The Problematic***

While dealing with the topic of the implications of interreligious dialogue with Hinduism, several questions arise. What is the importance of interreligious dialogue? Does interreligious dialogue involve personal or mutual conversion? What is the relationship of Christianity to Hinduism and other religions? Can members of other religions be saved if they reject Christianity or the preaching of the Gospel? Are non-Christian religions salvific? How should we understand the universal significant role of Jesus Christ? In the face of several claims from other religions, how should we proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. SUNDANAM, "Paul Bérenger Premier Ministre, L'Utopie devient Réalité", in *La Vie Catholique* 3-9 October, 2003 p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. B. MUNGA, D. MEICHA, "The Paradise Island" in *New People*, n. 88 January -February 2004 p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. PAUL VI, *Message for The Independance of Mauritius*, Rome, March 1, 1968 in F. GIOIA, *Interreligious Dialogue, The Official Teaching of The Catholic Church* (1963-1995) Boston 1997, p.156.

### ***Our Aim***

We do not aim at giving a close and definitive answer to these questions. On the contrary, we aim at providing a reflection of how interreligious dialogue affects the aim, methods and the theology of mission. In addition, we want to discuss how interreligious dialogue challenges the life of the Church and its mission.

### ***Our Method***

To attain our aim, we shall locate and analyse the context of dialogue at the Pont-Praslin Interreligious Dialogue Centre of Mauritius. Then, we shall see how interreligious dialogue is a constitutive entity of mission through a biblical and dogmatic analysis. Afterwards we shall view some pastoral implications of interreligious dialogue. Finally we shall conclude.

## **Chapter I**

### **1. An Analysis of the Pont-Praslin Interreligious Dialogue Centre**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter we shall locate the Pont -Praslin Interreligious Dialogue Centre in the Mauritian context. We shall view how this centre creates a space of dialogue and reinforces the mutual understanding of Mauritians. The questions that arise are: When was that centre founded? How did it emerge? What are its main activities? What is its influence on the Mauritian style of life? This first chapter deals with those questions. Furthermore, we shall see how Mauritians perceive interreligious dialogue. In addition, we shall consider how that centre is a possibility to mould the Mauritian identity.

### ***1.1. Geographical Location of the Interreligious Dialogue Centre of Pont-Praslin***

The interreligious Dialogue Centre of Pont-Praslin is in the parish of Saint Michel, in the eastern part of Mauritius. It portrays the religious constituent of Mauritius that consists of about fifty-eight percent Hindus, twenty-eight percent Christians and fourteen percent Muslims.

### ***1.2. The Emergence of Pont-Praslin Interreligious Dialogue Centre***

In the 1979, two Spiritan fathers, Father Paul Raymond Zimmerman and father Cascaro, both of French origin, were searching for a way to dialogue with the Mauritians of Hindu and Muslim faith. From 1980, another Spiritan father, Jean Luc Rencker joined them in this work. Since then, father Jean Luc Rencker together with father Raymond Zimmerman have been accompanying groups such as *Mosaïque* and *Interculturel*. Furthermore, they have consecrated lots of their time to meet imams, pundits and swamis and to visit the Hindus, Islamic and Christian families in the parish of Saint Michel.

After the departure of Father Cascaro, father Jean Luc Rencker and father Raymond Zimmerman have been identifying religious items and beliefs, which exist in Mauritius.<sup>5</sup> When the Pope John Paul II visited Mauritius (14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> October 1991) Father Jean Luc Rencker and Father Raymond Zimmerman proposed to organise an interfaith prayer. Many adherents of other religions answered positively to that decision. A large number of them attended that prayer, held at the monument of Marie-Reine-de-

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. L. RENCKER, "Le dialogue. Nécessité de la foi", *La Vie Catholique* n. 32, 6-12 August 2004.

la-Paix, in Port Louis. Moreover, many Hindu priests regretted for not meeting the Pope due to other engagements.<sup>6</sup>

### ***1.3. The Activity of Pont-Praslin Interreligious Dialogue Centre***

#### ***1.3.1. Residential Sessions***

The centre proposes some residential sessions that enable the interested persons to know more about the different religions of Mauritius. There are representatives of the different religions who contribute for the sharing. Each session normally starts on Saturday at 18 h and ends the Sunday at 15h. Any one can register either for a part of a session or for all the session.

#### ***1.3. 2. Retreat***

Every year the Centre organises a retreat or recollection for persons who wish to have a time of silence or reflection. It aims at preparing various persons of different faith to communicate and dialogue with each other.

#### ***1.3.3. Social and Cultural Activities***

The centre offers the possibility to learn oriental languages like Maarathi, Mandarin, Telegu, Urdu and Hindi. Furthermore, there is a possibility to learn some occidental languages such as French and English. The Centre also initiates people to the different cultural music and arts of Mauritius.

The Centre proposes four types of sessions named session A, B C and D. The session A, aims at fostering the person's knowledge about the great world religions like Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism and Buddhism. It covers a period of ten months. Every

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<sup>6</sup> J. L. RENCKER, "Le Dialogue. Nécessité de La Foi" in *La Vie Catholique* n. 32, 6-12 August 2004.

month the registered persons attend one session. The persons discuss about how Mauritius is a religious rainbow. After the presentation of all the religious family of Mauritius, the participants are asked about the role of religion in each cultural outlook. Then they need to reflect about how religions contribute to unity and division.

Afterwards, the participants are presented to the fascinating world of Hinduism. They reflect on the different Hindu feasts. Indeed, more than two hundred thousands of Hindu-Mauritians devotees go for the yearly pilgrimage of *Maha Shivaratree*<sup>7</sup> at Grand Bassin.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, we see devotees who raise the *kavadee*<sup>9</sup> or walk on fire.<sup>10</sup> An immense mass of Tamil<sup>11</sup> Hindus gather at the seashore to celebrate *Ganga-snaan*<sup>12</sup>. They believe that the river Ganga (Ganges) that ends under the sea is a divine purifier and bestower of life.<sup>13</sup>

All Mauritians are charmed and impressed by the celebration of the feast of *Divali*.<sup>14</sup> At *Divali*, *diyas* (little clay lamps) are lit at sunset to offer a string of light that

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<sup>7</sup> *Maha Shivaratree* literally means the night of Shiva. It is the most popular Hindu festival in Mauritius, celebrated in the month of *Phaguna* (February-March).

<sup>8</sup> Grand Bassin (*Ganga Talao*) is a lake of 1800 feet above sea level situated in the heart of Mauritius. In 1890, Shri Jhummon Giri Gosagne an Hindu priest, dreamed of the lake forming part of Ganges. People believed that fairies came to bath there every night and named the lake *Pari Talao* (The lake of the water fairies). In 1972 water from the Ganges was poured into Grand Bassin. Since then the latter is called *Ganga Talao* (The lake of the Ganges).

<sup>9</sup> *Kavadee* is derived from two Tamil words, *kaavu* (to carry) and *thadi* (a piece of polished wood). The kavadee is decorated with green leaves, banana tree barks and flowers. The most commonest shape of kavadee is the ark. However, the kavadees vary in shape and form according to the creativity of the devotee. Cf. R. RAMDOYAL, *Festival of Mauritius*, Rose-Hill Mauritius 1990, pp. 47-55.

<sup>10</sup> Fire walking (*Theemithi*) is performed by Tamil Hindu, after rigorous fasting and penance. Generally the festival is in December and January, fixed according to the Tamil calendar.

<sup>11</sup> A *Tamil* is a Hindu originating from the south of India, mainly from the state actually known as Tamil Nadu.

<sup>12</sup> *Ganga Snaan* means 'Bath in the Holy Ganges'. It is also celebrated as *Ganga Nawmi*: "Birth of River Ganga".

<sup>13</sup> Cf. R. RAMDOYAL, *Festivals of Mauritius*, Rose-Hill Mauritius 1990, 45.

<sup>14</sup> *Divali* is the Hindu feast of light.



covers the verandas, windows, roofs and the yards of the Hindus' houses. That night becomes the brightest of the year. The feast symbolises "the triumph of the light of truth over the darkness of falsehood, the victory of knowledge over ignorance, evil and wickedness."<sup>15</sup>

In brief, Hinduism rhythm with the Mauritian life. Hinduism structures the thought and life of all Mauritians. However, Mauritians need to discover what constitutes the real life of Hindus beyond their perception. Furthermore, it is necessary that they see how classical *repère*<sup>16</sup> still allow people to enhance their spiritual quest in a modern world filled of mutations.<sup>17</sup>

#### ***1.4. How Do Mauritians Perceive Interreligious Dialogue?***

Muritians have different perceptions of interreligious dialogue. This is a sign that even though many Mauritians view the importance of interreligious dialogue, prejudices, fear and distrust still veil the spirit of many Mauritians. These sometimes give rise to irrational attitudes and ethnic hatred.

##### ***1.4.1. Exclusivism***

There is an anonymous text on the registration form for the session of Pont-Praslin, which says:

To share the culture of others yes, but at the spiritual level, the Christians and the God of Pagans have nothing in common. The things, which do not come from the light, are things of darkness; the sphere of Satan...Some persons will deny their faiths to the expense of unity... The true Christians do not fear to be persecuted for their faith ... The other Christians are just like chameleons that try to save their skin, as we notice at the head of the Church. The true Church of Christ, the fiancée does not prostitute with

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<sup>15</sup> D. RAMSEWAK, quoted in R. RAMDOYAL, *Festivals of Mauritius*, Roe-Hill Mauritius 1990, 41.

<sup>16</sup> A repère is a point reference.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. CENTRE D'ACCUEIL DE PONT-PRASLIN, *Sur Les Chemins du Dialogue*, Port Louis 2000, 3-5.

the gods of Hindus and other religions. She is pure and Her only fiancée is Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.<sup>18</sup>

This text portrays a religious exclusivism that looks down at Hinduism as a pagan religion. Such an attitude creates barriers to interreligious dialogue. It rejects the validity of Hinduism together with its spirituality. Furthermore, that attitude monopolises God to Christianity. Hence, it may foster a militant behaviour towards Hinduism and other religions. "God is not the monopoly of any human tradition, even of those that call themselves theistic or consider themselves religious. Every discourse that would try to imprison God in any ideology whatsoever would simply be sectarian."<sup>19</sup>

#### *1.4.2. Indifferentism*

Some people say: "All religions are the same for, God created all peoples. We are all children of God. Whether we pray Shiva, Jesus Christ or Allah, it is the same God." This idea conveys a certain indifferentism.

Indifferentism correlates a form of lazy tolerance. It is to "deny the ability to discern the relatively inadequate degrees of good and bad or true and false amongst plurality of competing values and religious truth."<sup>20</sup> It results from dealing with the plurality, which is complex. Thus, some persons prefer to accept different beliefs without judgement or discrimination. Persistent indifferentism sometimes leads to an amalgam of various beliefs called negative syncretism.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. *La Vie Catholique*, 28 February - 6 March 2003 in website, [pages.intnet.mu/lavie/index.htm](http://pages.intnet.mu/lavie/index.htm) (My translation from French).

<sup>19</sup> R. PANIKKAR, "How not to talk about God" in *Cross Currents* ISSN 0011-1953, Summer 1997, 151.

<sup>20</sup> W. R. BURROWS, "The Absoluteness of Christianity", in K. MÜLLER - T. SUNDERMEIER - S. B. BEVANS ed., *Dictionary of Mission, Theology, History, Perspective*, New York, 1998, 3.

### 1.4.3. Syncretism

Jean a Christian says: "*Tou les ans mo lev cavadee.*" ("Every year I carry the Cavadee." His reason is: "*Mo ti gagne enn accident et mo finn dimann Pousari prier pou moi et mo finn gueri.*"<sup>21</sup> ("I had an accident. Thus, I asked a Tamil priest to pray for me and I was cured.") Such affirmation provokes some questions, though it translates a certain desire of insertion into the Hindu world. What difference does it make to be Christian? What is the uniqueness of Christ in our salvation? How to relate Christianity with Hinduism?

We need to see syncretism within the process of inculturation. When we communicate messages across cultural boundaries the risks of both losing and gaining information exists. Schreier remarks: "Emphasis shift, nuances change, things forgotten, and new insights are gained ... Inculturation is a risk, but it is also a necessary one. Without it faith cannot take root. With it, the possibility of new and deeper insights into the meaning of Christ are always present."<sup>22</sup>

Father Schiller notes that people often associate a pejorative meaning and negative connotation to the word syncretism. For some persons, syncretism causes the loss of critical and basic elements of the Gospel. For others syncretism is an uncritical approach, which irreconcilably fuse tenets and practices of religions and cultures. Some also view syncretism as the mere mingling of authentic notions and realities of different

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<sup>21</sup> The italicised expression is in the Mauritian Creole.

<sup>22</sup> R. J. SCHREIER, "Inculturation of Faith or Identification with Culture?" in J. A. SCHERER - S. B. BEVANS ed., *New Directives in Mission and Evangelization* 3, New York 1998, 75.

spiritual worlds. However, when viewed closely, syncretism is a necessary stage in the process of inculturation, and in the formation of identity.<sup>23</sup>

While describing what makes the Mauritian identity, Bishop Maurice Piat implicitly refers to positive syncretism. He writes:

There are some elements that are common to Mauritians that forge our identity. It is true that a Mauritian Creole is different from a white Mauritian. However, it is also true that a Mauritian Creole is culturally different from a Creole of Reunion, Haiti, and Martinique. A white Mauritian is culturally different from a white French, English or Irish. Similarly, it is true that a Mauritian of Indian, Hindu or Muslim origin differs from a Mauritian of Chinese origin. It is also true that a Mauritian of Indian origin culturally differs from an Indian of South Africa, Fiji or Trinidad. The Mauritian of Chinese origin culturally differs from the Chinese of Hong Kong, Taiwan or China. In Mauritius there is a unique way of being Creole, white, Indian or Chinese.

It is like the juice coming from a fruit salad. This juice is neither an addition nor a ready-made product. The juice of the fruit salad gradually becomes what it is by the unique interaction amongst the various fruits. Similarly, we have a unique interaction amongst different races, cultures and religions that construct the Mauritian way of life. We should not undermine or discriminate any Mauritian culture to promote those unique Mauritian interactions that construct our identity.<sup>24</sup>

The above quotation portrays the benefits that arise when different cultures merge together. That merging does not annihilate the cultures. Instead they transform and become a unifying factor for the persons. This is a form of positive syncretism.

Inculturation simultaneously involves faithfulness to the Christian message and insertion in the cultural situation of peoples. Therefore, a certain positive and authentic syncretism is necessary for the ongoing of the Christian life. It reflects the Church that courageously searches for true catholicity.

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<sup>23</sup> P. SCHNEIDER, "Inculturation and Syncretism: What is the Real Issue?" in *SEDOS Bulletin Holdings*, vol. 25 n. 1, Rome 1993, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> M. PIAT, *Lettre Pastorale De Carême 2000, La Responsabilité Politique du Citoyen*, Port Louis 2000, 21 (My translation from the French).

The Bible is not the end in itself. "The Bible functions as eye-glasses not to be looked at but to be looked through, to see the reality and love of God in the world today. Tradition too is a resource and not the end in itself."<sup>25</sup> Thus, there is a need to see the work of God in the world.

Furthermore, we have to develop a sense of the People of God through analysis to see whether particular habits, cultures or teachings enhance the community's faith in God. Critical openness and an attitude of learning and listening are necessary prerequisites to develop our capacity of discernment. "Such attitude opens us to the Spirit of God and to the Spirit of truth present in all cultures in a new and exciting way"<sup>26</sup>

#### *1.4.4. Interreligious Dialogue Reveals to Us that We Are all Brothers and Sisters*

According to Sister Mila of *Brahma Kumari*<sup>27</sup> Centre, interreligious dialogue is a must because we are all children of the same Father. God the Father has come to re-establish heaven on earth through his children.

We are all children of God irrespective of our caste, creed, religion and belief and are heir of the kingdom of God. She perceives that "working with the Church of Pont-Praslin is a great joy, an auspicious moment to share experiences of common unifying factors. These are peace, love, bliss and purity."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> P. SCHINELLER, "Inculturation and Syncretism: What is the Real Issue?" in *SEDOS Bulletin Holdings* volume 25, n. 1, Rome 1993, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> P. SCHINELLER, "Inculturation and Syncretism: What is the Real Issue?" in *SEDOS Bulletin Holdings*, volume 25, n. 1, Rome 1993, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Brahma Kumari is a World Hindu Spiritual School that teaches and experiences knowledge, yoga, inculturation of virtues and service. Many of the persons live community life and are celibate.

<sup>28</sup> S. MILA, Brahma Kumari Centre, Centre de Flacq Mauritius, Interview through Email, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

According to her, each human being is a child of the supreme soul, who aspires to communion with God. She sees different religions as different branches of the same tree that have God as the seed. "When you hold the seed you have the knowledge and potential of the whole tree. Meditation is like watering the seed and the root. It empowers the whole tree. The inter-connection of all religions is symbolised by the Christmas tree in Christianity and by the *kalpa* tree in Hinduism."<sup>29</sup>

Prayer with love, dedication and discipline is the path for the ultimate union for which every soul aspires: attainment of bliss. Furthermore, since we are children of the Supreme, divine virtues are our innate, inherent qualities. Living our virtues and values will bring harmony to the world.

### ***1.5. Discoveries about the Hindu Religion***

All Hindus commonly believe in *Dharma*, reincarnation, *Karma* and *Moksha*. The latter is the liberation of every soul through various moral actions based on meditative yoga. Furthermore, they believe in the fundamental principles of non-violence *ahimsa* and the primacy of *Guru*.

#### ***1.5.1. The Four Goals of Life***

The *Purushartha*, the four goals of life are common to almost all Hindus. They are *Karma*, *Artha*, *Dharma* and *Moksha*. All human beings seek *Karma* (physical or emotional pleasure) and *Artha* (power, fame and wealth). However as the individual grows in maturity one learns to govern these legitimate desires within a higher and

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<sup>29</sup> S. MII.A, Brahma Kumari Centre, Centre de Flacq Mauritius, Interview through Email, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

pragmatic moral framework known as *Dharma*. The latter is the attainment of moral harmony in all things.

Nevertheless, the only true infinite fulfilment of human life is *Moksha*, which is also referred as *Mukti*, *Samadhi* or *Nirvana*. This is the liberation from the cycle of life, death and existential duality.

#### *1.5.2. The Four Stages of Life*

According to Hindus human life consists of four *ashramas* (phases or stages). These are *Brahmacharya*, *Grihasthya*, *Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*. *Bramachyara* literally means, “grazing Brahma.” During that stage the person is a celibate and learns the secret of life through contemplation, under the guidance of a guru. In this way, that same person gradually acquires a sense of responsibility for their future life. *Grihasthya* (also known as *Samsara*) is the Householder’s stage, whereby the person satisfies *Karma* and *Artha* within a married and professional life. *Vanaprastha* is the gradual detachment from the material world. The person has to handle one’s duties to one’s sons and daughters in order to be able to consecrate more time to contemplation of the truth and make holy pilgrimages. *Sanyasa* is the final stage whereby one goes to seclusion to find God through Yogic meditation and peacefully prepare the body for the next life.<sup>30</sup>

#### *1.5.3. God is Creator*

The Upanishad invites the Hindus to proclaim and thank God for his kindness and to worship Him as creator.

My God be kind to us. We worship God as creator. We worship God as the soul. We worship God as the sustainer of all that is visible. I proclaim God. I proclaim his

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. <http://www.hindu.com>.

presence in all living beings. I proclaim him as goodness and righteousness. I proclaim him as truth and wisdom. I thank God. I thank him for his guidance. I thank him for the teacher he has given me. I thank him for helping and guiding my teacher. Aum! Peace! Peace! Peace!<sup>31</sup>

God the creator is supreme and eternal. His spirit is the soul of all living being. It is God's spirit and power that brings everything to existence. As stated in the Bhagavad-Gita:

God is the supreme and eternal. The soul is God's spirit, which dwells in every living being. God's power brings all living beings in existence, and sustains them. The bodies of all living beings are made of matter, which in time passes away: but the soul is eternal.<sup>32</sup>

#### 1.5.4. *The Incarnation of God*

"At the centre of Hinduism as in Christianity stands the incarnation of God, God's becoming human, though of course, this is not always free from a false humanization of God."<sup>33</sup> The believer is not a slave. He becomes his partner his friend. "Only God-lovers can see and experience the fullness of the Godhead as it is tirelessly active in time."<sup>34</sup> God says: "by worship of love addressed to me alone can I be known and seen in such a form and as I really am: (so can my lovers) enter into me"<sup>35</sup>

According to the Bible too, human beings are God's friends and not his slaves. In the person of Jesus God manifests the climax of the love of a friend who gives his life for the entire humanity. Jesus said: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's

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<sup>31</sup> Taittiriya, *Upanishad*, quoted in R. VAN DE WEYER ed., *366 Readings from Hinduism*, Ohio, Canada, 2000, 4/4.

<sup>32</sup> *Bhagavad-Gita* 8:3-4. Quoted in Robert VAN DE WEYER ed., *366 Readings from Hinduism*, Ohio, Canada, 2000, 5/31.

<sup>33</sup> H.G. PÖLLMANN, *Encounters with Hinduism*, London 1996, 5.

<sup>34</sup> M. DHAVAMONY, *Hindu Spirituality*, Rome 1999, 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Bhagavad-Gita*, 11:54.



life for one's friends."<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Abraham became God's friend through faith. "...Abraham believed in God, and he was called the friend of God."<sup>37</sup>

#### *1.5.5. Intrareligious and Interreligious Harmony*

Hindus perceive God as one reality that manifests himself in many forms. As a result, there are many manners of worship in the Hindu fold. Furthermore, there is a certain tolerance and indifference to doctrinal divergence. It is namely that divergence that leads to the unity of Hindus. Seemingly, this leads to Hindu's respect towards the persons of other faith and their religions. "All the diverse doctrines and paths originating at different times and in different countries, however lead ultimately to the same Supreme Truth, like the many travellers from different places to the same city."<sup>38</sup>

Ignorance of the absolute Truth and misunderstanding of the different doctrines lead to bitterness, animosity and quarrels. It is because human beings wrongly consider that their own path is the best and the only way.<sup>39</sup> Most Hindus believe that their God is the same as the Christian God. It is the mode of worship that differs.

Dialogue is very important for Hindus. The Upanishads and Bhagavad-Gita are forms of dialogues. To advance in spirituality a student (*siya*) needs to dialogue with his master (*guru*). That dialogue is not only a discourse or an intellectual exchange of ideas. Its purpose is to bring to dialogue their life experience (*anubhava*). Thus, spiritual

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<sup>36</sup> John 15:6, NRSV.

<sup>37</sup> James 2:23 NRSV.

<sup>38</sup> Yogavasistha V. III. 96. 51 quoted in M. DHAVAMONY, *Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Rome 1997, 165.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Yogavasistha V. III. 96. 52. 53 quoted in M. DHAVAMONY, *Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Rome 1997, 165.

learning is experiential and leads to self-realization (ātmasāksātkāra). It is the continuous experience of truth.<sup>40</sup>

### ***1.6. The Emergence of Other Interreligious Movements: a Desire for Dialogue***

Since the 1990's, Mauritius has been witnessing the mushrooming of various interreligious movements and groups. Such phenomenon indicates the existence of a new spirit of tolerance and dialogue, which creates a new relation between Christianity and other religions. That same spirit establishes a channel of communication that reinforces the persons' commitment for the good of all Mauritians. We are going to look at some of these groups.

#### ***1.6.1. Groupe Interculturel (The Intercultural Group)***

Father Jean Luc, Linda, Anil, Daniella, Madhoury and Robert are amongst the members of the *groupe inter-culture* (intercultural Group). Each member of this group comes from a different social and cultural milieu. Robert Chevreau says: "I joined the group inter-culture to foster my knowledge of the various cultures of my country... This helps me to understand our differences and to level the problems that exist among us."<sup>41</sup>

Linda Yagapen is a Catholic of Tamil culture and origin. She says that every year the IMCA (Indo Mauritian Catholic Association) celebrates the *Divali* and *Varusha Pirrapu* in communion with the Christian community in the Church. According to her some persons use to say: "*Bann malbar la inn pran tou dan nou pays, tou pès dan*

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<sup>40</sup> M. DHAVAMONY, *Christian Theology of Inculturation*. Rome 1997, 164.

<sup>41</sup> S. SEERYAVE, "Contre Le Communalisme," in *Look Magazine* n. 34, 24 May 2001 p. 27. (My translation from French)

*gouvernman, ki ou vinn 'er dan legliz?*"<sup>42</sup> ("The persons of Indian origin have taken every thing in our country, including all the jobs in the governmental sector. What do you come to do in the Church?")

#### 1.6.2. *Groupe Mosäique (The Mosaic Group)*

*Groupe Mosäique* is another fruit of the Interreligious dialogue Centre of Pont-Praslin. Mr Patrick Guimbeau the chairman of the group says: "This group came after four years of reflection together. As believers in God we wanted to carry the religious dialogue at another level. Since 1998 we have organised many discussions and debates on peace, love, friendship, violence..."<sup>43</sup>

This is Mrs Nina Gopaul's experience of the *Mosäique*: "I am of Muslim faith... It's a way to practise my religion. My relation with God is not only vertical. It is a relation with other brothers and sisters who are different from us. It is that difference that we should respect to appreciate others."<sup>44</sup> Allan Purahoo a Hindu says: "Since I am in the *Mosaïque* group I am able to express my opinions more freely without harming others."<sup>45</sup>

For Harold Julie "the belief in God our source of union is what motivates us to think in terms of Inter-religious dialogue. Instead of organising something separately, we work together ... We are conscious that the source of our division in society is that

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<sup>42</sup> This sentence of Mauritian creole is quoted in S. SEEYAVE, "Contre le Communalisme" in *Look Magazine* p. 27. (My translation from Creole).

<sup>43</sup> S. SEEYAVE, "Mosäique", in *Look*, n. 34, 24 May 2001, p. 35. (My translation from French)

<sup>44</sup> S. SEEYAVE, "Mosäique", in *Look* n. 34, 24 May 2001, p. 34 (My translation from French).

<sup>45</sup> A. PURAHOO, Interview through Email, 12 August 2004.

we do not know one another enough. We need to discover and appreciate our differences.”<sup>46</sup>

#### *1.6.3. The Intercultural Committee for the Respect of Life*

The *Comité de dialogue pour le respect de la Vie* (Intercultural committee for the respect of Life) was founded in 2001. It consists of Mauritian citizens who care for the respect of life. Amongst them are members of NGOs, religious leaders of various denominations, and counsellors. Their main aim is to conscientise people that sex and love are meant for procreation and life, by presenting God as the master of life. Through counsellors, the media and its website (<http://aimelavie.intnet.mu>) that committee mobilises the persons about the irreversible traumas of abortion.

#### *1.6.4. The Group SOS Femmes (Women's SOS)*

This group consists of women of the three main religions of Mauritius, who meet monthly to discuss about issues that affect women in the contemporary society. Those women discuss and analyse issues such as abortion, child rearing, the upraising of youth, and the role of women in politics, single parents in a sociological, scientific and religious point of view. One of their meetings held on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004 dealt with women in religion.

According to Pundit Yudhisther Munboth, women have a noble role in Hinduism. They mould the character of the child to be born, for, women are the connection between the child and the society. According to the Vedas, a woman has the

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<sup>46</sup> S. SEEYAVE, “Mosaïque”, In Look, no 34, 24 May 2001, p. 34 ( My translation from French) .

right to be instructed, to accomplish religious rituals, to choose her husband, and to participate in the life of the society.<sup>47</sup>

The assembly of the *SOS Femmes*, concluded that their vocation is to be carriers of life. They are to promote peace, openness and respect of differences so that people of different cultures and religions can cohabit together.

The women proposed that we interpret religious texts and books with a critical mind. According to *SOS Femmes*, we should not manipulate and alter sociological arguments to theological arguments that exclude women from transmitting religious values. They proposed to question biased arguments that exclude women from religion such as feminine impurity, women are weak and their places are at home.<sup>48</sup>

#### *1.6.5. The Spiritan Lay Associate Movement*

This movement consists of ten persons who co-operate with the Spiritan Fathers of Pont-Praslin in the interreligious dialogue. They understand that commitment as a means of witness to God's call. It is a way of dialogue with persons who live in different cultural horizons. Indeed, in Mauritius the Christians are the minority. Thus, they have to bear witness to their faith in a milieu of Hindus and Muslims. This calls the Christians to look at the other religions without prejudices. Ghislaine Martinet the eldest of the group (65 years old) says: "I have discovered the Spiritans through the sessions on popular beliefs. Then I became interested in the Spiritan Spirituality. I try to help the

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. D. BABOORAM, "Femmes et Religions. Libération ou Emprisonnement", in *La Vie Catholique* no.11 March 2004 p. 4-5 (My translation from French).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. D. BABOORAM, "Femmes et Religions. Libération ou Emprisonnement", in *La Vie Catholique* no.11 March 2004 p. 4-5 (My translation from French).

members of the different groups of Christians that I encounter to an openness to people of different Faith.”<sup>49</sup>

Harold Julie has collaborated with the Spiritans of Pont-Praslin for eight years. He has discovered that to live his mission it is necessary to have a group of reference. “This is why I have joined the *Équipe Noyau de Pont-Praslin* and have since been in contact with the Spiritans. I like the Spirituality of Father Libermann. I also form part of the group *Mosaïque*. This group was born from Pont-Praslin interreligious dialogue Centre. Our aim is to constitute a common ground for reflection and actions with Hindus, Muslims and Christians”<sup>50</sup>

Bernard Mouza is a *îlois*<sup>51</sup> who has followed all the sessions proposed by the Pont-Praslin interreligious dialogue Centre. He says: “I live my mission in the world of the *îlois*, bringing to them a sign of hope”<sup>52</sup>

#### 1.6.6. *What Can We Learn from These Interreligious Movements?*

These different interreligious movements consist of people of various religions who manifest the need of witnessing to mutual understanding and peace. This desire is not only based on humanitarian and humanistic values. It is rooted in the realm of deeper truths that affects human life and its destiny.

Interreligious dialogue is necessary in a world that denies values such as human rights, the inviolability of life and the dignity of each and every human being. Through

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<sup>49</sup> G. MARTINET, Interview through Email, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2004.

<sup>50</sup> H. JULIE, Interview through Email, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2004.

<sup>51</sup> An *îlois* is someone who was deported from the island of Agalega at the time of the Independence of Mauritius in 1968.

<sup>52</sup> B. MOUZA, Interview through Email, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2004.

interreligious dialogue, we bear witness that truths remain the point of reference for every person and for the society at large. We learn to respect every person's dignity, irrespective of his ethnic origin, religious affiliation or political party. When allowed to permeate the grassroots, interreligious dialogue corrects the misunderstandings that different communities have towards each other. They do not perceive each other as spies and enemies, but as friends.

In addition, it fosters solidarity in building a more just and human society. Furthermore, genuine dialogue enables us to understand that we are religious persons. Thus, we discover the need of encouraging religious freedom for all in order to promote harmony. We become aware that violations of human dignity and the destruction of the environment through violence, wars, oppression and injustice are opposed to the true essence of religions.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *To the Participants in the Sixth Assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP)*, at the Synod Hall, Rome, November 3, 1994. Cf. also JOHN PAUL II, *To the Participants in the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' conference*, Manila January 15, 1995 in G. FRANCESCO, *Interreligious Dialogue*, Boston 1997, 529-532.

**Conclusion.**

At the end of this chapter we shall recall that Pont-Praslin Interreligious Dialogue Centre, was born from the initiatives of persons of good will who wanted to go beyond prejudices and barriers.

These initiatives opened the eyes of many persons upon the need of collaborative interreligious ministry, resulting in the mushrooming of other interreligious groups. We noticed that those religious movements permeate various strata of Mauritian daily life. This phenomenon translates the need to respect mutual understanding, and the search for a point of reference in a rapidly changing world.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **2. Cultural and Sociological Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

Interreligious dialogue is a challenge for people of different faiths to strive together in a neighbourly spirit. They need to share their joys and sorrows, their human problems and concerns. This should stimulate a dialogue of action whereby the persons of different faith collaborate for the transformation of the society and for the integral development and liberation of people.

Interreligious dialogue is a pilgrimage in the world of the others. The more we penetrate the universe of the persons of different faith, the more the mystery in the others' faith is unveiled. Thus, we realise that we need others to grow.

What are some of the cultural and sociological challenges of Interreligious dialogue? What should we do to go beyond the cultural and sociological challenges? In this chapter we shall see some sociological impacts and challenges of interreligious dialogue.

### *2.1. Interreligious Dialogue Invites Us to Go Beyond the Phenomenon of Exclusion*

In Mauritius we can notice some concentrations of ethnic groups in some specific zones and regions. This was particularly caused by the racial war of 1960-1968. For example in regions as Roche-Bois, Bambous and Cassis, we find a great demographic concentration of 'general population,' also called 'Creole.' At Plaine Verte and Plaine Magnien, we find a high population of Muslims.

Politicians, ministers, parliamentary members and political parties use these ethnic divisions for their advantages. We can notice from ministers and politicians, linguistic expressions that enclose people in ghettos. Sometimes they say: "We should free the 'Creole' from exclusion." Is it not formulating such a statement on behalf the 'Creole' or another ethnic group, enclosing them in the same system of exclusion? Furthermore, the other ethnic groups may perceive such a thing as favouritism.

In Mauritius if the government builds a bridge at Roche-Bois, people will say that this is given to the 'Creole.' If it is at Triolet, it is for the Hindus, and if it is in Plaine Verte it is for the Muslims. Sometimes we hear people saying: "*Ki ministre la inn fer pou Creole cité?*" "(What has the minister done for the 'Creoles' who live in housing estates?)." Some also say: "*Li pa pran bann malbar la campagne compte.*" ("He does not have consideration for the Hindo Mauritian<sup>54</sup> villagers.")

In Mauritius, we are in a system whereby the state and the persons, generally think in terms of groups and ethnicity. On the opposite end, to solve the problem of exclusion, it is necessary to accentuate on personnel, family and citizen's development,

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<sup>54</sup> Hindo-Mauritian is a term defining people of Mauritius whose ancestors come from India.

instead on regional and ethnic development. We should promote the integration of every person in the society, rather than exclusion, both in words and in deeds. Thus, interreligious dialogue can foster our understanding in order not to fall into ethnic traps. We are invited to step further and not to fear differences.

## ***2.2. A Redefinition and a Reappropriation of the Term Creole Is Necessary***

In Mauritius the term 'Creole' is usually restricted to persons whose ancestors came from Africa and Madagascar. The persons of 'general population' sometimes claim this term. It is time to look into this idea. Who forms part of the Creole world? Should we reserve this term to a particular group?

The ancestors of all Mauritians came from different parts of the world to inhabit the same country. They came from Asia particularly from India and China. Some came from Europe (France, England, Ireland and Holland). Others came from Africa and Madagascar. Nowadays the Mauritians live on an island, where there is a cohabitation of these different cultures.

As a result every Mauritian is geographically separated from the land of his ancestors. Some of these ancestral cultures, customs and traditions have been mixed. They have become ingredients that give the Mauritian way of life its identity. By this way, everybody independently of his ethnic, socio-cultural and religious background shares a common culture. This is to live as a person being shared among different cultures coming from Asia, Africa, Europe and Madagascar. Furthermore Creole is the language that each and every Mauritian can speak and understand. Thus, we should see 'Creolity' not only as a hereditary inheritance, but also, as that which constructs our

identity and unity. This poses inculturation as a necessary condition for every Mauritians and every church, to foster dialogue.

### ***2.3. Our Church Should Be Rooted in Each and Every Culture***

The church of Mauritius is usually identified as the people of 'general population'. These are the persons whose ancestors are from Africa, Madagascar or from Europe. Many Christians and people of other religions think that the role of the church is to defend the cause of the Creole against the others. Is this way of thinking not a mean of creating cultural and ethnic seclusion? It is time for the Church of Mauritius to go beyond these ethnic and cultural divisions, which is identification to the 'Euro-Creole'<sup>55</sup> world.

Let us take for example: when someone of the Hindi culture adheres to the Christian's faith, one is told by his surroundings to act like a 'Creole' or a European. Although there have been considerable changes promoting inculturation in Mauritius, many persons feel surprised to see someone dressed in an Indian fashion in our churches. These behaviours are signs of disrespect and misunderstandings of unity in diversity. It is not the way of dressing, the customs or the cultures that identify a good Christian, but the conversion of heart and faith in the triune God.

The faith of a person who comes from an Indian background takes root in his culture. For, "culture is a vital expression of the beliefs, relationships, celebrations and the life of the people."<sup>56</sup> It is dangerous to cut that person's cultural root, for; it

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<sup>55</sup> Euro-Creole is a Creole whose ancestor came from Europe.

<sup>56</sup> A. BELLAGAMBA, *Mission and Ministry in the Global Church*. New York 1992, 118.

incapacitates one's proper personal development. It is like cutting the root of a tree. If you cut the root of a tree, the tree will die.

Nevertheless, conversion implies a minimum break with the past to embrace something new. This newness is the personal profession of faith to the Father who communicates to us through his Son in the Holy Spirit. Conversion encompasses the person's conscious belonging to the Church, through the Sacraments. However, we need to understand that conversion is holistic. Above all, the main protagonists in that process are God and the convert. The latter explicitly experience that newness personally with the eyes of faith. The perception and articulation of that newness is influenced by the person's cultural background and history. Christianity should not be alienation to the Hindi culture. On the contrary, conversion to Christianity must enable the person to live one's culture better.<sup>57</sup>

We should let ourselves be enlightened by Jesus Christ. His incarnation was for the salvation of the whole humanity to recapitulate everything in him. It actualises the encounter of the divine and human sphere, for God is present in all the strata of human history. Jesus was born as a man, as a Jew in Bethlehem, Galilee and spoke Aramaic. Though he was born in a particular time and place, his ministry was not limited to the persons of his race. His love and mercy broke all boundaries and frontiers. He lived and died for all humanity. "Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the saviour of the world. In his *Kenotic* condition the Son of God became the 'historical' Jesus, the Word become

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. R. J. SCHREITER, "A Discussion on Inculturation", in M. MOTTE - J. R. LANG ed., *Mission in Dialogue*, New York 1982, 551.

flesh in a particular time and place (cf. John 1:14; Galatians 4:4); and in his resurrection he is constituted the 'cosmic' Christ, the saviour of all (cf. Ephesians 1:20-22)."<sup>58</sup>

The incarnation of Jesus ascertains that inculturation is effective when the criteria of affirming identity and locating the need for social change are simultaneously considered. "Social change without some point of reference leads to alienation and inner death. Without identity, a community loses its soul; without facing change, it loses contact with the world of which it is a part. Theologically they represent the two dimensions by which we experience God: creation and redemption."<sup>59</sup>

By choosing his apostles from different cultures and groups, Jesus Christ teaches us that we can be united through our diversity. We are called to grow in God's love, by loving our neighbours. Jesus Christ does not fear barriers or prejudices. He communicates with the Samaritan woman; He cleanses the lepers and heals the sick. He goes to eat at Zaccheus' place, a tax collector. The gospel is full of examples of Christ's self-giving love.

Similarly, the Mauritian Church must not be perceived as a mere sociological body. She has to identify herself to the body of Christ. The church is simultaneously visible and invisible. She is at the same time the mystical body of Christ and a sociological body, for it is anchored in history with its different cultures and societies. The Church is the people of God advancing towards consummation and perfection.

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<sup>58</sup> J. B. BARLA, *Christian Theological Understanding of other Religions according to D.S. Amalorpavadas*, Rome 1999, 27.

<sup>59</sup> R. J. SCHREITER, "A Discussion of Inculturation", in M. MOTTE - J. R. LANG ed., *Mission in Dialogue*, New York 1982, 550.

However, that pilgrimage starts here and now. Thus the Church needs to radiate Christ the unique saviour of humanity. However, the Christians should acknowledge that the Holy Spirit “is the principal agent of mission.” The Holy Spirit precedes us in our mission. The church simultaneously originates and receives her mission, as a gift from the Holy Spirit to be shared by the whole humanity. We are thus invited to leave aside our prejudices, whether they are cultural or psychological.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we discovered that interreligious dialogue, raises a greater universal concern to our brothers and sisters. It challenges our conscience about the need to work for the common good, to overcome the temptations of favouritism, segregation and seclusion.

Interreligious dialogue tears away our barriers and our unfounded prejudices. Then, we gradually discover that our cultural identity is not necessarily that which divide us, or that in which Mauritians differ from each other (the race the culture the religion). Some elements that are common to all Mauritians build and foster our identity. In addition, we have a style of interactions, amongst different races cultures and religions, which is unique in Mauritius. It calls to better co-operation amongst persons of different races, ethnic groups and religions.

We also discovered a new way of perceiving *Creolity* as our Mauritian way of life that consists of a merging culture from Africa, Asia and Europe. Furthermore, the Creole Culture is that which cements the various races, religions and traditions of Mauritius, for it is simultaneously the common language to all and the culture that we share in common, albeit our differences.

However, interreligious dialogue is not for mere coexistence of culture. It has a transcendental aim in God our saviour and creator. Interreligious dialogue urges us to ask some questions like: Where do we come from? Where are we heading? What is our destiny? Why are we created different? Who made us different?



## **Chapter III**

### **3. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction.**

We will now see how interreligious dialogue is in the plan of God. For this purpose we shall look into some selected Biblical texts. Afterwards we shall analyse the dogmatic foundations of interreligious dialogue by looking at some documents of the Church. We should focus on the dialogue with Hindus, through the help of the reflections of some Hindu theologians like Parikkar and Amaladoś.

### 3.1. *Biblical Foundations of Interreligious Dialogue*

#### 3.1.1. *The Universality of Salvation*

The book of Genesis portrays the idea that from the very beginning "God's message and action aim at universality."<sup>60</sup> The first eleven chapters of Genesis refer to the whole world with all its nations. The theology of creation provides a unifying factor for all the apparent dualities of mission like creation-salvation, nature-grace, Church-world, Christianity-religions, development-preaching, creation-redemption.<sup>61</sup>

God created humanity and the universe because He is the God of life, who wants to communicate his life to the full. The entire creation is destined to salvation. God continually bestows his grace that perfects nature. "We are all participants in the reality of creation which comes out of the grace of God. As a participant in the reality of creation, I am a son of grace, existing by the grace of God. Everything else too, exists by the grace of God. Therefore, I have *koinonia*<sup>62</sup> with everything that exists."<sup>63</sup> The creation theology invites all human beings to refrain from conflictual, disrespectful and abusive relationship with God's creation.

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<sup>60</sup> H. RZEPKOWSKI, "Creation Theology and Missiology" in Karl Muller, Theo Sundmeier, ed., *Dictionary of Mission Theology: History, Perspective*, New York 1987, 90.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. H. RZEPKOWSKI, "Creation Theology and Missiology" in *Dictionary of Mission Theology, History Perspective*, K. MÜLLER – T. SUNDMEIER, ed., New York 1987, 90.

<sup>62</sup> Koinonia means communion.

<sup>63</sup> T. PAUL, ed., *Present-day Challenges to Religion (A symposium)*, Kerala, India 1973, 77.

The entire humanity and the world are waiting for the definitive redemption when God will be all in all. The letter of Saint Paul to the Romans states that the whole creation will be delivered from slavery through the participation of the life in the Spirit (Romans 8:18-22).

Thus, the Church's duty is to proclaim the Gospel of life through preaching, action, development and witness to the world. This echoes in the commissioning of the disciples. They are sent to the world to be restorers of creation. This is why they are called to be the salt and light to the world (Matthew 5:13-16), to be fruitful witnesses (John 15:16) and to be peacemakers (28: 19-20).<sup>64</sup>

The Old Testament testifies that from the beginning of creation God made a covenant with all peoples. This shows that there is one unique history of salvation for the entire humankind. The Covenant with Noah, the man "who walked with God"<sup>65</sup> symbolises in a special way the divine intervention of God in the history of the nations.

Furthermore, to stress upon this one history of salvation the New Testament refers to some non-Israelite figures of the Old Testament as models of heroic faith. Abel, Enoch and Noah are persons who knew, adored and believed in the same one true God who revealed himself to Abraham and Moses.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> J. CHEW, *When You Cross Cultures, Vital Issues facing Christian Missions*, Singapore 1984, 55-56.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Genesis 6: 9-10.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Hebrew 11: 4-7.

In addition, the Gentile priest Melchisedek blesses Abraham the Father of all believers. It is the history of salvation that reaches its climax and “fulfilment in Jesus Christ in whom is established the new and everlasting covenant for all peoples.”<sup>67</sup>

### *3.1.2. We Are of Common Goal and Origin*

The ground of the universality of salvation is our common goal and origin. All the persons and peoples of various races, colours, cultures or religions share a common fundamental equality. All of us are made in the same image and likeness of God. We share the same condition by being partakers in the same life of God.

We note a universal *Koinonia*, which is reinforced by our ultimate common goal. This consists in reaching our fullness by sharing in God’s life as children of God. Thus the role of the Church is to assimilate God’s project, to enable all persons and peoples to live accordingly their own identity as God’s children.

### *3.1.3. Israel as a Representative of the Nations*

Israel was deeply conscious and aware of its unique role and status as a chosen people. However, “this election (is) by a process of formation and continuous exhortations to preserve the purity of monotheism constitutes a mission.”<sup>68</sup> Israel was constituted by God as a witness of God as a mediator of his love and grace to the nations. “Essentially, Israel had sufficient knowledge of God and of the God-man relationship to enable her to communicate both valuable theological information and

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<sup>67</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, *Dialogue and Proclamation* n. 19, in J. A. SCHERER, S. B. BEVANS ed., *New directions in Mission and Evangelization I*, New York 1992, 182.

<sup>68</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, *Dialogue and Proclamation* n. 20, in J. A. SCHERER, S. B. BEVANS ed., *New Directives in Mission and Evangelization I*, New York 1992, 182.

more elevated ethical standards to her pagan neighbours.”<sup>69</sup> The Israelites believed in one God and made it a tenet of their faith. However, in the beginning their monotheism was merely a fanatical belief to their liberal oriental contemporaries.

Israel knew God because he had shown himself to her in theophany, prophecy and prodigy. Deutero-Isaiah conveys this idea in these words: “...There is no other god besides me a righteous God and a savior; there is no one besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God and there is no other.”<sup>70</sup>

It was only in the closing of the Old Testament that the Israelites started to acknowledge that God is the creator of all. He called all human beings including Israel’s worst enemies. Evidently this shows that God loves them.

#### *3.1.4. Revelation is also Outside of Christianity*

Can revelation be found outside Christianity? In his letter to the Romans Saint Paul affirm that the pagans are able to know God though their natural reason and by observation of their natural world. Paul writes: “What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are have been understood and seen through the things he has made.”<sup>71</sup>

Thus they can arrive to the conclusion that God is omnipotent, intelligent and personal. The Bhagavad-Gita recognises God as creator of the universe and lover of human beings. “With strong desire I have desired thee; therefore shall I tell thee my

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<sup>69</sup> J. POWER, *Mission Theology Today*, Dublin 1970, p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> Isaiah 45: 21-22 NRSV (The New Revised Standard Version).

<sup>71</sup> Romans 1:19-20 NRSV.

salvation. Think of me: worship me: sacrifice to me: pay me homage; so shall thou come to me. I promise thee truly, for I love thee well...turn to me as thy refuge; I shall deliver thee from all evil."<sup>72</sup>

Through their own conscience, human beings know God as the ultimate source of our moral actions. By scrutinising the interior of his own being, a person comes to know that God rewards our good conduct and punishes our evil doings. "In this way without any reference to Scripture, human beings are capable of arriving at quite an extensive knowledge of God and of their relationship with God."<sup>73</sup> According to Karl Barth to claim that human beings can attain such a relationship with a mere human reason "is an outrage upon the Christian idea of God"<sup>74</sup> There is always a supernatural dimension to a human being in the world that God has created. The natural existence of a human being is always a graced existence since by virtue of creation, humanity is God-oriented.

The Church is the sacrament of an on-going dialogue with humanity. This dialogue occurs simultaneously in the individual's human conscience and in his or her own religion. The Lord himself inaugurated the Church and her mission.<sup>75</sup> The Kingdom of God is wider than the Church though the latter is the beginning of the kingdom in history.

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<sup>72</sup> Bhagavad-Gita 18.64-66.

<sup>73</sup> J. P. BRENNAN, *Christian Mission in a Pluralistic World*, Middlegreen, England, 1990. 50.

<sup>74</sup> K. BARTH, *Church Dogmatic II, I*, Edinburgh, 1956, 40.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. VATICAN II, *Lumen Gentium* n. 5.

### 3.1.5. *Salvation is Cosmic*

God's action in the history of salvation is Trinitarian. For, God communicates his Godself through the Son in the Holy Spirit. This occurs through a holistic process that "embraces the whole history from creation through redemption to its ultimate consummation."<sup>76</sup> In the Old Testament for instance, the Israelites realise that God is the creator through the experience of their liberation from Egypt. Furthermore, they recognise God as the one who will recreate the entire universe in the last days from that same experience.

The hymn of the Colossians reveals Christ as the source, pattern and goal of all creation. No creation is superior to him. The Hellenistic speculations conceived the universe as a body, with the deity such as Zeus and Ether as its head. However, the author of the Colossians adds the word Church to give that cosmic speculation a new interpretation. The Lordship of Christ over the created universe differs from the mythical power of the Greek gods over the world. The Church as body of Christ is effective to the whole world, for it reconciles both Jew and Gentiles. The Community's struggle to be faithful to God's love is a sign of God's relationship to the world<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, the death and resurrection of Christ cosmically reconciles the universe to God. Paul refers to a new creation in God who reconciles everything to himself through Christ. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us a ministry of reconciliation; reconciling the world to himself,

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<sup>76</sup> M. AMALADOS, "The Pluralism of Religions", in R.S. Sugitharajah, ed., *Asian Faces of Jesus*, New York 1993, 91.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. D. SENIOR, C. SCHUMUELLER, *The Biblical Foundation of Mission*, New York 1993, 197.

not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."<sup>78</sup>

This is echoed in his letter to the Romans: "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely will we be saved in his life. But more than that we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus through whom we have now received reconciliation."<sup>79</sup> In Colossians, this reconciliation affects not only humanity but also, all things.

He is the image of the invisible God the firstborn of all creations; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or rulers or powers- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church, he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was please to dwell.<sup>80</sup>

### ***3.2. Dogmatic Foundation of Interreligious Dialogue***

#### ***3.2.1. The Church as Sacrament and Sign of Salvation***

To understand the Church as sacrament and sign of salvation enables us to perceive the relationship of the Church and the world. Its mission is viewed as God turning to the world. This breakthrough came mainly with the perception of Vatican II.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) views the Church as being provisional, for it is not the ultimate ground and goal of mission. The final goal of mission is not the Church, but the glory of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. Thus, we cannot identify the

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NRSV.

<sup>79</sup> Romans 5:10-11, NRSV.

<sup>80</sup> Colossians 1:15-18, NRSV.



Church with the Kingdom of God though it is the mediation of that Kingdom. It is "the sign and the instrument of that Kingdom that is to come"<sup>81</sup>

The Church needs to display to humanity "a glimmer of God's imminent reign - a kingdom of reconciliation, peace, and a new life"<sup>82</sup> to become a credible sacrament of salvation for the world. Though this happens most visibly in the Church, it occurs also in society, including other religions such as Hinduism. As *Lumen Gentium* puts it: "The Church is, on earth the seed and beginning of that Kingdom."<sup>83</sup>

The significance of interreligious dialogue with Hinduism and other religions lies in "a 'convergence' between liberating individuals and peoples in history and proclaiming the final coming of God's reign."<sup>84</sup> Indeed, "Only the kingdom is absolute and it makes everything else relative"<sup>85</sup>

The Church is the sacrament of an on-going dialogue with humanity. This dialogue occurs simultaneously in the individual's human conscience and in his or her own religion. The Lord himself inaugurated the Church and her mission.<sup>86</sup> The Kingdom of God is wider than the Church though the latter is the beginning of the kingdom in history. "The Church must not only discern Christ in the changing life but be there in it, responding to him and making his presence and Lordship known."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 59.

<sup>82</sup> J. SCHMIEZ, 1971, quoted in D. J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York 1994, 377.

<sup>83</sup> VATICAN II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 8.

<sup>84</sup> D. J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York 1994.

<sup>85</sup> PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 27.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. VATICAN II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 5.

<sup>87</sup> T. U. KYAW ed., *Witnesses Together Report*, Rangoon 1959, 60.

### 3.2.2. *The Holy Spirit Blows Where It Wills*

The Holy Spirit is operative in the entire universe. Even before the coming of Christ, its action was ordered towards Christ in relation to the divine plan of salvation. As a result of the universal salvation accomplished in Christ, the Spirit is at work outside the Church.<sup>88</sup>

This idea is rooted in the Scriptures. The Old Testament foresees the fulfilment of the messianic times as an eschatological outpouring of the Spirit, which would result in a renewal. Ezekiel states that Yahweh will give human beings one heart and put a new spirit within them.<sup>89</sup> That spirit will enable Israel the chosen people of God to follow God's statutes and ordinances.<sup>90</sup>

This outpouring of the spirit is firstly beneficial to the People of Israel. "It is this eschatological outpouring of the Spirit of God that the apostolic Church sees realised at Pentecost in fulfilment of the ancient promises."<sup>91</sup> Speaking of the Ascension and Pentecost *Redemptoris Missio* tells us: "The apostles have a powerful experience which completely transforms them: the experience of the Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them witnesses and prophets (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:17-18). It fills them with serene courage, which impels them to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope, which motivates them. The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus in boldness"<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Dominum Et Vivificatem* n. 53, in AAS 78 (1986).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 11:19.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Ezekiel 36:32.

<sup>91</sup> J. DUPUIS, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World religions*. Translated from the French by R. BARR. New York 1993, p.154.

<sup>92</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio* n. 24.

Redemptoris Missio affirms that the presence of the Holy Spirit is active. The Holy Spirit simultaneously affects the spiritual life of believers and their religious traditions.

The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and its members. Nevertheless, his activity is universal, limited neither by space nor by time. The Second Vatican II council recalls that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the "seeds of the Word", to be found in human initiatives including religious ones and in man's efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself.<sup>93</sup>

The same encyclical affirms that the peoples who do not belong to the Church can be saved by the virtue of grace. The grace of God enlightens them in a way, which is accommodated to their spiritual and material needs. Those persons though not being formally part of the Church have a mysterious relationship to the Church. This is because that grace comes from Christ as a result of his sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. In this way the Holy Spirit offers everyone an opportunity to share in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.<sup>94</sup>

### *3.2.3. Other Religions Have a True Place in the Economy of Salvation*

Raimundo Pannikar sees interreligious dialogue as a dialogue-confrontation between many religions. He views the attitude of exclusivity by Christians as an obstacle to dialogue. No human tradition can claim that it can offer universal truth. This heroic attitude carries "the obvious danger of intolerance, hybrids and contempts for others."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 53.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 10.

<sup>95</sup> R. PANIKKAR, *The Intrareligious dialogue*, New York/Mahwah, 1978, XV.

For Panikkar, Christian theology goes beyond the mere Christian reality with its Scriptures, traditions and concrete history. Thus, Christian Theology needs to consider the multi-religious reality as a starting point. We need to discover what our faith tells us about Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world.

This invites us to accept a Theocentric universe, for no religion can claim exclusiveness and absoluteness for its own. Thus, any claim to exclusive, unique, final, religious knowledge seems to be inadmissible. Indeed, the scriptures of other religious traditions continuously provide spiritual nourishment for peoples. "If God looks after the Hindu people, it cannot be through purely personal-individual action which would have very little meaning: it has rather to be something collective, sociological and mythical."<sup>96</sup> As a result Hinduism has a true place in the economy of salvation.

#### *3.2.4. How Should We Understand the Uniqueness of Christ?*

As Jacob Parapallay puts it "God's spirit present in the authentic values of other religions cannot be separated from Jesus Christ."<sup>97</sup> This urges the Christians and the Church to refrain from proclaiming the uniqueness of Christ with a sense of superiority and arrogance to those who have inherited an Indian context and background. The point of departure is the cosmic and trans-historical presence through his Spirit.

However, we should not put mere emphasis on the historicity of Jesus, for this may reduce Jesus to a historical founder of religion.<sup>98</sup> Other founders of religions and

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<sup>96</sup> R. PANIKKAR, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. New York 1981, 88.

<sup>97</sup> J. PARAPALLAY, "The Challenging Newness of Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism," in: *Cristologia e Missioni Oggi*, a cura di G. COLZANI - P. GIGLIONI - S. KAROTEMPREL, Rome 2000, 121.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. J. PARAPALLAY, "The Challenging Newness of Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism", in *Christologia Missio Oggi*, a cura di G. COLZANI - P. GIGLIONI - S. KAROTEMPREL, Rome 2000, 120.

other ways of salvation are not parallel ways that complement God's revelation through Christ. In addition they do not participate in the mediation of Jesus Christ.

The revelation in Jesus Christ is new and calls for a free response and total commitment. God wills to save all human beings through him. "The Indian and Asian attempts in recognising a 'hidden presence' of Christ through his Spirit in the authentic religions and cultural traditions in no way, separates Jesus Christ from his Spirit but promotes the tremendous possibilities of proclaiming Jesus Christ. Discovering the Spirit's presence and action in the complex realities leads to the encounter with Jesus Christ whose Spirit he is."<sup>99</sup>

Does this mean that Christ is identical to the Holy Spirit? We need to encounter the Holy Spirit to encounter Christ the risen Lord. For, the risen Lord being unlimited by time and space operates in the Holy Spirit in our salvation history. This urges us to view mission in a Trinitarian perspective. God the Father wills to save us through his Son in the Holy Spirit. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* Pope John Paul II underlines that the action of the Holy Spirit and the universal salvation in Christ is inseparable with the Church's commitment to fulfil her mission.<sup>100</sup>

Moreover, "Christ is already at work (even) in the unbelieving world preparing the way for our witness. We must work to keep pace with him. Our living Lord is our neighbour's Lord and working in him and for him. We believe that Christ in some sense

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<sup>99</sup> J. PARAPALLAY, "The Challenging Newness of Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism", In *Christologia Miso Oggi*, a cura di Colzani, P. Giglioni - S. KAROTEMPOREL, Urbanania, Rome 2000, 121.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 17-18.

remains with all men (human beings), irrespective of their attitude towards him, and wherever there is faith, it is reckoned into righteousness."<sup>101</sup>

To proclaim Jesus Christ meaningfully in an Indian context we should not separate or isolate Him from the "many and varied ways God has spoken to our (fathers) ancestors."<sup>102</sup> God speaks in other religions through their founders and the values that exist in their religions. This urges us to view mission and interreligious dialogue as dynamic and not as static.

### *3.2.5. Interreligious Dialogue as a Fraternal Pilgrimage.*

Amalados remarks that interreligious dialogue becomes a concern in two situations. "Firstly, existentially, people who belong to different religions are living together in one society. Secondly ideologically, we have a positive view of and respect for other religions."<sup>103</sup>

Religions are ways through which God's grace come to the believers. The Asian Bishops recognised that in religions God draws all peoples towards salvation. Father Marcello Zago commented: "At Assisi, the welcome given to the religious representatives present at the prayer service offered by the various religions was in some way a recognition of these religions and of prayer in particular, a recognition that these religions and prayer not only have a social role but are also effective before God."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> T. KYAU ed., *Witnesses Together Report*, Rangoon 1959, 60.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Hebrews 1:1f

<sup>103</sup> M. ALAMALADOS, "The Challenges of Mission Today", in W. JENKINSON, H. O'SULLIVAN ed., *Trends in Mission*, New York 1991, p. 373.

<sup>104</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR CULTURE, *Bulletin* 64, 1987, 60.

However, this recognition does not imply that all religions are the same. Instead the above quotation underlines that those religions are effective ways of communications to God. We need to understand religions as a relationship between God and the human person in community. For, religion is not merely a system of dogmas, rituals, and institutions. On the contrary, it is a concrete relationship that is mediated through symbolic structures. This deep relationship goes beyond all religions, since it involves a communion with God the absolute. As Amalados points out: "This relationship is always absolute- because it is with the Absolute on one hand and the absolute authority of conscience on the other end - but at the same time lived in a relative way - humanly, symbolically and in history."<sup>105</sup>

This suggests that religions are somewhat relative to the Absolute (not to each other). However, it is God who saves us and not religions. Religions are not the representatives of God mystery. Instead, they serve as mediation to attain and live God's mystery. In this way, the encounter and mutual encounter of different religions serves as a mutual purification that fosters mutual compatibility.

It invites us to see the Church as a community of pilgrims on the way walking towards the New Jerusalem in which God will be with the people. This pilgrimage starts here and now. In this fraternal journey the prior role of the Church is not for salvation but for mission. The Church's purpose is to actualise the saving presence and action of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>105</sup> M. AMALADOS, "The Challenges of Mission Today", in *Trends in Mission*, W. JENKINSON, H. O'SULLIVAN, ed., New York 1991, 373.

We need to proclaim that God dialogues with humanity by accepting the human ways of communication. This is expressed through Jesus' incarnation. This pilgrimage is not a progressive juxtaposition of movements by different religions. Speaking to leaders of other religions in Madras, India, Pope John Paul II said: "By dialogue we let God be present in our midst; for as we open ourselves to God (...). As followers of different religions we should join together in promoting and defending common values in the spheres of religious liberty, human solidarity, education, culture, social welfare and civic order."<sup>136</sup> This quote portrays interreligious dialogue as interaction and collaboration. The first outcome is a growth in the experience of God due to the challenging encounter of the other faiths. The latter may provide a common moral and spiritual foundation to moral life.

This attitude presents interreligious dialogue not as a competition with other religions. It is a means of partnership. Thus, proclamation of the faith in Jesus Christ takes into account religious experience of the people addressed.

"While proclaiming the message of God in Jesus Christ, the evangelising Church must always remember her task is not exercised in a complete void. For, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is present and active among the hearers of the Good News even before the Church missionary action comes into action."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Origins* 15:36, (February 20 1986): 598, quoted by M. AMALADOS, "The Challenges of Mission", in W. JENKINSON, H. O'SULLIVAN ed., *Trends in Mission*, New York 1991, 376.

<sup>137</sup> PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, *Dialogue And Proclamation*, n. 68.



The motivation for mission is not simply bringing people into the Church. "It is to render present in every human context the viable witness to Christ's salvation, which is at work everywhere."<sup>108</sup>

As Pope John Paul II points out, we are invited to see in this fraternal journey: "an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another toward the transcendent goal which he sets before us."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> C.f. Th. SUNDERMEIER, "Theology of Mission, Theology, History Perspective", in K. Müller, S.B. BEVANS, R.H. BLISSIE ed. p. 429.

<sup>109</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II *Comments on the prayer of Assisi*, quoted in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, n. 79.

## **Conclusion**

We have seen that the foundation of Interreligious Dialogue is in God's salvific will to save humanity and the cosmos. Thus, we cannot restrict God's activity to any religion. The Holy Spirit blows where it wills and affects the spirituality and religious traditions of the people of different faiths.

We saw that Israel gradually developed a conscious awareness of being mediator of God's grace to the nations. Similarly, the Church has the mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God through words and deeds. However this urges us to differentiate between the Church and the kingdom of God. This chapter helped us to see that Jesus Christ is unique because he is the ultimate and definitive figure in the way God deals with the human family. The question that remains is: how we can foster interreligious dialogue in our pastoral life?

## **Chapter 4.**

### **4. Pastoral Application**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we shall propose some means to foster interreligious dialogue with Hinduism in the practical life. We do not pretend to give universal remedies. Instead, we intend to stimulate the readers to find other means of pastoral applications applicable to their particular situations. Those proposals highlight different areas of the life of the persons. For the sake of convenience we have classified those proposals into four areas namely: formation, prayer and spirituality, life dialogue and communication.

#### *4.1. Formation for Better Dialogue*

Both Hindus and Christians need to be strong in their faith to promote true interreligious dialogue without fear and prejudices. There is a need to instruct adults and youth about the originality of their faith.

##### *4.1.1. Formation of laypersons*

Native priests and theologians can carry on this formation on a regional basis. This will enable the simple Christians to acquire basic knowledge on the Great Religions and the originality of Christianity. Furthermore we should encourage formation in the History of the Church, Ancient and New Testament, the sacraments and documents of the Church. In addition it is necessary to have contacts with foreign theologians (e.g. Hindu theologians) to benefit from a different contribution.

##### *4.1.2. The Formation of an Inculturation Committee*

We can organise a committee consisting of priests and laypersons with adequate theological backgrounds to search for ways that favour dialogue between Christian theology and the Hindu world. Actually, Mauritians are not sufficiently exposed to Indian theologians and their writings. This will liberate the Mauritian mind that Catholicism is mere adoption to the European or Creole culture.

##### *4.1.3. The Institution of Interreligious Dialogue Committees in Parishes*

We can institute in each parish a group responsible of inter religious dialogue. They will have as duty to prepare inter religious meeting to foster dialogue.

We have to think of a new means of initiation for the adults. This formation should favour openness and esteem to other religions. We can reach this aim by

introducing in the programme of catechism, the knowledge of other religions. Furthermore we can encourage our liturgical teams to include the brothers and sisters of other religions, in our prayer of intercession during our liturgical assemblies.

#### **4.2. Life Dialogue**

We have to stimulate and encourage meetings with brothers and sisters of other religions. Sometimes we should participate to what they propose to us. This will lead us to a greater acceptance and conviviality.

##### *4.2.1. Answer Present to the Hindu's Invitation.*

In Mauritius our Hindu friends usually invite their Christian brethren to feasts like weddings and *Divali*. On the feast of *Divali*, they use to share sweet cakes to their Christian neighbours. Seemingly, for a feast like Assumption Christians use to share *gato Marie*<sup>110</sup> to their brethren of other faith. Such activities develop occasion of life encounter and foster acceptance and peaceful interactions amongst persons of different faith.

##### *4.2.2. We Should Develop a Culture of Justice and Peace*

There is a need to encourage multireligious and pluricultural associations that commit themselves to common projects of justice and peace. In the past years we have seen some collaborations from persons of different religions in the project of *École Complémentaire*<sup>111</sup> (Complementary School).

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<sup>110</sup> *Gato Marie* is a cake, which is made on the occasion of Assumption of Mary in Mauritius. It is derived from the words *gato*: cake and *Marie*: Mary.

<sup>111</sup> *Ecole Complémentaire* is a project to help educate dropped out primary and secondary school students.

Many of those persons give voluntarily their time. We notice many signs where the Christians commit themselves in an unselfish and impartial manner. Many religious congregations run homes for the elderly persons and orphans. Some examples are *Fille de Marie* (Daughter of Mary), *Bon Secours* (Good Saviour) sisters, *Frère Saint Jean de Dieu* (Brother John of God). Amongst the donors are Hindus. Furthermore, the government offers grant aid so that these homes can offer free services in order to alleviate the sufferance of the poor.

We should encourage interreligious groups whereby persons of different religions struggles together for a better life. These groups serve as basic human communities and provide a common moral and spiritual basis for public life. These groups can promote interreligious prayer meeting so as to deepen dialogue on a common heritage. For each religion has in itself rich resources that can enrich each other.

#### *4.2.3. We Should Respect Religious Freedom*

Christians who wish to engage in interreligious dialogue need to show appreciation and respect to the persons of other faiths. We shall engage in dialogue without the idea of proselytising. Otherwise, the persons of the other faith will think that we want to destroy their religion. Dialogue must be conducted in a spirit of patience and humility, whereby both parties are simultaneously talker and listener.

#### *4.3. Communication.*

We should ask those working in mass media and communication, to take in greater consideration the theme of interreligious dialogue. We need to organise debates

and talks based upon the different religions of Mauritius through TV, radios and newspapers. Religious newspapers need to reserve a page for interreligious dialogue.

#### ***4.4. Prayer Dialogue and Spirituality***

We need to encourage interreligious prayer. To understand each other, to work for the common good become easier through prayer. Prayer liberates us from pride and makes us able to forgive each other. In addition, prayer works out our messianic complex of being saviour of the world. "The first gift to believers is the Holy Spirit's action of making the world a beneficiary of the Love that eternally lives in the Father's and Son's ecstasy. For this reason, before being activity, mission is contemplation and prayer."<sup>112</sup>

##### ***4.4.1. Seize Appropriate Opportunities to Organise Inter-faith Prayers***

The managers of hotels, textile industries and factories annually invite priests to celebrate mass at the request of the workers. Similarly, sick persons and personnel of the hospitals, prison officers and prisoners request Christian Ministers to pray for and with them. In such situations interreligious prayers are more appropriate than a mass. For, many Hindus participate in the mass without understanding the meaning.

##### ***4.4.2. Prayer through Concerts and Songs***

Interreligious prayer can be in the form of concerts and song. In Mauritius, for instance Father Jocelyn Grégoire organises session of prayers around the country with his musical bands. Among those who come to the prayer are many Hindus and persons of other religions. Some of the concerts he organised were entitled '40,000 Femmes pou

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<sup>112</sup> G. BUONO, *Missiology, Theology and Praxis*. Translated by M. BAGNAROL, Nairobi 2002, 109.

Zezi,<sup>113</sup>, 'Enn Fami pou Bondie'<sup>114</sup>, '20,000 Zom pour Zezi'<sup>115</sup>. During these concerts or sessions of prayers, some Christians and non-Christians verbally witness how God has touched their lives.

We propose that Mauritius form an interreligious choir. This may start nationwide and then according to the needs we can extend to the village level. Our aim would be to collect songs based upon certain religious themes like God, peace, love etc. This can help the persons to develop their talents. Furthermore, those songs may serve as aid for concientisation about the need of dialogue and harmony.

#### *4.4.3. We Need Spiritual Direction to Grow in Dialogue with God and our Neighbours.*

The "guru" has an important role in Hinduism. He is a master, an illuminator, and a transmitter of wisdom, who initiates his disciple to undiscovered mysteries. He fosters a personal relationship with the disciple and guides him to realise practically the spiritual goal. He is the umbilical cord of a birth in the spirit of the disciples.<sup>116</sup>

The concept of guru teaches us the importance of a spiritual guide to accompany us in our journey of faith. We need to encourage Christians to have spiritual directors. Furthermore, we need to form some reliable Christians for spiritual direction.

#### *4.4.4. Places of Pilgrimage as a Mean to Foster Dialogue*

The persons of different religions believe that pilgrim places incarnate the power of God. They believe that these sacred places express the idea of the communion of the

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<sup>113</sup> 40,000 women for Jesus.

<sup>114</sup> A family for God.

<sup>115</sup> 20,000 men for Jesus.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. M. DHAVAMONY, *Hindu Spirituality*, 1999, 76.



saints, in the sense that believers of all the ages, dead or alive share together in the life of God.

In addition people believe that those pilgrim places have a special atmosphere of power that help them to express their faith. We should pay attention to proper maintenance of the pilgrim places in order to keep and reinforce this character of the sacred.

Furthermore, at our Christian pilgrim places such as the sanctuary of Father Laval we need to encourage that there is a team of persons who can provide counselling to the persons in need. We also propose that there is always a priest at the *Centre Père Laval* (Centre of Father Laval) for the spiritual guidance of the pilgrims and for confession of the Christians.

#### *4.4.5. Adoration of the Holy Sacrament*

Many Hindus come to adore the Holy Sacrament in the Catholic churches. We propose that the churches in different parishes remain opened from morning to six in the evening, to enable those who are interested to pray.

Furthermore, we propose that at least every Friday, each parish organises for the adoration of the Holy Sacrament. Some parishes like *Sainte Croix* (Holy Cross) Port Louis and *Notre Dames de Mont Roches* of Beau-Basin has tried this experience.

#### *4.4.6. Development of a Cosmic Conscience of the Sacraments and Rituals*

There is a need to know and understand the meaning and purpose of Hindu rituals and the Christian sacraments. Whenever a feast such as *Divali*, *Maha Shivaratree*

or *Ganga Snaam* is celebrated, a Hindu priest can share about their social, sociological and theological meanings to Christians.

Similarly, we need to make Hindus know what is meaning for us of sacraments such as Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Eucharist, Anointing of the sick, Marriage and Holy orders. This may broaden our understanding about those sacraments and rituals and help to avoid inferiority or superiority complexes and uncritical syncretism.

In addition, Christians need to know that the sacraments they receive are of cosmic value, for they unite us to God, our fellow human beings and to the world. Those sacraments make Christians participate in the life of God the Father of all through the Paschal mystery of Christ in the Holy Spirit. Such cosmic conscience fosters a sense of mission based on humility and service to all people.

**Conclusion.**

In this last chapter we have acknowledged some of the things that exist already to bring about new insights that will foster interreligious dialogue with Hinduism. We have tried the best so that our pastoral proposals may reflect the objectives of this long essay. We hope that these insights will generate new stimuli that will foster truthful and respectful interactions amongst the Mauritians of different races, religions and cultures.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

### **The Church Needs to Undergo a *Kenosis*.**

If the church wants to be a visible witness of the love of God to human beings, independently of their cultures, races, levels and religions, she has to adopt the attitudes of Jesus Christ. *Kenosis*<sup>17</sup> is a necessary condition for the missionary who wants to follow Jesus Christ as an apostle. "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me (Matthew 16:24). From this sentence we notice that renunciation of heart is a necessary prerequisite for the apostle to enter the movement of divine love. Christ himself proposed abnegation as a necessary condition for the apostle.

Jesus Christ adopts the attitude of *Kenosis*. During his life on earth, he deliberately chose the position of the humble servant and became a humble friend of human beings. Jesus Christ emptied himself from all his possessions: glory, power, and holiness to enrich us with them. This *Kenosis* happened through his total incarnation and reached its climax upon the cross. This is echoed in the exhortation of Saint Paul to the Philippians: "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ

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<sup>17</sup> Kenosis means self-emptying or self-denial.

Jesus, who did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness, ... he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this God greatly exalted him" (Philippians 2:5-8). This exhortation is still valid for our church of the modern era. for *Kenosis* is a necessary attitude for us to understand others. The Church that is the people of God has to empty herself from certain habits, tastes and desires so that Jesus Christ and his love can be manifest to peoples. Is this state of *Kenosis* a change or an adaptation to cultures? Culture is only the *milieu* of realisation of this *Kenosis*. The latter should be regarded, as a spiritual need. "It is of no use for someone to empty himself from his habits, to change his reflexes, to adapt himself to the manners of other peoples if this transformation does not have transcendental aims."<sup>118</sup>

Thus if the Mauritian Church becomes Creole with the Creoles, Chinese with the Chinese, Tamil with the Tamil, Hindi with the Hindi ...it is not to become like the other one. Otherwise it would have been only a passage from one culture to another. *Kenosis* is the actualisation of divine revelation in time.

This is why the church has to empty herself, to reflect the image of Christ as a servant. *Kenosis* is not a skilful policy to capture others' kindness and attention. It enables us to enter a spiritual state. The Church of Mauritius has to empty herself from triumphalism, which is incompatible with Jesus Christ's attitude.

After analysing the situation of the Church in Mauritius, we notice that interreligious dialogue requires prudence and discernment. Nevertheless, interreligious

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<sup>118</sup> LES PERES SPIRITAINS. *Spiritus* number 27, February, Paris 1969, 15 (My translation from French).

dialogue remains a genuine form of Christian witness, since it transforms persons, society and culture. "People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than teaching, and in life and action than in theories ... In many cases this is the only possible way of being a missionary"<sup>119</sup>

Authentic dialogue with people of other faith, or even those who claim no faith is a self-evangelisation for Christians. The latter realises that evangelisation and dialogue are inseparable. For, human beings receive the Gospel, not as an abstract being but as a tangible person formed by his history, society and culture. Haughtiness, arrogance, violence, ambition and a tendency to possess material goods on the part of the evangelists render the Gospel incredible.<sup>120</sup>

When dialogue is carried in a spirit of faith, it becomes a prayer dialogue. Dialogue calls for some practical fellowship, and presupposes faith in the interior action of the Holy Spirit within human hearts.

"The universal and pluriform presence of the Spirit in the world and its people and cultures, calls in question the validity of the Church's mission, or at least, some of its dynamics and practices. The call is for more dialogue than preaching, for development more than numerical expansion, for freedom of conscience more than conversion."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 42.

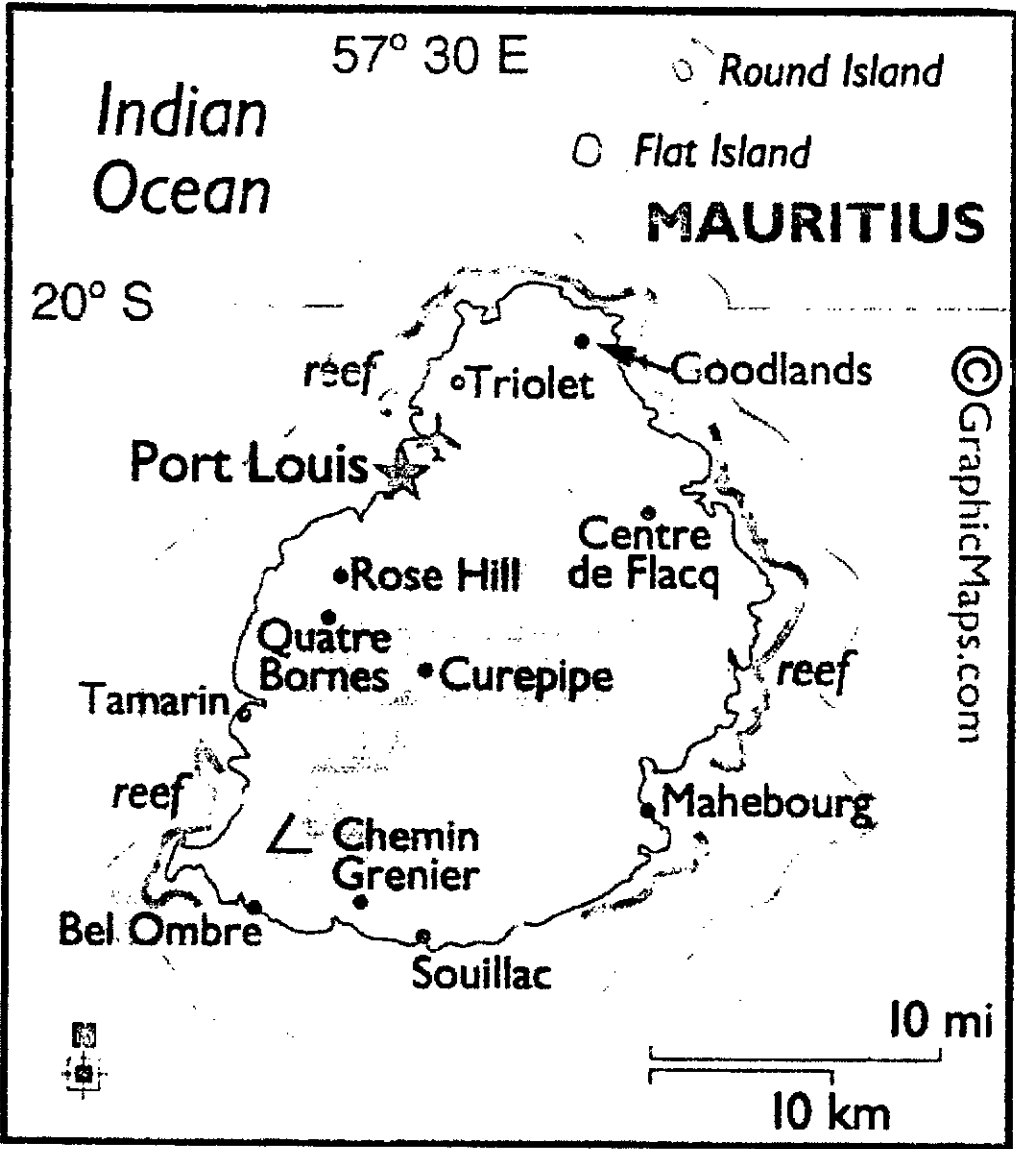
<sup>120</sup> Cf. H. FRËS, "Evangelization and Dialogue", in M. DHAVAMONY ed., *Evangelization, Dialogue and Development*. Rome 1972, 251.

<sup>121</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 4.

APPENDIX 1: MAP SHOWING THE LOCATION OF MAURITIUS ISLAND.



APPENDIX 2: MAP OF MAURITIUS ISLAND.





## APPENDIX 3: ACTIVITY OF PONT-PRASLIN INTERRELIGIOUS CENTRE.

### École de Dialogue interreligieux

Centre d'Accueil Saint-Michel, Pont-Praslin

Tel : 418 11 01 Fax : 418 11 02 Courriel: rzimmer@intnet.mu

#### Parcours B

Croire en dialogue, ou Mieux connaître  
foi dans le dialogue avec les autrement cro

Durant le premier semestre de l'année, le Par  
B se fera en quatre dimanches de 9h30 à 15h, à  
Praslin

**13 février**

La Bible et les Écritures Sacrées -

I. *Le Coran*

**13 mars**

La Bible et les Écritures Sacrées -

II. *Les Quatre Védas et le Bhagavad Gîtâ.*

**10 avril**

La Bible et les Écritures Sacrées -

III. *La Bible*

**8 mai**

La Bible et les Écritures Sacrées -

IV. *Rôle des Écritures dans les diverses religio*

#### Parcours A

**Les grandes religions à Maurice, ou Comment  
mieux apprécier la religion de notre voisin**

Durant le premier semestre de l'année,  
le Parcours A se fera au Centre Misereor,  
Port-Louis, de 18h30 à 20h.

**Jeudi 27 janvier**

L'île Maurice, un arc-en-ciel religieux ?

**Jeudi 10 février**

L'hindouisme, un monde fortement structuré

**Jeudi 24 février**

L'hindouisme, des hommes et des femmes en quête  
de libération

#### Parcours C

Religion populaire et religion de la nuit, ou  
Plongée dans le monde de la peur et de la  
fascination.

Durant le premier semestre de l'année, le  
Parcours C se fera en 6 sessions résidentielles, à  
Pont-Praslin. Chaque session commence le  
samedi à 18h et s'achève le dimanche à 14h30.

**29/30 janvier**

Le mal existe ; que peut-on en dire ?

**26/27 février** Le mal existe

**19/20 mars**

Satan, démons et mauvais esprits

**23/24 avril** Traiteurs ou menteurs ?

**21/22 mai**

Souffrance - Guérison - «Superstition»

**25/26 juin** La religion populaire

#### Parcours B

«Communalisme  
pa otel».

Mais comment

l'éviter ? ou

Comment

contourner

l'amalgame

entre race,

culture, religion

et politique ?

L'Ecole de Dialogue Interreligieux  
est une nécessité pour notre Eglise.  
Cette École de formation nous rappelle  
à temps et à contretemps  
que l'Eglise Catholique doit s'engager  
d'une façon irréversible  
dans le dialogue(...)  
Une Eglise qui ne dialogue pas  
est une Église morte !

Mgr Maurice E

## APPENDIX 4: GANGA SNAAM



### *Birth of Ganga: A Poem by Bhai Vir Singh.*

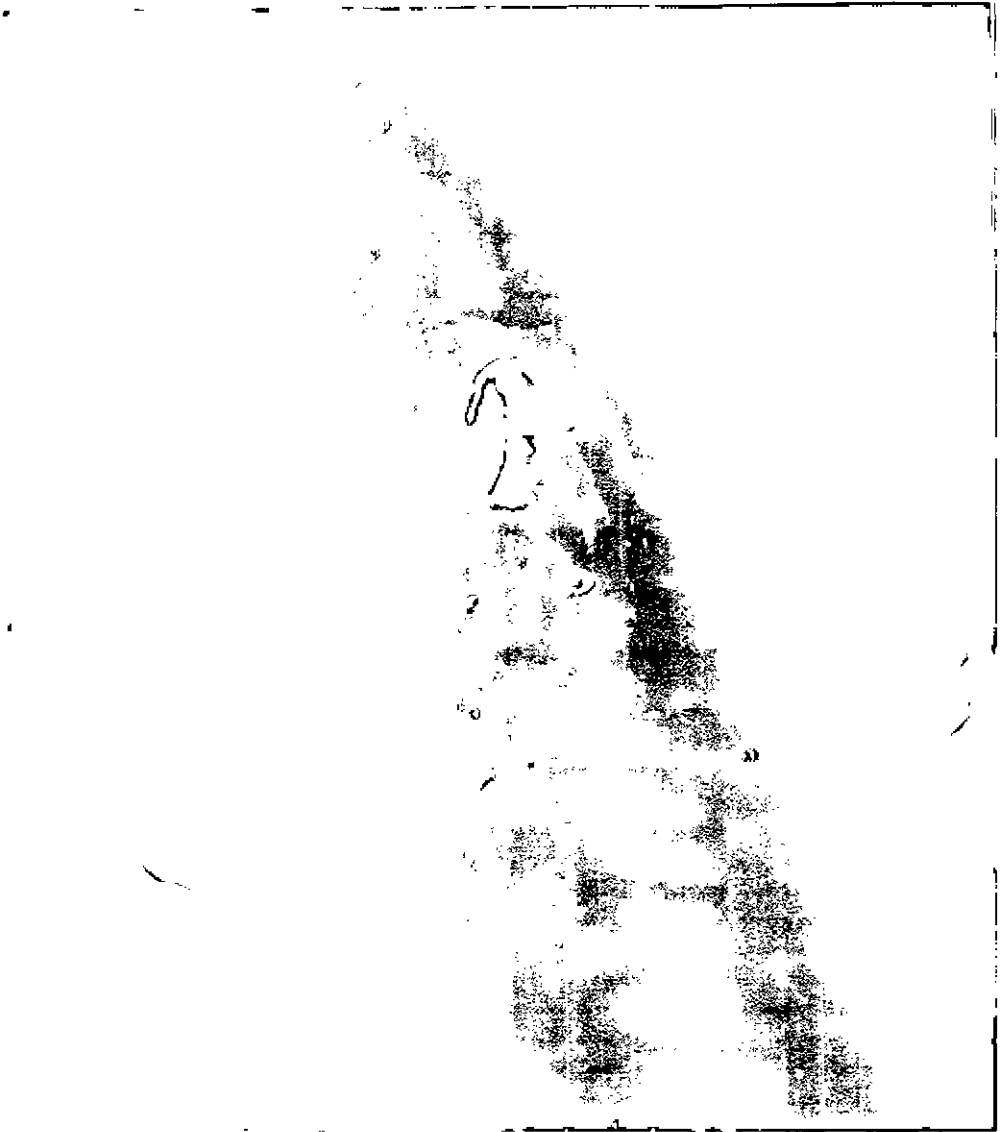
The sea of the approaching Ganga said, who and from whence are thou?  
Thou are great, full of every gem and scent.  
Thou are fragrant with the fragrance of the earth and of many a herb!  
Thou bringest the joys of the land of the people.  
Rich laden with gold and pearl thou comest!  
Thou hast been showering joys on all,  
Thou hast brought blessings all,  
Pray, tell me thy tale, where is land, thy home  
O beautiful one.

## APPENDIX 5: KAVADEE

*It expresses the triumph of good over evil. People who celebrate Kavadee ( cavadee ) believe that the Lord Muruga will restore peace and harmony in the world. Arrogance hypocrisy and violence will be destroyed. Human being will emerge from the ashes of sin and be redeemed.*



## APPENDIX 6: SWORD WALKING.



*Swords where are you? Death where are your stings?  
This man is walking barefooted on cutting edge swords.  
Sword walking follows a ten days vegetarian diet and abstinence.  
The penance is offered for some wrongdoings.  
Sometimes it is to seek favor against ill fate.*

## APPENDIX 7: SOME FRUITFUL THOUGHTS.

*"Since wars begin in the mind of men (human beings), it is in the minds of men (human beings) that the defences of peace must be constructed."*

Liliane Berthelot, Mauritius.

*"When man's thought is filled with the light of the heaven, all obstacles in his path fade away."*

Mahatma Gandhi.

*"Light, my light the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart sweetening light! Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life: the life strikes, my darling; the chords of my love: the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over earth. The butterfly spread their sails on the sea of light. Lillies and jasmynes surge up on the crest of the waves of the light. The light is shattered into Gold on every cloud, my darling, and it scatters gems in profusion"*

R. Tagore - Gitanjali LVII.

*The dimension of Mauritius may very well be that of a universal man."*

Kher Jagatsing, late minister of Education, Arts and culture of Mauritius.

*"'Unity in diversity' in our pluricultural, multilingual, multi-religious, multi-racial society is not an empty slogan. Unity in diversity is a national hymn born home everyday to the heart of every Mauritian, in the call of the muézzin, in the pealing of Church bells, in the sounds of the gong, as these daily rise from every nook and corner of the land reaching the heavens and beyond, to the ears of the infinite cosmos."*

Ramesh Ramdoyal, Mauritius.

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