

ॐ Hindu-Catholic Dialogue



Time & Location

Date: Saturday, May 23, 2015
Time: 9:00 am to 1:00 pm

Location

Durga Temple of VA
8400 Durga Place
Falls Church, VA

You are invited to join with other academics, scholars, and practitioners to a landmark event, the first of what we expect to be a series of regular dialogues between Hindu and Catholic Communities.

EVENT IS FREE - YOU MUST REGISTER

Speakers

Hindu

Anand Ramachandra
Professor of Religion, Philosophy
and Asian Studies at St Olaf College
Minnesota

Abhinav Ashiana
President of VRIH

Dr. Datta
CON Governors

Catholic



Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran
Pres. Pontificae
Council for Interrelationship Dialogue



Paul LaBrosse
Bishop
Falls Church, VA



Francis X. Clooney, SJ
Parkman Professor of Divinity
Professor of Comparative Theology
Director of the Center for the Study of
World Religions

Commemorative Brochure

Hindu - Catholic Dialogue
May 23, 2015

Hinduism offers practitioners a variety of ways to transform their minds so that they become aware of the Divine's presence everywhere, at all times, in themselves, in every other human being, in the whole of creation. Such a person rises above sorrows, awakens an innate sense of love, compassion and service towards all, and spreads peace and joy in all that they do.

Hinduism is not about adherence to a dogma or following a Prophet. It is about connecting with the Divine Truth that is within everyone: *Hidden in all individuals there is only one Deva –the Divine Being. He is all pervading and the soul of all living beings.* (Svetashvatara Upanishad 6.11).

Since this Truth is beyond the mind's grasp, Hinduism inherently promotes respect for the viewpoints of others: *Truth is One although wise persons speak of It in various ways.* (Rig Veda 1.164.46).

Hinduism emphasizes *Dharma* (right conduct) rather than doctrine, and points the way to a meaningful life. *The supreme dharma for all humanity is that by which they can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the Self.* (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.2.6).

The all-pervasiveness of the Divine and the principles of *Dharma* and *Karma* inspire Hindus to respect the earth, minimize violence, and be concerned with the welfare of all. These core teachings are beautifully relayed in a song by Narsin Mehta, the great poet saint of the 15th CE -- a song later popularized by Mahatma Gandhi-- where a devoted Hindu is described: *One who is a true devotee knows the pain of others, does good to others, without letting pride enter his mind. A devotee tolerates and praises the entire world, does not speak ill of others, keeps his/her promises, action, and thoughts pure...A devotee sees everything equally, rejects greed and avarice, respects women as he respects his own mother. Though his tongue may tire, he will utter no untruth....*

In the words of Swami Vivekananda: "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.... *As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee....* Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal." (Swami Vivekananda, World Parliament of Religions, 1893)



HINDU – CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

Saturday, 23 May 2015

Venue: Durga Temple
8400 Durga Place
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
www.durgatemple.org



9:00 – 9:30AM**	Registration, Networking, Tea/Coffee/Snacks		
9:45 AM	Arrival & Welcoming of H.E. Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, Vatican and other distinguished guests		
10:00AM – 10:15AM	Opening remarks and welcome	Sant Gupta	
	Lighting of the auspicious lamp	Dr. D C Rao, Dr. Siva Subramanian and Ms. Pratima Dharm.	
	Invocation and Prayer	Ms. Suhag Shukla	
10:15AM – 11:30AM	General Meeting		
	Remarks by	Mr. Anuttama Das	5 Min.
	Remarks by	Bishop Loverde	5 Min.
	Remarks by	Dr. Abhaya Asthana	5 min.
	Keynote Speaker's TOPIC: Hindus and Catholics Traditions Together: Theological Reasons for Mutual Respect & Reverence		
	Keynote Talk:	Dr. Francis Clooney	25 Min.
	Keynote Talk:	Dr. Anantanand Rambachan	25 Min.
11:30AM – 11:45AM	Remarks by	H.E. Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran	10 Min.
	Honoring of Distinguished Guests by V. S. Raghavan and Dileep Thatte		
	Vote of Thanks Ms. Mythili Bachu		
11:45AM -12:15PM	Visit the Temple Prayer Hall (Upper Level)		
12:15 PM – 1:00PM	Lunch		
1:00	End of General Meeting – Guests Depart		

NOTES:

**All guests should be seated before Cardinal Tauran, distinguished guests and other panelists arrive.

All guests will enter the Durga Temple building from the lower level in the rear of the building.

ANANTANAND RAMBACHAN, Ph. D.

Dr. Anantanand Rambachan is a Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College, Minnesota, USA. He is Visiting Professor at the University of Hamburg (Academy for the Study of World Religions), Germany. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Leeds in



the United Kingdom and completed three years of traditional Vedānta study in India with Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati. His books include, *Accomplishing the Accomplished*, *The Limits of Scripture*, *The Advaita Worldview* and *A Hindu Theology of Liberation*. Prof. Rambachan has been involved in the field of interreligious relations and dialogue for over twenty-five years, as a Hindu participant and analyst. Among his many public roles, Professor Rambachan is an advisor to Harvard University's Pluralism project, a member of the International Advisory Council for the *Tony Blair Foundation*, and President of the Board of Arigatou International, NY. The latter is an international inter-faith organization dedicated to mobilizing

the resources of world religions for the wellbeing of children. Prof. Rambachan delivered the invocation address at the historic first White House Celebration of the Hindu festival of Diwali in 2003. The British Broadcasting Corporation broadcasted a series of 25 of his lectures on the Hindu tradition internationally.

HINDU AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS TOGETHER:

THEOLOGICAL REASONS FOR MUTUAL RESPECT AND REVERENCE

ANANTANAND RAMBACHAN

Hindus and Catholics have a long history of co-existence in communities across our world. Catholics and Hindus have lived as neighbors on the Indian subcontinent for centuries. Hindus also live among Catholics in many other parts of our world, including Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Fiji, Mauritius, North America and Australia. While our history together is not free from controversy and dispute, we must not overlook the friendship and mutual learning that also characterize our encounters. These are precious resources that can be too easily ignored in times of conflict and contention.

It is always good and important to remember that relationships do not occur between religious traditions. Relationships are initiated and sustained by human beings who embody their traditions and whose identities are shaped profoundly by their religious commitments. We are blessed with the gift of freedom that enables us to be attentive to each other's concerns, and to critically discuss our relationship, past and present. We can admit mistakes, we can forgive and heal, and we can transform and enter into new relationships. As Chāndogya Upanishad reminds us, "Hope is greater than memory (*āśa vai smarād bhūyasī*). Even as we struggle with difficult memories, our freedom is a source of hope and new possibilities.

As Hindus and Catholics, people with religious commitments, we define the meaning of our lives in relation to the One we regard as the source of all life. The values by which we live come from the centeredness of our lives in the One we worship as having ultimate value. Our understanding of this One, therefore, must be at the heart of our understanding of our relationship with each other. Without this, we do not speak to each other from the depths of our religious commitments as Hindus and Catholics.

Mutual respect and reverence in relationships between Hindus and Catholics do not require that we overlook our differences or that we ignore difficult issues. Relationships that disregard differences and are silent on contentious matters will be superficial and risky. Respectful relationships do not insist on sameness of vision or the relinquishing of our distinctive theological commitments. In fact, our differences may be the places of our deepest learning from each other.

Mutual respect and reverence, however, do require humility; a virtue closely associated with religious wisdom in the Hindu tradition. A fundamental theological ground for humility is the Hindu teaching that God is always more than we can describe or understand with our finite

minds and languages. Taittirīya Upaniṣhad speaks of God as the one “from whom all words, along with the mind, turn back having failed to grasp (*yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha*).” The implication is that we can only profess our traditions with humility and be open always to the possibility of learning from and being enriched by the wisdom of others. Ṛg Veda entreats us to welcome wisdom from all sources (*ā no bhadrāḥ kṛtavo yantu vishvataḥ*).

Mutual respect and reverence must also be grounded in a value for the dignity and sacred worth of the human being. It is our value for the person that leads to our value for the religious tradition that he or she holds dear and to our wish to deepen our understanding of that tradition. It seems difficult to respect a religious tradition without respect for those who belong to that tradition. The Hindu tradition teaches that God exists equally in all beings. There is no life outside of God and there is nothing that exists which is not sustained by God. No being is excluded. Every human encounter is an encounter also with God. This is the source of our reverence for the human person and our affirmation of her and his dignity and equal worth. We can stand together against any ideology and political or social structure that denies the personhood and dignity of human beings and that condones injustice and irreverence. We can speak together for justice and do so for reasons that include but go beyond the political and economic—we can speak of the divine present in the heart of the human.

Hindu and Catholic theologies, in their distinctive insights, enable us to stand together for the dignity and equal worth of human beings. These inspire us, in special ways, to lives of compassion and service for the overcoming of suffering in our world. In a world that longs for peace, these are among the finest reasons why Hindus and Catholics can and should stand together, committed to a dialogue of mutual enrichment and the common good.

REV. FRANCIS X. CLOONEY, S.J. Ph. D.

Rev. Francis Clooney's primary areas of scholarship are theological commentarial writings in the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions of Hindu India, and the developing field of comparative theology, a discipline distinguished by attentiveness to the dynamics of theological learning

deepened through the study of traditions other than one's own. He has also written on the dynamics of dialogue in the contemporary world.



His most recent monograph, *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence*, explores the absence of God in accord with the biblical *Song of Songs* and the Hindu *Holy Word of Mouth (Tiruvaymoli)*. His new book project delves into the Mimamsa tradition of Hindu ritual theology, as a study of the 14th-century *Jaiminiya Nyaya Mala* of Madhavacarya. Fr. Clooney is

the Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions - Parkman Professor of Divinity and Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard University.

HINDU AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS TOGETHER:

THEOLOGICAL REASONS FOR MUTUAL RESPECT AND REVERENCE

For millennia, Hindus and Christians have been in relationship, first in India and now across the world. This is a living relationship, with the ups and downs, dark and light moments, of human experience, and it continues to take new forms even today. This ongoing communication makes us aware that Hindus and Christians have much to be thankful for, need reconciliation, and share many opportunities for future collaboration. Today, we can and should be spiritual friends and collaborators, friends in the work of spiritual renewal. Catholics everywhere are eager for a positive relationship, for the Church is also catholic, a universal community, even finding its place, now on respectful terms, in every culture old and new. It makes no sense for Catholic Christians to imagine that Hindu traditions are somehow outside or apart from the mystery and love of God manifest in Jesus Christ. Most deeply, the Catholic vision of the world implies recognizing with gratitude that God works deeply and continually in the lives, words and actions, faith and practice, of devout Hindus of every tradition.

A fruitful Hindu-Catholic relationship is not merely a matter of necessity or convenience, but a truly spiritual opportunity with firm foundations. God is one; we are all the children of God; God wills the salvation and well-being of all; God is a mystery, ever greater than our efforts at exact definitions and boundaries. Fifty years ago, Vatican II opened up a new era in how Catholics and Hindus might relate. *Nostra Aetate* (“In Our Age”) briefly described the Hindu paths of action, wisdom, and love, and then stated that the Church “rejects nothing that is true and holy” in Hinduism and other religions. It adds, “Indeed, she regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.” How can this be? It is because Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6); from a Catholic perspective, Jesus is radiant and alive in whatever paths lead to God, whatever is true, whatever is alive.

Hindu learning and wisdom invite Catholics to think anew about matters of theological importance: the nature of divine and how the divine is revealed to us; the importance of God’s entrance into the world and of sacramental realities; the importance of seeing and affirming God as a person; the possibilities and limits of images and words about the divine reality; the riches and limits of ritual practice; who we ourselves are, as embodied beings subject to birth and death; the delicate balance between affirming the true, the good, and the beautiful, and respecting very diverse paths; the promise of liberation for all beings, over time. Learning all this is a blessed opportunity for Catholics, and so new ideas and insights find their way into our Catholic minds and hearts.

Since the Council, lived experience, study, shared learning, and work together on issues of justice have shown the urgency and fruitfulness of collaboration among Hindus and Catholics in India and globally. Innumerable small connections, so local as hardly to be noticed by media too often focused on bad news, make the relationship real. Leaders, monks, and scholars too have a role, but the firmest grounding of the Hindu-Christian relationship is found in ordinary life, in the cities and towns where we are neighbors to one another.

Hindus and Catholics share a sense of the wholeness of the natural and human worlds, a reverence for life in all forms, a recognition of deep spiritual truths; energized by our faiths, we can work together for the benefit of the world sorely in need of such values. In a world troubled by violence, environmental degradation, materialism, and widening gaps between rich and poor, Hindu-Catholic cooperation is all the more necessary.

In spiritual practice too Hindus and Catholics have much in common, and much to learn from one another. We value quiet, mystical paths of the ascent of God. We celebrate the divine presence in nature. We recognize the special ways in which God makes certain places holy. We build beautiful temples and churches, filled with sacraments and symbols, rites and music, that raise our minds and hearts to God. We can teach one another how better to be reverent, to worship, to find God in all things. It is good then that we meet and share our spiritual lives and journeys, now more than ever.

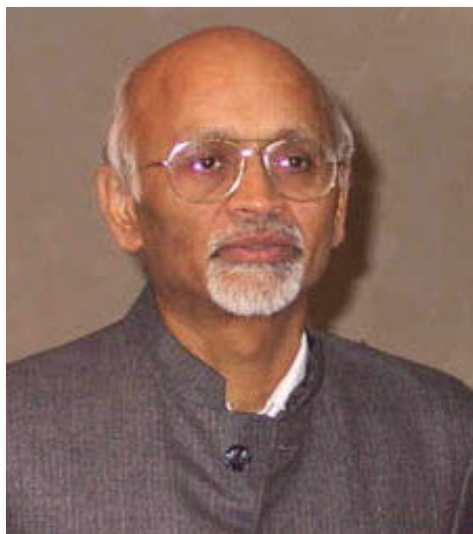
Francis X. Clooney, SJ

Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions

Harvard University

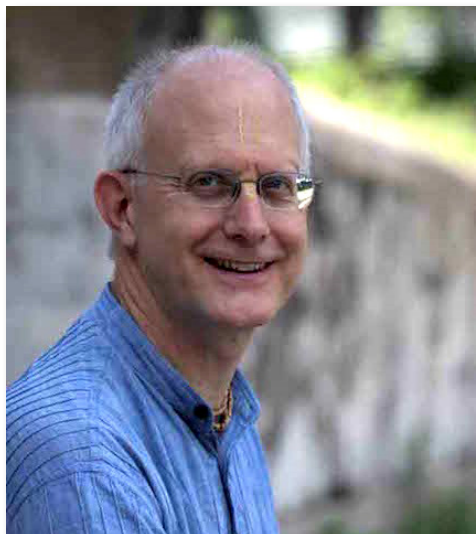
DR. ABHAYA ASTHANA

Dr. Abhaya Asthana is a Fellow at Bell Labs-CTO where he directs R&D in the areas of computer and communications systems. He is a world renowned expert with a rare grasp on the complexities of telecommunications network and a deep understanding of the underlying technologies. Earlier, he led the design of semiconductors at INTEL and taught at IIT Kanpur. His passion is to learn about Hindu Dharma and history, practice it and pass it on to the children. His mission is to help Hindus living in America remain Hindus, and through their lives contribute to the richness of their adopted land. He is the President of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA).



ANUTTAMA DASA

Anuttama Dasa is the Minister of Communications and former Governing Body Chairman of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), a monotheistic Vaishnava Hindu tradition.



Dasa was initiated into the Vaishnava order in 1976. He has served as President of two ISKCON temples; Vice President of the Religion Communicators Council (RCC); and currently serves on the Board of Religions for Peace USA. He is the convener of the Vaishnava-Christian Dialogue held annually in Washington, D.C. since 1998, and the Vaishnava-Christian Dialogue in Tirupati, India, which this January welcomed Catholic and Protestant leaders for three days of dialogue on “Love of God.”

HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran was ordained to the priesthood in 1969 and served as parochial vicar in Bordeaux. In 1983, he was called to the Vatican and joined the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church; for many years he represented the Holy See at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. He was appointed undersecretary of the Council for the Public Affairs of the Church (now known as the Section for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State) in 1988. In 1991, he was consecrated as titular archbishop of Telepte and appointed as secretary of the same council. He has led the Holy See delegation at numerous international conferences. In 2007 he was named President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.



MOST REVEREND PAUL S. LOVERDE

Bishop Paul S. Loverde was appointed by Pope John Paul II as the Third Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington on January 25, 1999. Prior to coming to the Diocese of Arlington, Bishop Loverde served as the Bishop of Ogdensburg, New York for five years.



He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Norwich, Connecticut on December 18, 1965, in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. He was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Hartford on April 12, 1988, in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Hartford. He was installed as the Eleventh Bishop of Ogdensburg on January 17, 1994, and he was installed as the Third Bishop of Arlington on March 25, 1999.



HINDU

Hinduism is about how to be truly content here and now. Human beings are unhappy because they seek to satisfy their worldly desires instead of resting their minds in God. The Supreme Being is One, although known by many names, appearing in many forms, and worshipped in many ways¹. Because of this whole-hearted acceptance of *unity in diversity*, Hindus make no claim to be the *exclusive* path to God. God is ever-present in the whole universe. All people can realize their own inner divinity through selfless activity to serve the world and systematic spiritual practice to make their hearts pure and their minds clear and calm.

¹ Rg Veda: 1.164.46

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

A1. When and where was the religion founded?

What is now known as the Hindu religion originated in India a few thousand years B.C.E., the precise period being open to debate. The term “Hindu” is relatively recent, introduced by the ancient Greeks and Persians to indicate the people who lived by the Sindhu River (also known as the Indus River). The ancient term is “Sanatana Dharma,” which means “eternal path of righteousness.”

A2. Who are the main prophets or seers?

The sages to whom the original scriptures were revealed preferred to remain anonymous. Since then, there have been numerous sages and teachers from ancient times to today.

A3. Are saints venerated?

Although there is no formal tradition of granting “sainthood,” sages and teachers, both ancient and contemporary, are deeply venerated.

A4. What was the original language of the main scriptures?

Sanskrit.

A5. What are the main divisions and how did they arise?

The philosophy and practices of Hinduism span an extremely broad spectrum of spirituality. Followers of specific beliefs or practices may consider themselves as separate communities, akin to denominations in Christianity. Distinctions may arise due to philosophy, (such as the traditions of Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, and Madhvacharya), the choice of a favorite form in which God is worshipped (such as worshippers of Vishnu, Shiva, or the Divine Mother), or the modes of worship prescribed by revered teachers (such as Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Vallabhacharya, Basavanna, or Dayananda Saraswati). As India is a large and diverse country, regional and language differences are also significant.

A6. How do you greet and part from each other?

A typical mode of both greeting and parting is to join one’s palms in front of the heart and say “namaste” or “namaskar,” which both mean “I bow to the divinity in you.” In parting, one might use words that indicate “we will meet again.”

A7. Is there a way to praise God in a greeting?

Such greetings include “Ram Ram,” “Hare Krishna,” “Hari OM,” and “OM,” all of which are various ways to refer to the Divine.

ETHICS AND MORALITY

B1. What are some of the main ethical injunctions on how to conduct one’s daily life?

Many scriptures contain injunctions on moral and ethical issues that are presented as norms to strive for rather than mandatory commandments. One example is the list of five Yamas (restraints) and five Niyamas (observances) presented in the Yoga Sutras.

The five Yamas are non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, non-indulgence, and non-possessiveness. The five Niyamas are purity, contentment, spiritual fervor, spiritual study, and surrender to God.¹ All are expected to honor their parents, teachers and guests, and to study and practice the scriptures.²

B2. What are one’s obligations toward other people, society, and the environment?

The simplest injunctions are to treat others as you would like them to treat you and to regard the whole world as one’s own family. Fundamentally, one’s obligations are expressed as the need to follow one’s Dharma, a complex concept derived from a verb root that means “to sustain.” One’s behavior should always provide the best possible sustenance to society as a whole.

Each individual has a moral obligation to ascertain what his or her Dharma is under specific circumstances. One aspect of Dharma is that each person should discharge his or her debt to God, who creates and sustains the universe; to the sages, who guide humanity; to ancestors and parents, who have begotten and cared for us; and to the society in which we live³. The scriptures exhort human beings to regard the elements of nature as manifestations of God and to treat them with reverence. Care for the environment and respect for nature are part of one’s obligations to God.⁴

B3. What are one’s spiritual obligations?

Hindus regard spiritual obligation in terms of deepening understanding and devotion to God rather than adherence to doctrine. The highest spiritual goal is to see God in all things and all

things in God. Among all living beings, humans are uniquely equipped to be self-aware and seek spiritual growth; it is therefore the moral duty of each human being to cultivate the qualities necessary for spiritual evolution. For this, the scriptures enjoin worship, selfless activity for the good of society, charity, and spiritual discipline (known as Yajna, Dana, and Tapas).⁵

Ancient sages recognized that people differed greatly in their degree of interest in God, in their interest in or capacity to understand philosophy, in their willingness to take time away from their mundane pursuits, and in their ability to overcome their own pettiness. So they designed a variety of spiritual paths that variously emphasize devotion, philosophical inquiry, service, or ritual. Put differently, one's spiritual goal is, by any means whatsoever, to rest one's mind steadily in God and fully understand one's relationship with the Supreme Being and the universe.⁶

B4. What are the religious requirements concerning diet, dress, etc.?

The strongest prohibitions are against eating beef and using shoes or leather accessories in places of worship. From Vedic times, Hindus have seen cows as a gift from God to humankind, for cows are gentle creatures that give great abundance to humans. Everything about them is beneficial: they work on the fields, provide valuable dairy products, and even their dung and urine is used. Because of these qualities, cows are considered sacred and are not to be abused.

Many Hindus are strict vegetarians and the most orthodox may eschew onions and garlic. Fasting is prescribed on the eleventh day of each lunar fortnight. There are generally no rigid dress requirements, though traditional dress is preferred on special occasions.

GOD OR ULTIMATE TRUTH

C1. What higher power (God) or ultimate Truth is worshipped? How do you name God? Is God one or many?

There is One Supreme Being who is Pure Consciousness, the single source of all existence, all awareness, and all bliss.⁷ The One is known by many names and manifests in many forms so that, at a personal level, devotees may choose to worship a specific form and forge a more intimate connection with God (see C3).

C2. What are the relationships among God, the individual, and the world?

The entire universe, without exception, is pervaded by the One Supreme Being.⁸ For ease of understanding this profound truth, the scriptures speak of the creator as Brahma, the sustainer as Vishnu, and the transformer as Shiva, who prepares the ground for the next round of creation in an eternal cycle. Brahma the Creator is not to be confused with Brahman, which signifies undifferentiated Pure Consciousness.

While nature consistently follows God's laws, humans forget their divine nature and turn away from God toward worldly pleasure. The In-dwelling God responds to each individual based on his or her own adherence to Dharma.⁹ God protects and serves the true devotee.¹⁰

C3. Does God have a form?

The One Supreme Being, Brahman, has no form. While the Formless can be an object of meditation, personal worship of God is directed to more descriptive forms of the Supreme, which may be viewed as different aspects of the One Supreme Being (see C1). Deities are represented in specific forms: male (such as Rama and Krishna), female (such as Lakshmi, Durga, and Saraswati), and with animal features (such as Hanuman and Ganesha). Scriptures and stories describe their glories, appearances, and roles in the creation, sustenance, and withdrawal of the universe.

C4. Has God appeared on earth?

As Sustainer of creation, Vishnu appears on earth from time to time to cleanse the world of evil forces and show the right paths in the practice of Dharma.¹¹ Rama, Krishna, and Buddha are among the main forms in which He has appeared in more recent history.

C5. What are the principal attributes of God?

The Supreme Being is far beyond the capacity of the human mind and individual perceptions vary according to the level of their own understanding. At the most philosophical level, Brahman is beyond all attributes, as any attribute would limit the Infinite Pure Consciousness.¹² As Ishwara, the One Supreme Being is said to have attributes: omniscient and all-powerful as the inner controller, benefactor, and guide to all living beings.¹³ The personalized forms of God are embodiments of love, compassion, and beneficence and are active in eliminating evil.

SCRIPTURE

D1. What are the main scriptures? What language were they written in?

The foundational scriptures, known as the Vedas, are perhaps the oldest existing scriptures. They are in the Sanskrit language and were transmitted orally for many centuries. They include philosophical discourses known as Upanishads. The Puranas and the epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) present moral philosophy in the more accessible form of stories concerning the various manifestations of the Supreme Being. Moral prescription is the focus of the Manu Smriti. The most widely consulted scripture is the Bhagavad Gita, which clearly states the Hindu philosophy and provides a practical guide on how to embody that philosophy in one's daily life.

D2. What is their origin?

The Vedas were revealed to sages in ancient times and are traditionally regarded as the very breath of God. The other scriptures were composed by sages.

D3. How old are they?

The date of the Vedas is fiercely contested. Modern evidence and scholarship indicate that the Vedas existed prior to 3500 B.C.E.¹⁴

WORSHIP

E1. Describe a typical worship ceremony.

A worship ceremony (*puja*) generally involves a figure representing a favorite form of God, either a simple stone form representing Shiva or an elaborately carved figure representing some other form of God. At a temple, the figure representing the God to be worshipped is ceremonially bathed and richly attired and decorated with flowers. To the accompaniment of mantras from the Vedas and other prayers, offerings of sanctified flowers, leaves, rice, fruit, incense, lamps, etc. are made.

The nature of the offerings depends on the material means of the devotees: some offer only prayers, others offer flowers, and some even offer gold. Physical offerings are less important than the devotion with which they are made.¹⁵ At the end of the worship, all present receive a token portion of the offerings that have been made to the deity as a symbol of divine grace. The forms of worship are less elaborate in homes than at temples, but do not differ in essence.

Worship can also be purely in the mind, with primary emphasis on the use of sacred mantras without any external ritual.

E2. Is worship mainly communal or private?

For a Hindu, worship of God is primarily a private affair. It can be performed daily in one's own mind or using rituals at a modest altar at home. A Hindu may visit a temple occasionally, regularly, frequently, or never. A Hindu may observe holy days both by special ceremonies at home and also by going to temples.

E3. What are the main religious symbols and what do they signify?

The main religious symbols include:

(OM), which represents the Supreme Being, Brahman. It signifies all aspects of human experience. This symbol is shown on the cover page of this note, as it is often used at the start of texts, both scriptures and personal letters.

The **swastika** means “well-being.” It signifies the goals of life and is used very widely as a sacred symbol to overcome obstacles and invoke prosperity, auspiciousness, and happiness.

The **six-pointed star** depicts two interlocking triangles. The upward-pointing triangle represents human effort and the downward-pointing triangle represents divine grace.

E4. What are the main holy days?

The most popular Hindu festival is Dussehra-Diwali, which occurs in October/November. (Holy days are set by the lunar calendar.) Known as the “festival of light,” it celebrates the victory of good over evil and, in some regions of India, marks the New Year. It includes a month of prayer and festivities related to the Divine Mother. Other major holy days are the birthdays of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, Maha-shiva-ratri (in honor of Lord Shiva), Ganesha Caturthi (in honor of Lord Ganesha), and many more.

E5. What are the major sites for pilgrimage?

There are major pilgrimage sites all over India, ranging from Kashmir in the north and Varanasi/Kashi in the center to Rameswaram at the southern tip. One of the most sacred sites is Mount Kailas in Tibet. Strongly encouraged by the scriptures, pilgrimage is popular even among the not-so-rich and not-so-devout. The “maha-kumbh-mela” at Prayagraj was estimated to have drawn 80 million pilgrims in one month in 2001, the largest gathering of human beings ever.

E6. How is worship integrated in daily life?

For the observant Hindu, there is no activity in daily life that does not involve worship.¹⁶ Prayers are prescribed to remember God during routine activities such as waking, bathing, eating, greeting others, picking up tools, turning on a light, etc. Pictures and symbols to remind one of God are displayed at home and in the workplace. In all actions, Hindus are asked to remember that God is present in all beings and all things.

LIFE CYCLE

F1. List three or four main life cycle events and the rituals associated with them. What do they signify?

Scriptural tradition mentions forty sacraments to be observed through life. Three of them precede birth; those during childhood include birth, naming ceremony, first solid food, first haircut, etc. Being a student is the first stage of one's life. The "upanayanam" or "thread ceremony" traditionally marked the start of formal education under the guidance of a Guru. The second stage is "householder," which includes maintaining a family as an integral part of society. Wedding vows are exchanged in the presence of the sacred fire using Vedic mantras culminating in the prayer "may our minds always be in harmony." In the third stage, husband and wife withdraw from active involvement in the world, devoting their time to spiritual study and practice. The fourth stage, which is entered only by a few, involves a ceremonial "death" to the world, renouncing all familial relationships, all property, and one's entire past identity, and surrendering oneself entirely to the Divine Will. The final sacrament is cremation of the body at death.

AFTERLIFE

G1. Describe the funeral ceremony.

After death, the body is cremated by male family members in an austere ceremony where only white clothes are worn, followed by several days of prescribed ritual, prayer, and scriptural readings. The rituals signify the provision of food and peace and comfort to the departed soul in its journey to the next world. After about two weeks of mourning, there is a feast celebrating the soul at rest.

G2. What happens to an individual after death?

Only the physical body dies. The subtle body (i.e., the energy field and mind; distinct from the individual Soul or Atman) of one who performs good acts is rewarded by going to heaven but remains there only until its merit runs out, at which point it returns to earth.¹⁷ When the subtle body returns to earth, it is in another physical body best suited to exhaust the accumulated karmic consequences of its previous deeds.

G3. What constitutes salvation? What is the reward or punishment for one's actions?

Is there rebirth?

The subtle body is reborn again and again until the karmic consequences of its past births are overcome by spiritual practice. Freedom from the cycle of rebirth is called *Moksha*, which means freedom or liberation. *Moksha* is the result of spiritual practice to purify the subtle body when supported by the grace of God. But philosophically, the scriptures also say that each person, right here, experiences in their own minds the heaven and hell that they create by their own actions and thoughts.¹⁸

G4. What is one's relationship to one's ancestors?

Respect for elders and deceased ancestors is a strong value. On the anniversaries of their parents' deaths, Hindus perform a special ceremony honoring their ancestors. The blessings of ancestors are invoked on special occasions such as marriage and at designated periods each year.

GOVERNANCE

H1. What are the functions of clergy? What is their education and training? What is the relationship between clergy and laypersons?

No person or organization is a preeminent authority on doctrinal, religious, or moral issues. Priests are trained for the performance of rituals but do not generally have a role in teaching, preaching, or pastoral counseling. Monks and scholars are active in guiding and teaching spiritual seekers.

H2. What role do religious leaders play in social issues?

Religious leaders speak out on social issues and can be quite influential, but decisions are

ultimately left to individual conscience.

H3. Who is permitted to interpret the meaning of sacred texts?

All spiritual seekers are encouraged to study and reflect on the scriptures directly to the best of their ability. Their understanding is aided by the guidance of commentators and teachers, but there is no stricture against individuals reaching their own interpretations of scripture. Vigorous questioning and independent inquiry are strongly recommended and doctrinal issues are generally left to the individual to decide in line with his or her own understanding of Dharma and personal conscience. The scriptures themselves state that direct experience of the Divine has more authority than the scriptures.¹⁹

H4. Are women eligible to be clergy or religious leaders?

Some of the most prominent religious leaders are women, but customarily priests are men.

H5. Is there a formal way to admit persons to this religion?

Anyone who professes faith in the Vedas is a Hindu and traditionally there has been no formal rite for conversion.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE “OTHER”

I1. How are other religions viewed in scripture or tradition?

Hindus do not engage in proselytizing and have no hesitancy in accepting all religions as legitimate ways to God, as observed diversity is merely superficial, masking the one underlying Reality.²⁰ This attitude is fostered by the scriptural emphasis on experience rather than doctrine; an ancient tradition of free debate among all philosophical schools, including atheism; and a long history of offering sanctuary to followers of religions that were being persecuted elsewhere, including Jews, Christians, Muslims, Zoroastrians and Baha’i. Hindus have close philosophical and cultural affinity to the three other major religions that were born in India—Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

I2. Do followers of other religions merit salvation?

Hindus do not claim that Hinduism is the exclusive path to salvation (see G3).

13. How important is it to try to convert others to this faith?

Hindus do not attempt to convert followers of other religions. A growing number of Hindus oppose proselytisation by others, particularly missionary activities that are seen as subtly coercive, using material incentives to target those suffering poverty and lack of education. Further, there is strong suspicion at claims of “exclusivity” or “uniqueness” by any religious group.

14. What is the attitude toward followers who choose to change to another faith?

There is no social ostracism of Hindus who convert to other religions.

15. Cite historical periods when there was exceptional amity or conflict between this faith and other faith. To what extent do these conflicts linger today?

Hindu society has traditionally been a haven for those persecuted elsewhere (see I1). For a thousand years until 1947, India was governed by non-Hindus who sometimes actively discriminated against followers of Hinduism. And in 1947, India was partitioned on a religious criterion with the creation of territories that are now Pakistan and Bangladesh. Despite the bitter memories of the awful violence that accompanied that upheaval, religions have mostly lived amicably in India. The sporadic bursts of local conflict are probably politically motivated: the poor, uneducated, and unemployed are easily manipulated to provoke unrest and riots. The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion to all and India is a secular state. “Secular” is not defined as separation of the state from religion but as the obligation to treat all religions equally.

16. What are the ways in which this religion interacts with other religions in the USA today?

Hindus are a young community in the USA, with many, if not most, adults being first-generation immigrants. The vital effort to build temples is now reaching maturity. Involvement in interfaith organizations has been a high priority for many years and has been the main forum for interacting with other religions. Despite isolated instances of hate-crimes against the Hindu community or places of worship, relations between Hindus and other religions have been most cordial. A small minority of Americans has gained some familiarity about Hinduism through travel or the study of yoga and ayurveda, but most Americans know very little about Hindu philosophy or religious practice.

MORE...

Are there common misconceptions about this religion that need to be addressed? Are there any other aspects of the religion that need to be highlighted?

The most common misconception is that the caste system comes from the scriptures and forms a central part of Hindu religious practice. In the scriptures, the division of society into four groups was no more than a recognition of the variety of functions in society: education (the Brahmins), maintaining order and security (the Kshatriyas), producing wealth (the Vaishyas), and performing labor (the Shudras). The social division into numerous communities was quite different from this four-fold division, but over time, the two concepts were conflated into a hereditary, hierarchical and oppressive social system consisting of numerous castes and outcastes that reformers have long fought to eliminate. In India, the law prohibits discrimination by caste and has put in place extensive affirmative action programs. But much remains to be done to eliminate the practice of discrimination. Caste is a non-issue among Hindus in the USA.

Also, it is common these days to refer to the Abrahamic religions as “the three great monotheistic religions of the world.” This is factually incorrect, reflecting a basic misunderstanding of Hindu philosophy. It conveys a sense of superiority over other religions that is misleading and perpetuates misunderstanding.

Finally, many believe that Hinduism is fatalistic in its adherence to the doctrine of karma. This doctrine is nothing more than the insistence that every action has a consequence; that all our actions will bear their corresponding fruit in this or subsequent lives; and that the only way to assure good outcomes in the future is to do good acts in the present, and pray for divine forgiveness of past misdeeds.

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Readings:

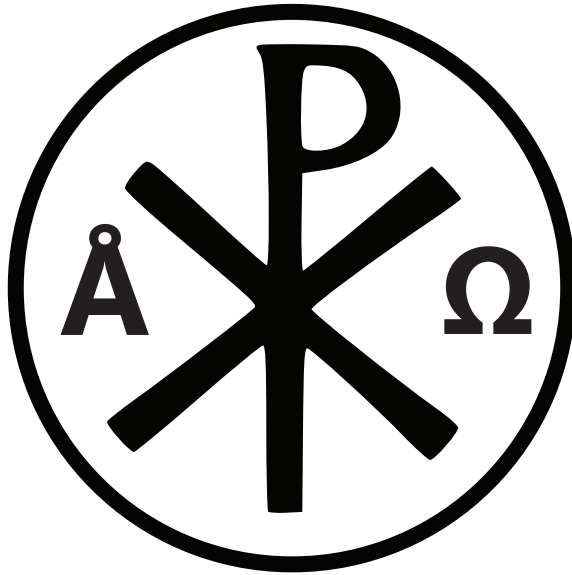
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1. For a brief discussion of Yamas and Niyamas, see “Lectures on Yoga” by Swami Rama, The Himalayan Institute of Yoga, 1979.
2. Taittiriya Upanishad 1.11.2
3. Mahabharata, Adi Parva, 120.17.20. see “Dharma: the Global Ethic” by Justice M. Rama Jois, ebook: www.vhp-america.org
4. Bhagavad Gita verses 3.9-16.
5. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.22
6. Srimad Bhagavata Mahapurana 7.1.31
7. Chandogya Upanishad 6.2.1
8. Isha Upanishad 1
9. Bhagavad Gita verse 13.22
10. Bhagavad Gita verse 9.22 and 12.6-7
11. Bhagavad Gita verses 4.7-8
12. See Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.6 and Bhagavad Gita verses 13.12-15 and 15.17,18
13. For a definition of Ishwara, see Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras 1.24-27, Mandukya Upanishad 6 and Svetashwata Upanishad 6.11.
14. For a review of this debate, see “Pride of India, A Glimpse into India’s Scientific Heritage”, Samskrita Bharati, 2006, pages 76-85.
15. Bhagavad Gita verse 9.26
16. Bhagavad Gita verse 9.27
17. Bhagavad Gita verse 9.20-1
18. Bhagavad Gita verse 16.21
19. Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.5
20. Bhagavad Gita verse 13.16



ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The closest followers of Jesus Christ became the first leaders of what would come to be known as the Roman Catholic Church. After two thousand years, Roman Catholicism continues to trace its heritage directly back to the time of these apostles. Through periods of persecution and political power, schism and reformation, the Church has persevered and today relies on both Scripture and Tradition to give witness to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the world.

A. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

A1. When and where was the religion founded?

The beginning of the Catholic Church is traced to the day of Pentecost (the story can be found in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2) in the city of Jerusalem, at that time under the Roman Empire, during the 30s of the first century A.D. (Anno Domini: "The Year of the Lord," the traditional manner of dating from the approximate year of the birth of Jesus). Pentecost, a Jewish feast meaning "fifty days," came to be known as the day on which the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of flame over the disciples, empowering them to proclaim the Gospel message after the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (Jesus Christ). However, Jesus himself, who lived his life within the Judaism of his time, is considered the founder of Christianity and the one who established the unique features of the Catholic Church such as succession from the apostles and the sacraments as empowering a unique relationship with God.

A2. Who are the main prophets or seers?

The Catholic Church recognizes the revelation of the one true God to Abraham in ancient times (ca. 1800 B.C.; B.C. means "Before [the birth of] Christ," and is the traditional manner of dating for Catholic Christians.). The Church also recognizes the prophets of ancient Israel as having received revelations inspired by God. The last of the prophets, for the early Church, was St. John the Baptizer, a cousin of Jesus who prepared the Jewish people for the imminent appearing of the true Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

A3. Are saints venerated?

Saints are venerated, not worshiped. They are fellow-Christians who are role models, protectors, and intercessors because of their generous responsiveness to the grace of God. Some saints are popularly considered the "patron saints" of various needs and activities. The liturgical calendar of the Church sets aside certain days on which particular saints are commemorated officially. Over the centuries, a formal canonization process has evolved by which the Pope officially recognizes deceased exemplary Catholics as saints.

A4. What was the original language of the main scriptures?

Greek.

A5. What are the main divisions and how did they arise?

In the period after the death of the last apostles, a number of disagreements arose among Christians in the Mediterranean world, giving rise to heretical movements alongside mainstream Catholic Christianity. Some rejected the authority of the Old Testament (Marcionism); some taught that salvation comes through esoteric knowledge that enables the soul to escape from the evil material world to return to God (Gnosticism); others debated the meaning of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; others had various theories about what it meant for Jesus to be the Son of God or the “Word of God incarnate.” Even before becoming a legal religion, leading Catholic theologians argued against the tenets of these movements. Soon after the Catholic Church was given legal status in the Roman Empire (313 A.D.), the Council of Nicaea affirmed the traditional faith of the Church on the question of Jesus’ divinity. The Latin Church and the Greek Orthodox Church were in union with one another for most of the first millennium of Christianity. In 1054 A.D. the Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated each other in a tragic dispute; over the centuries, this division became more and more permanent; the modern ecumenical movement is striving to heal this division between the two great churches representing “old growth” historic Christianity. In recent decades, some of the long-separated Middle Eastern Churches have reconciled their theological differences with the Latin Church. In the sixteenth century, conflicts involving church governance, theology, and civil society within the Latin Catholic Church in Western Europe gave rise to a reform movement led by the Augustinian friar and theologian, Martin Luther. His movement came to be known as the Protestant Reformation, whose beginning is traced to his posting of the famous “95 Theses” – theological challenges to be debated in public - in 1517 A.D.

A6. How do you greet and part from each other?

There is no specific form of greeting among Catholic Christians. “The Lord be with you” and “Peace be with you” are used during liturgical worship services.

A7. Is there a way to praise God in a greeting?

Although there is no universal form for mentioning God with reverence, in some countries the expressions “If God wills” (Romance language countries) or “God is great” (south Germany and Austria) or “May Jesus Christ be praised” (Romance and Slavic countries) are still in use.

B. ETHICS AND MORALITY

B1. What are some of the main ethical injunctions on how to conduct one's daily life?

Believing in Him as Savior and Lord, Christians take Jesus Christ as their model and guide in ethical matters; the heart of his ethical message is the love of God and neighbor, known as the two-fold law of charity. Since the moral law is based on the Bible, it is understood that Christ supplies specific spiritual assistance (graces) to enable people to live up to the demands of a truly Christian life. The teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapters 5-7 are central to Catholic moral teaching, uniting the norms of ancient Judaism to a strong emphasis on personal responsibility. Social and family ethics are also taught in most of the letters of St. Paul, usually in a special section towards the end of the letter. Over the centuries, the moral teachings of the Bible (such as the Ten Commandments and the Eight Beatitudes) have been brought together in various Church documents and teaching materials (catechisms) in order to teach them to believers in various circumstances. In the past 125 years, the Catholic Church has been giving considerable emphasis to teachings on social justice and peace making.

B2. What are one's obligations toward our fellow beings, society and the environment?

We are called to a sense of solidarity and community with other human beings, especially the poor. We have the obligation to contribute to the creation of a more just and moral society. We are stewards of creation, meaning that we must care for the planet and our environment.

B3. What are a person's spiritual obligations?

Catholic Christians are obliged to become active participants in a parish or other Eucharistic-centered community, such as a monastery or Catholic association or movement. This means that, at the very least, they attend the celebration of the Eucharist (Mass) every Sunday and Holy Day of obligation, and support the work of the parish with volunteer time, financial offerings, and prayer. During Lent, they are obliged to perform works of penance, almsgiving and prayer.

B4. What are the religious prescriptions concerning diet, dress, etc.?

Catholics are encouraged to practice simplicity of lifestyle in accordance with the requirements of their personal calling in life. There are no dietary rules for the entire year, but during the penitential season of Lent (forty days before Easter), Catholics between the ages

of 14 and 59 are obliged to refrain from eating meat or meat products on Ash Wednesday and every Friday in Lent. In addition, on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, they are to practice fasting which is minimally defined as refraining from eating between meals, and confining oneself to one light, meatless meal and, if needed, two smaller meatless meals during the day. It is encouraged to extend the fast to Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. Traditional days of fast and abstinence include the day before Christmas and the day before New Year's Day (the Solemnity of Mary as Mother of God). With regard to clothing, men and women are expected to dress modestly, particularly during services in church. The clergy wear special vestments during liturgical services.

C. GOD OR ULTIMATE TRUTH

C1. What is the higher power (God) or ultimate truth that is worshipped? How do you name God? Is God one or many?

There is one God, creator of heaven and earth. There is no god other than or above this God. Within the life of God, there are three equal, eternal, inseparable divine Persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This life is a communion of perfect, unconditional, self-giving love. In Catholic worship, the believing community is considered to be admitted into the loving relationships of the three Divine Persons by having been baptized “in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. Thus, the prayers of Catholic Christians are inspired by the Holy Spirit, offered in and with the Son- Jesus Christ – and directed to the Father who is the origin of everything.

C2. What are the relationships among God, the individual and the world?

The Trinity models for us an intimate community of love. In Scripture, we are told that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son to live as a human being. God became one of us. He did not remain distant from the world. The Spirit continues to guide us as the on-going, abiding presence of God in the world.

C3. Does God have a form?

God is beyond all words and forms; the words that we read in the Scriptures are to be understood as analogies of the true nature of God. Through revelation, God has made known, by way of a gift of love, the truths that are necessary for humans to be saved and to be made holy. The primary and unsurpassable revelation of God is Jesus Christ; thus the ultimate form of revelation is not a text, but a divine Person.

C4. Has God appeared on earth?

One of the three Divine Persons, the Son or the “Word” (Logos) of God, entered human history by becoming a man, Jesus Christ, born by virginal conception in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

C5. What are the principal attributes of God?

God is the source of all things; God is the creator from nothing of all things that exist. The Scriptures mention many attributes of God, such as mercy, justice, compassion, wisdom, omniscience, omnipotence, eternal, present everywhere and so forth; these are all understood to be analogous to the truth about God’s nature, because human language can at best only point in the right direction with the help of God. Human language does not fully describe the attributes of God.

D. SCRIPTURE

D1. What are the main scriptures? What language?

The Catholic Church received the Hebrew Scriptures as they were known to Jesus and the Apostles. In preaching about Jesus Christ, the early Christian community made use of the Septuagint, an expanded version of the Hebrew Scriptures containing Greek translations of Hebrew and Aramaic works as well as several works composed by Jews in Greek. The New Testament consists of 27 early Christian writings, all of which were composed in Greek.

D2. What is their origin?

The human authors of these works are believed to have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the *selection* of these works was also guided by the Holy Spirit to insure that they authentically convey the teachings of Jesus and the apostles; these works were read during the early Christian celebration of the Eucharist. An important witness to this process of selection is St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in about 110 A.D. He had been a bishop in Asia Minor for more than three decades, the very period in which the New Testament works were composed; in his letters, he deliberately restricts his citations to the works in the New Testament except the Book of Revelation.

D3. How old are they?

The books of the Bible were composed over a long period of time. The books that comprise the Old Testament were written in ancient Israel from approximately the tenth century B.C. to

the second century B.C. The works that comprise the New Testament were composed from the 50s of the first century A.D. to the first decade of the second century A.D.

E. WORSHIP

E1. Describe a typical worship ceremony.

The Eucharist, also referred to as the Mass, is a daily form of worship in which the faithful gather around an ordained priest-celebrant who leads the prayers, comments on Biblical readings, and offers the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of Christ (Holy Communion). Attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation is a basic obligation of the Catholic faithful. In the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, a considerable amount of cultural adaptation, particularly in architecture, vestments, and music, is allowed. In the Byzantine Rite of the Catholic Church, the cultural traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Slavic civilizations are carefully preserved. Other worship services include Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, funerals, and other special ceremonies in which the sacraments are conferred, such as matrimony.

E2. Is worship mainly in a communal forum or private?

Catholic worship includes both public liturgical rites and personal prayer. Public liturgical prayer, such as the Eucharist or Morning and Evening Prayer, is the clearest expression of the communal character of Catholic belief. Personal prayer is encouraged in a variety of forms, such as: the recitation of the rosary (often done publically) which involves meditation on the events in the life of Jesus and Mary; the Way of the Cross, which involves meditation on the suffering and death of Christ; mental prayer or meditation, which involves reflection on the great events and themes of Christian faith followed by personal spontaneous prayer and contemplative silence; Lectio Divina, which involves the prayerful and attentive reading of the Bible; Eucharistic Adoration (also done in groups) which involves silent meditation on the Presence of Jesus Christ in the reserved Eucharistic bread kept in every Catholic church.

E3. What are the main religious symbols and what do they signify?

The cross, particularly ones showing Christ crucified, is the most typical religious symbol found in Catholic churches and homes. It represents the suffering and death of Jesus Christ by which He redeemed the world from sin and offered the graces that enable human beings to be saved. The church building itself is a sacred symbol representing the summary of all the prayers and acts of worship that the Catholic Church makes available for the spiritual benefit of the faithful. A great variety of symbols can be found in church decoration, each of which

is meant to remind the faithful of the means by which God gives grace to the person of faith.

E4. What are the main holy days?

Every Sunday is a holy day, commemorating the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the course of the year, time is divided up into several sacred liturgical seasons: Advent, to prepare for Christmas; Christmas (December 25) to reflect on the birth of Christ and his manifestation (Epiphany, January 6); Lent to prepare for the Sacred Triduum of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday; Easter and the fifty days after; Pentecost to celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit; Ordinary Time, in which the main themes of Christian faith are presented in a three-year cycle of readings. There are also the feast days of Mary such as her Annunciation (March 25, when she received the message of the angel Gabriel and conceived the Child Jesus), her Assumption (August 15, when she was raised body and soul to heaven), her Immaculate Conception (December 8, when she was conceived without the transmission of Original Sin by her parents Joachim and Anna- please note that this feast is often confused with the Annunciation). Through the course of the year, there are feasts for many of the saints. In addition, all the saints known and unknown are remembered on All Saints' Day (November 1), and all the dead are recalled on All Souls' Day (November 2).

E5. What are the major sites for pilgrimage?

The main sites of pilgrimage are Rome and the Holy Land (Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem, as well as other sites associated with Jesus, Mary, and the prophets of ancient Israel). Over the centuries, pilgrimage to sites associated with important saints or the relics of the saints has been a very important part of Catholic piety. In recent centuries, the sites of apparitions of the Virgin Mary have become particularly important, such as Lourdes in France and Fatima in Portugal.

E6. How is worship integrated in daily life?

The sacraments celebrated under various circumstances are intended to unite worship to the experience of a committed and faithful life. In addition, it is understood that worship carried out in church is meant to influence one's ethical conduct in daily life. The Church itself, as the visible Body of Christ, is itself a sacrament, that is, an outward sign of the invisible action of God's grace in the world. There are seven sacraments that particularize the grace of God that comes to believers through the action of the Church:

Baptism – the ritual water bath that first initiates a believer into the Church and celebrates victory over original sin;

Confirmation – another initiation sacrament that seals with holy oil the commitment first made in baptism, often celebrated in the teen years;

Eucharist – the final initiation sacrament in which the believer joins his or her fellow Catholic Christians in the ritual meal during which the Body and Blood of Christ are consumed;

Matrimony – a vocational sacrament in which one man and one woman consent freely to live in an indissoluble union as man and wife, accepting children as a gift of God, supporting one another's spiritual and material well-being.

Holy Orders – vocational sacrament in which a single man promises to live a celibate life in service to the Church as a priest, or when a married man vows to live a life of ordained service to the Church as a deacon, or when a priest is given special leadership responsibilities as a bishop;

Reconciliation – sacrament of healing in which a person confesses his or her sins to a priest, promises to turn away from such sins in the future and offers particular prayers or acts of service as a penance;

Anointing of the Sick – healing sacrament in which a person who is ill is anointed by a priest or bishop with specially blessed oil while prayers for his or her physical well-being are offered.

F. LIFE CYCLE

F1. What are the 3-4 main life cycle events and what are the rituals associated with them? What do they signify?

In Catholic practice, life cycle events are typically celebrated with appropriate sacraments. Soon after a child is born, he or she is baptized. The essential ritual of baptism, which is the first sacrament “of initiation” involves pouring water over the head of the child (immersion is also used) three times while speaking the words: I baptize you, N_____, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Later, at the “age of reason,” approximately at age 7 or 8, the child receives First Holy Communion, usually with a group of classmates. Children are prepared for this sacramental experience with a period of training corresponding to their mental abilities called “catechesis”. After receiving First Holy Communion, the child may receive communion at any future Eucharist, on a par with adult faithful. Confirmation is a third sacrament of “initiation” into the Christian life that is most often celebrated at age 14. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, the young Christian is strengthened in the faith, which is to be brought to maturity by further study, service of others, and prayer. The rite consists of

the laying on of hands by a bishop (or the local pastor, in certain cases) and anointing with the perfumed oil of chrism. Through these three sacraments of initiation, a Catholic Christian is brought into the life of God, worshiping the Father in and through a deep relationship of faith in the Son, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

G. AFTER-LIFE

G1. Describe the funeral ceremony.

The Catholic funeral ceremony has a number of stages that can be adapted according to the circumstances of death. At the moment of death, there are prayers for the “commendation of the deceased”. After the body has been prepared for burial, there can be a “Wake” or “Vigil” for the deceased, which is a short prayer service often accompanied by the recitation of the Rosary by family and friends, usually led by a member of the clergy. In the parish church, the body of the deceased, encased in a coffin, is brought into the center of the worship space and the funeral Eucharist is celebrated. At the end of the ceremony, the coffin is sprinkled with holy water to recall the start of the Christian life in Baptism, and incensed as a sign of the hope of eternal life. In essence, the entire Christian life is a preparation for eternal life in union with God, so these rites highlight the basic hopes and beliefs of the Christian community. After this final rite, the body is accompanied to the cemetery where the gravesite is blessed and final prayers are offered in the presence of family and friends.

G2. What happens to an individual after death?

The goal of the Christian faith is eternal life with God in heaven, which is the state of perfect happiness; this is also called the beatific vision and, in early Christian writings, is described as a banquet in the Kingdom of God. This state is only attainable by the grace of God that comes to human beings in and through Jesus Christ. It is important to note that the perfection of this heavenly life can only be attained at the end of time itself, when the entire human person, body and soul, are reunited in the immortal resurrection body. Between bodily death and the final end, only the immortal soul of a person enjoys the heavenly life with God in the company of all the saints. There are therefore two moments of judgment after death: the first occurs soon after bodily death, after which the soul finds itself in heaven, purgatory, or hell. The second judgment occurs when body and soul are reunited as the resurrection body; it is then that the whole person abides in either eternal life or eternal damnation. It is possible for a human being to reject God’s offer of saving grace in Christ; such persons are refusing an absolute offer of love. Therefore, upon death, they will endure the consequences of their refusal of God’s love in an eternal state known as Hell.

G3. What constitutes salvation? What is the reward or punishment for one's actions? Is there rebirth?

Salvation consists in accepting and living in accordance with God's offer of grace through Jesus Christ; the Catholic Church is the visible institution by which the saving grace of God is made available to human beings. Christ has redeemed us by his incarnation, death, and resurrection, making an infinite abundance of divine love available to everyone who has ever lived, past, present and future. To believe in Christ's gift of love, openly confessing one's faith and striving to live a virtuous, generous, and repentant life, leads a believer to persevere to the end of life. The Catholic Church offers many sacraments and spiritual teachings to assist a person in his or her life's journey so that at the time of death he or she is ready to enter eternal life. The entire process of remaining faithful to the spiritual journey is called "sanctification" by which a person becomes a saint, guided providentially by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit from moment to moment in one's life. The Catholic Church does not teach the doctrine of reincarnation, in which a soul can move from one body to another; there is only one embodiment. After death, should a person attain salvation, it is possible to envision an endless growth in love for God that endures beyond time and which cannot be fully described in words, but which some spiritually gifted persons have experienced through mystical union during their earthly lives.

G4. What is one's relationship to one's ancestors?

Catholic Christians offer prayers for their deceased relatives and friends, particularly on the anniversary of their death. There is a very strong belief in the "communion of the saints" which means that the souls of those who have entered heaven can intercede with God on behalf of the living, and the living can pray on behalf of those souls that are enduring purification in Purgatory. The souls in Hell, however, cannot intercede and cannot receive the benefit of prayers. Perfect communion and love among all those who are saved and sanctified among those who have ever lived is one aspect of the resurrection of the dead and eternal life with God; heaven is a community in which love prevails.

H. GOVERNANCE

H1. What are the functions of clergy? What is their education and training? What is the relationship between clergy and lay persons?

Although there have always been lay persons involved in various aspects of Church governance, the primary governing functions of the Catholic Church are the responsibility of ordained clergy. Bishops govern a diocese, which is an administrative district with geograph-

ical boundaries that often correspond to a group of counties, or even an entire state. Within the diocese, local parishes are governed by pastors who are assisted by other priests, deacons and lay administrators. The primary function of the clergy, however, is spiritual. Clergy administer the sacraments, preach the word of God, provide spiritual counsel for individuals and families, serve as chaplains to institutions, and teach about the faith in a wide variety of educational institutions. The training of a Catholic priest typically begins with completing a four year university degree with substantial work in philosophy. The seminarian then proceeds into a professional degree program (the Master of Divinity) in a recognized Catholic institution in which both academic and spiritual formation are regulated in accordance with norms established by the Holy See and the national bishops' conference. The primary relationship between clergy and laity is one of spiritual service, as indicated above. In many settings, however, clergy and laity collaborate as professional colleagues ministering to the diverse needs of a world-wide Church.

H2. What role do religious leaders play in social issues?

The roots of the separation of Church and State in the US and in Europe go back to a long history of conflict and debate between the authorities of the Catholic Church, especially the institution of the Papacy, and various kingdoms and empires. Basically, church leaders are to teach the moral norms of Catholic Christianity as clearly as possible in every era and cultural setting. Church leaders may work with the secular authorities to find ways to apply moral norms within the structures of autonomous public institutions and legal codes. The Catholic Church is concerned about basic human rights: freedom of religion, the right to life (which includes opposition to all abortion procedures, euthanasia, and the death penalty), immigration rights, labor rights including a just wage and job security, education rights (the freedom to educate one's children in accordance with one's own moral and religious principles), social justice, and environmental conservation.

H3. Who is permitted to interpret the meanings of sacred texts?

Chapter three of *Lumen gentium*, a key document from the Second Vatican Council, teaches that the hierarchy of the Pope and the bishops around the world who are in communion with him has the authority to interpret Scripture. *“Among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place. For bishops are preachers of the faith, who lead new disciples to Christ, and they are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice, and by the light of the Holy Spirit illustrate that faith. They bring forth from the treasury of Revelation new things and old, making it bear fruit and vigilantly warding off any errors that threaten their flock. Bishops, teaching in communion with*

the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth."

H4. Are women eligible to be clergy or religious leaders?

Women cannot receive the sacrament of Holy Orders. However, they may occupy positions of leadership in accord with Church (canon) law, for example they can serve as Chancellors of a Catholic Diocese or justices in Diocesan Tribunals. Lay women and consecrated women (sisters or nuns) are serving as pastoral administrators of parishes that lack an ordained resident priest. It should be recalled that women have taken on leadership roles in the Church since the first decades of Christian history (see especially Romans 16). From at least the third century A.D., women have formed their own celibate monastic communities. There are many thousands of women saints, representing an extremely diverse spectrum of spiritual gifts, cultural backgrounds, and accomplishments.

H5. Is there a formal way to admit persons to this religion?

Yes, there are formal ways to admit persons as governed by Vatican documents. See the initiation sacraments described above. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)* is the normative means by which converts are initiated into the Church in the present day, recalling the public ritual stages in which converts entered the Church in the early days of Christianity.

I. ATTITUDE TO THE "OTHER"

I1. How are other religions viewed in scripture or tradition?

Other religions, with the exception of Judaism, are understood to be the outward expression of a natural desire to come to knowledge of God that is present in all human beings. Catholic Christians believe that the Jewish people received an authentic revelation from God in addition to the basic natural desire to know the truth. Thus, the Jewish faith is already a response to God's revelation. That revelation is found in the Old Testament, and finds its complete meaning in the New Testament and in the person of Jesus Christ. However, the Jewish people's adherence to an authentic revelation places them in a special relationship with the Catholic Church that is not shared by other world religions. There has always been some form of recognition that other religions have elements of that which is true and good. In the document *Nostra Aetate* (1965) of the Second Vatican Council, the Church officially recognized that there are such elements of truth in other religions and formally prohibited anti-Jewish teachings based on the erroneous notion that the Jews are collectively guilty for the death of Christ. *Nostra Aetate* also encouraged Catholics to engage in dialogue with members of other religions; shortly after 1965, the Vatican created a special Pontifical Council to promote such dialogue.

12. Do followers of other religions merit salvation?

Scripture asserts that “God wills all to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2:4). God has also provided the means by people can come to know the truth and be saved. That means is the person of Jesus Christ, who is made known in various ways by the preaching, teaching, and witness of the Church. Although there are many definitions of salvation among the religions of the world, all of them highlighting what each religion believes to be the final goal of all human striving, the Catholic Church believes that the only salvation that God has revealed for human beings is that which God has given us through Jesus Christ. This is why the Catholic Church teaches that “outside the Church there is no salvation.” There is no salvation other than that which God alone gives us in Christ, and the means established by God to make that salvation available in the world is the Church. It is understood, however, that not everyone encounters Christ and the Church in the course of a lifetime. The Second Vatican Council taught that “those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience –those too may achieve eternal salvation.” (*Lumen Gentium* 16).

13. How important is it to try to convert others to this faith?

The Church has been given a mission from God to make Jesus Christ known to everyone, and to invite people to belief and full communion. The ultimate purpose of the Church’s mission is to enable people to share in the communion of love that is the very life of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (cf. Catechism #850). It is therefore very important for Catholic Christians to let other people know, in appropriate and respectful ways, who Jesus is, and what the Church is in God’s plan of salvation for all people.

14. What is the attitude toward followers who choose to change to another faith?

Those persons who, “knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it” cannot be saved (*Lumen Gentium* 14). Thus, before and since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has always formally taught that if a person leaves the Church, they lose the grace of salvation that God offered them within the Church. The Catholic Church deems this to be a very serious sin, called “apostasy,” that automatically separates a person from the spiritual benefits of being “one in Christ” with those who believe. Leaving the Church is a cause of great distress to the family and friends of those who make this choice.

15. Cite historical periods when there was exceptional conflict between this faith and other faiths? To what extent do these conflicts linger to-day?

During the first century of Christianity, there were many persons who objected to or rejected the message of Jesus. Some Jewish leaders and officials of the Roman Empire made efforts to stop the spread of the faith. There were very intense polemical exchanges between Christians and Jews for the entire first millennium of Christian history. Another tragic, centuries-long conflict has characterized relations between Christians and Muslims. During the seventh century A.D., the Arabic successors of the founder of Islam began to build a large international empire in the Middle East at the expense of the pre-existing Byzantine and Persian empires. The new empire incorporated the military prowess of the early Muslim community and its religious zeal to create a new civilization based on Islam. Eastern Christians in the conquered lands recognized that the new religion contained elements of Judaism and Christianity. Islam showed itself to be a completely new religious movement offering both political and intellectual challenges to all the forms of Christianity in the Mediterranean world and the Middle East.

16. What are the ways in which this religion interacts with other religions in contemporary USA?

In the United States, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has sponsored more than forty years of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (www.usccb.org). Local Catholic dioceses and parishes are active partners in interfaith partnerships engaged in a wide variety of projects.

J. MORE...

J1. Are there common misconceptions about this religion that need to be addressed?

It is not uncommon for some people to deny that Catholics are “Christians”. Given the history of the text of the New Testament, transmitted through the Catholic Church over the centuries, and the handing on of the apostolic ministry, it is obvious that this opinion has no basis in fact. Catholic priests and bishops are selected from men who have a calling to the priesthood and are willing to live a celibate life; permanent deacons may be married or celibate. A special provision is made for married Protestant clergy who wish to become Catholic priests; they are not required to take on celibacy.

Another common misunderstanding about Catholicism is about the veneration that Catholics

show towards the Virgin Mary. Mary's prayers as a heavenly intercessor are based on her unique role as the mother of Jesus. Because of her willingness to say "yes" to God, she is a model of Christian freedom and faithfulness, like the other saints. However, because of her indispensable and unique role in salvation history, she has a higher place in the theological vision of the Catholic faith.

Another area of misunderstanding surrounds Catholic defense of human life from conception to natural death. Some would say that this is "imposing Catholic belief on non-Catholic members of society." Catholics believe that the universally valid natural law requires the defense of human life. Biologically, a person is human from the moment of conception. It is therefore because of a concern about human rights and their protection by the state that Catholics urge governments to prohibit abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, embryonic experimentation, and embryonic stem-cell-based medications.

J2. Suggestions for further research?

www.usccb.org is the website of the aforementioned United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It gives an excellent overview of Catholic life in the U.S. today. Depending on where you live, local diocesan websites might also be quite helpful. In Washington, D.C., the address is www.adw.org. On a worldwide scale, www.vatican.va is the official website of the Holy See.

by Rev. Dr. Francis Tiso (USCCB) with Mike Goggin and Chris Byrnes (IFC).



Durga Temple

(A Tax-Exempt Non-Profit Organization)
8400 Durga Place, Fairfax Station, VA 22039
Phone: 703-690-9355
www.durgatemple.org

Since its inauguration in March 1999, Durga Temple of VA has served the Hindu community's religious, cultural, educational, and social needs in Northern Virginia area. The temple offers: *BalGokul*; Discourses on *Gita* and other *Dharmic* Scriptures; Indian Language classes; Yoga for adults and children; Music, Dance and SAT Classes; Sr. Citizen Group; Monthly free health clinic and awareness sessions and more. Highly acclaimed & renowned Spiritual *Swamis* and *Gurus* visit the temple on a regular basis to deliver religious teachings, *Bhajans* (Devotional chanting) and impart their knowledge and wisdom to our community

We celebrate all major Hindu Festivals and other important days. Some of them are: *Navratras*, *Diwali*, *Holi*, *Shivaratri*, *Ganesh Pooja*, *Janamashtami*, *Ram Navmi*, *Buddha Jayanti*, *Karva Chauth*, *Hanuman Jayanti*, etc. The temple places special emphasis on programs for the young and our youth. The temple participates in the Fairfax county initiatives, Community *Seva* (service) Inter-faith dialog, and various outreach activities.

The temple has four full-time *Pandits* and *Acharyas* (Priests) and is governed and managed by a Board of Trustees and an Executive Board. Plans are underway to expand the current facility to serve the growing community.

There has been a growing interest among non-Hindus in learning about Eastern traditions, especially Hinduism, the third largest religious in the world. We are happy that the Hindu-Catholic Dialog will take place at the Durga Temple of VA. All guests and visitors are most welcome. We look forward to a continuation of our interaction with followers of other faiths.



Hindu American Community Services Inc.

10710 River Road, Potomac, MD 20854 www.hacsiusa.org

SERVICE TO HUMANITY IS SERVICE TO GOD ❖ LOVE ALL SERVE ALL



Hindu American Community Services Inc. (HACSI) was incorporated in 2009 for mobilizing the "spirit of giving" of Hindu Americans to assist those in the larger community who find themselves in adverse circumstances. HACSI's focused programs are the following:

Food For The Needy: This is HACSI's flagship program. Volunteers from HACSI and its two dozen affiliated organizations prepare close to 110,000 meals a year at *DC Central Kitchen (DCK)*. About half the meals are served in DCK facility and the remaining distributed through shelters housing the homeless, battered women, needy seniors and school children.

Assistance to Bhutanese Refugees: About 1,500 Hindu and Buddhist refugees have been resettled in the Washington-Baltimore region. HACSI programs of assistance include computer education for students and seniors, donation of computers to school-going children, periodical health fairs for free medical check-up, and monthly meetings to enable the Bhutanese families to keep in touch with their religious and cultural heritage.

Benevolent Fund to help members of the Hindu and Bhutanese communities to cope with financial emergencies due to calamities such as death or protracted illness.

Support to Inter-Faith Educational Activities: HACSI funded the distribution of the PBS documentary "*Asian and Abrahamic Religions: a divine Encounter in America*" to 350 high schools in D.C., Maryland and Virginia. Additionally, HACSI has underwritten a part of the cost of training programs that will help social studies teachers to use this documentary as teaching material in US high schools. HACSI has also provided support to InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington to strengthen the dissemination of its *Strengthening Teaching About Religions (STAR)* publications.

Supporting the Hindu Soldiers Serving in US Military: HACSI has been sending care packages to Hindus in active duty. It assisted the Hindu Chaplain in the US Military by organizing cultural programs and providing Indian food during major Hindu Festivals at Walter Reed Military Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland.

HACSI is an IRS-approved 501 (c) (3) entity and all donations to HACSI are tax-exempt.

For more information about HACSI, Please contact: K.Venkatraman, Chair Person, 301-646-1232. or visit web site: www.hacsiusa.org

HAF is changing the narratives and shaping policies that affect Hindus everyday...

From religious liberty and human rights to the portrayal of Hinduism in school textbooks and the media, HAF speaks up, educates, and builds relationships with key stakeholders to strengthen the welfare of Hindus globally and promote dignity, mutual respect, and pluralism universally.



HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION

Promoting
Dignity,
Mutual Respect,
and Pluralism

910 17th Street NW
Suite 316A
Washington, DC 20006

(202) 223-8222

www.hafsite.org



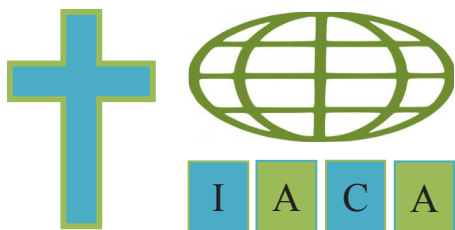
Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC) - celebrating 10th Anniversary

The Hindu *Mandir* Executives' Conference (HMEC) is focused on developing a network among all Executives from the North America Hindu *Mandirs* (temples) and institutions. *Mandirs* outside India have to be centers of teaching and learning of Hindu *Dharmic* scriptures, philosophy, traditions, rituals and culture. The HMEC provides a platform for the *Mandir* executives to share their knowledge, wisdom and best practices so as to build on each other's experiences and achievements. The conferees explore avenues of expanding institutional roles in meeting the changing needs of current and next-gen of Hindus and to ensure the sustainability of *Dharma*.

Successful initiatives include: Coalition of Hindu Youth (CHY); Sanatana *Dharma* Scholarships; Hindu Seva *Divas* (Service Days); Blood / Bone Marrow Drive; Hindu Mandir Priests Conference (HMPC), Prayer Book for Care Givers, Hindu Chaplaincy, Digital Library and books, etc.

From the first conference in Atlanta, GA in 2006, it has grown to be the largest annual conference for Hindu Institutions and Temples in No. America. The 10th HMEC is scheduled for 2-4 Oct., 2015 in Trinidad. For more info visit: <http://myhmec.com/>





INDIAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC ASSOCIATION WASHINGTON, D.C

A 501 c (3) Organization of Catholics from the Indian subcontinent
India *Bangladesh *Pakistan *Sri Lanka
Established -1993
www.icacusa.org

The Indian American Catholic Association (IACA) was founded in 1993 to build a united community based on our strong Catholic faith and to showcase the rich religious and cultural diversity that we bring from the Indian subcontinent to our adopted land. We wanted our children to learn their faith traditions that have been practiced by our Catholic ancestors for over two millennia in the Indian subcontinent. IACA is represented by over 15 Catholic communities from the subcontinent as well as the Eastern rites – Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara churches.

As the membership of IACA has grown over the years, so also have the number and variety of our activities. Here are some highlights:

- Built an oratory to Our Lady of Good Health, Vailankanni at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, in Washington, DC (1997) and hold an annual pilgrimage, monthly devotions, and prayer services at the Basilica regularly since 1997
- Raised and distributed (through Catholic Charities, the Red Cross and other international organizations) well over \$300,000 for disaster relief in the U.S. (Hurricane Katrina and Super storm Sandy); in India (cyclones in Orissa, tsunami in Tamil Nadu, earthquakes in Maharashtra and Gujarat), and other countries (tsunami in Sri Lanka and earthquakes in Indonesia, Haiti, and Japan)
- Regularly volunteer in social service programs in Washington DC
- Organize a variety of youth leadership building programs; sponsor youth participation in religious and socio-economic projects
- Since 2000, work with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and several east coast dioceses in promoting diversity in faith practices, training pastoral agents involved in ministry with Asian and Pacific communities, and in implementing the pastoral document “*Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith*”
- Founding member of the Asian Pacific Catholic Network (APCN) that brings together over 20 Asian and Pacific Catholic groups for prayer, youth training, and Asian Catholic cultural events on a regular basis



Sri Siva Vishnu Temple

6905 Cipriano Road, Lanham MD 20706

Tel: (301) 552-3335 Fax: (301) 552-1204

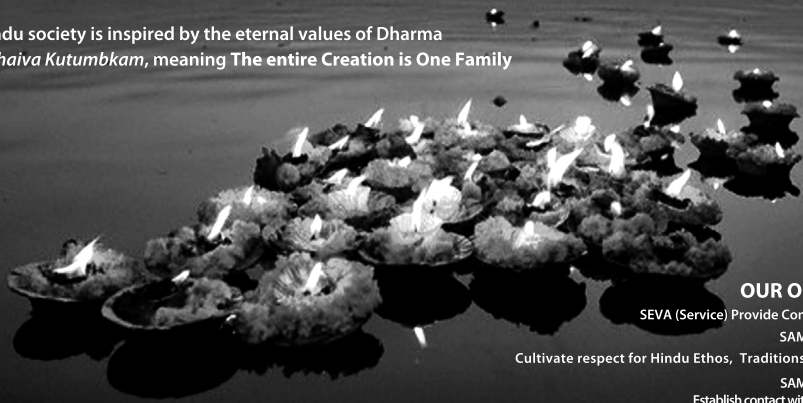
E-Mail: ssvt@ssvt.org Web Site: <http://www.ssvt.org>



A Religious & Cultural Landmark in Washington Metropolitan Area

- One of the largest Hindu Temples in USA. It seamlessly incorporates Mayan, Pallava, Vijayanagara, Kerala and South Canara styles of temple architecture. Pujas performed everyday as per Saiva Agama, Pancharathra Agama, Kerala Tantric and Madhwa traditions. Major deities are modeled after Deities in famous temples of India. The only temple in Western hemisphere with sanctified 18 Holy Steps for Lord Ayyappa.
- A major center for carnatic music and traditional South Indian dances. Most visiting artists from India are invited to perform on SSVT stage. SSVT's “local artists” series provides a platform to local musicians and dancers who have blossomed into renowned artists.
- SSVT volunteers are active in community work. For twenty years, SSVT youth have been preparing 1,500 sandwiches every month to be served in homeless shelters. SSVT volunteers have been preparing meals in DC Central Kitchen since 2007.
- Weekend seminars on topic of religious significance. Also, classes on Sunday mornings for children and young adults to familiarize them with Hindu scriptures.
- School students and inter-faith groups are welcome to visit the temple. Please contact: Sasi Menon, Vice Chair (operations) at sasi_20903@yahoo.com or (202) 528-7564.

A dynamic, vibrant Hindu society is inspired by the eternal values of Dharma
and the ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam*, meaning The entire Creation is One Family



धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः

The one who protects Dharma is protected by Dharma

OUR OBJECTIVES

SEVA (Service) Provide Community Service
SAMSKARS (Values)
Cultivate respect for Hindu Ethos, Traditions and Humanity
SAMPARK (Network)
Establish contact with Hindus globally
PRACHAR (Awareness)
Promote unity among Hindus;
Provide a forum for and represent the interests
of Hindu Institutions and Organizations

VHPA 45 years in service of community WORLD HINDU COUNCIL OF AMERICA

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vishwa.sampark> | web: www.vhp-america.org | Twitter: ootzchakra | Phone: 732.744.0851



Hindu American Seva Communities

Building Pluralistic Communities through Seva

The mission. Hindu American Seva Communities (HASC) was founded in 2009 with the guidance of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Its goal is to empower the Hindu community, especially youth, by making service and volunteering a defining part of Hindu American life and culture—and to liaise with government and interfaith groups to communicate Hindu needs, share Hindu points of strength, and build bridges of understanding.

Our five points of focus are to 1) develop dynamic Seva Centers nationwide, 2) improve security for our families and places of worship, 3) train youth and empower women, 4) promote energy conservation and protect the environment, and 5) educate and advocate toward dharma and social justice. In January 2015, HASC was awarded a federal grant to reach out to South Asians without adequate health insurance to identify affordable health care coverage options and to help them enroll in Marketplace insurance plans. HASC volunteers reached out to South Asians in ethnic grocery stores, temples, gurudwaras, and enrollment centers in New Jersey and Maryland.

Your help will make a world of difference. In just five brief years, HASC has helped comfort, uplift and inspire countless souls. Yet, we are just beginning. There is a great need out there and we welcome your contribution financially or by volunteering in any of our five focus areas listed above.

Please email us as at: seva@hinduamericanseva.org

And/or send a check or donate online: www.hinduamericanseva.org



INDIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL AND CULTURAL CENTER

India International School (IIS) is a non-profit equal-opportunity educational institution, serving the Washington DC areas community since 1982. The main objective of IIS is to: provide quality education in the arts, culture, and languages of India; impart knowledge and skills to younger generations seeking personal growth and harmony with others; and sensitize the young to basic human values and preservation of the environment. About 100 classes per week are taught by 35 teachers in core subjects including: vocal and instrumental music, classical and modern dances, fine arts, Yoga, and languages. IIS students frequently perform at national and local community festivals, theater, radio and television.

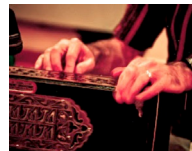
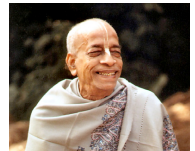
In addition to regular classes in core subjects, IIS is home to many other learning opportunities: creative writing, critical thinking, public speaking, leadership, Science Technology Engineering Math (STEM), supplementing STEM by adding the Arts dimension (STEAM), emotional balance, financial management, in-house plays and concerts. IIS is also engaged in many volunteer programs including - Boy Scouts of America, feeding the hungry, annual drives for blood donation and bone marrow donor registration, and donations to other charitable organization. Workshops and seminars at IIS include - nutrition and health, history, literature, meditation, and spiritual awareness, etc.

To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to help check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.

—From ISKCON's Seven Purposes

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is a Vaishnava, or monotheistic tradition, within the broader family of Hindu faith. It was formally established in New York City by Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada in 1966, and today comprises nearly 500 temple communities across six continents.

ISKCON's primary contributions include Hare Krishna Food for Life which feeds vegetarian meals to 1.3 million children a day in India; the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust which publishes books on the Vedic culture in 60 languages; and the celebration of Vaishnava festivals including Janmastami, Holi, and Rathayatra which attract thousands of participants annually in Washington, D.C., and millions world-wide.





Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs

The Bishops Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs consists of twenty five bishops who specialize in relations between Christians and inter-faith groups. The committee, currently headed by Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski of Springfield, Mass., is reestablished every three years. The Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs exists to carry out the ongoing programs and plans of the bishops' committee.

The mandate of the committee is to give guidance in ecumenical and interreligious affairs and, acting in accordance with the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), determine concrete ways of fostering positive relations and building networks of greater collaboration and trust with other Christians and members of non-Christian traditions.

Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs
3211 Fourth St. NE
Washington, D.C. 20017
(202) 541-3020

The Archdiocese of Washington is home to over 620,000 Catholics.

The 95 Catholic schools educate over 27,000 children while service agencies, including Catholic Charities and Victory Housing, have made the Archdiocese one of the largest private social service providers in the region.

Every year, thousands of people receive counseling, shelter, adoption and foster care assistance, health care, immigration and legal aid, affordable housing and more through the care of archdiocesan staff and volunteers. New immigrants find assistance at the many archdiocesan ministries serving our diverse community, including the Spanish Catholic Center.

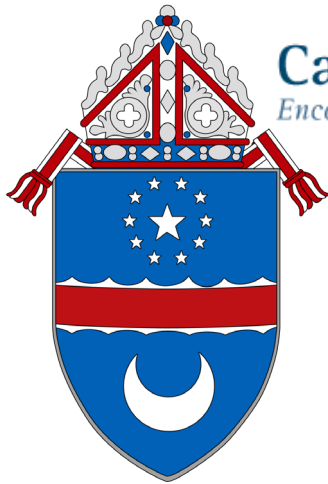


Archdiocese of Washington

5001 Eastern Avenue,
Hyattsville, MD 20782

Phone: 301-853-4500

WWW.ADW.ORG



Catholic Diocese of Arlington

Encourage and teach with patience

The Catholic Diocese of Arlington
200 North Glebe Road
Arlington, VA 22203
703-841-2500
www.arlingtondiocese.org

The **Catholic Diocese of Arlington**, founded in 1974, encompasses twenty-one counties and seven independent cities in the northern tier of Virginia. Over 450,000 Catholics belong to the diocese's 69 parishes and 5 missions. Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde is the third Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Arlington, and his episcopal motto, "Encourage and Teach with Patience," along with his Pastoral Letter, "Go Forth with Hearts on Fire," have inspired his flock to embrace the mission of the New Evangelization.

CADEIO stands for the
***Catholic Association of Diocesan
Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers.***

It was formerly known as NADEO,
the National Association of
Diocesan Ecumenical Officers.

CADEIO was established to: (1) stimulate the exchange of ideas, experiences and networking among the Ecumenical Officers of the arch/dioceses in union with Rome; (2) promote programs that further the work of Christian unity and interreligious cooperation; and (3) cooperate with the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and with other ecumenical and interreligious agencies.



**Catholic Association of Diocesan
Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers**

1009 Stafford Avenue
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22401

540-373-6491

www.cadeio.org

The organizers of the Hindu-Catholic Dialogue wish to express their sincere gratitude to the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington (IFCMW) for their gracious permission to reproduce the two chapters in their entirety (on Hinduism and Catholicism) from their publication:
Strengthening Teaching About Religion.

Welcome from the USCCB's SEIA:

“The Church, therefore, urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.” ***Nostra Aetate, 2***

The year 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Catholic Church's *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions*, more commonly referred to as *Nostra Aetate*. This seminal document, understood by many to be the Catholic Church's Magna Carta for interreligious dialogue, serves as an irrevocable mandate for Catholics to engage in dialogue with members of other religious traditions for the promotion of greater understanding and mutual esteem.

Over the last decades, we in the Catholic Church have witnessed remarkable fruits produced as a direct result of establishing networks of intentional dialogue, such as the mutual commitment to intertextual study of sacred texts, engaging together on issues of common concern in the public square, sharing in interreligious prayer services and events, visits to one another's sacred places of worship, et al. The most precious fruits of dialogue, fruits that prove to us how effective dialogue truly is for the well-being of humanity, are the concrete ties of friendship and bonds of trust that have emerged and are expanding—ties that for centuries were demonstrably absent and, on account of this absence, can rightly be judged as the source of so much suffering and brokenness in the human family. Accordingly, we are convinced that dialogue occupies a central place in the life of the Church and the Church's vision for a reconciled world.

With the creation of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops committed itself to the full promotion and implementation of this vision of *Nostra Aetate*. It is our purpose and goal, therefore, to establish strong and lasting networks of dialogue between the Catholic Church and members of the world community of religions.

Having established ties to many religious communities across the country, including the Vaishnava Hindus, it is a great joy to be welcomed this day by the Durga Community of Fairfax! We anticipate that this meeting will lead to a more robust relationship with Hindus and so we look forward to our future friendship and mutual collaboration in the public square.

--Rev. Mitchell T. Rozanski, Bishop of Springfield, MA, and Chairman of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the USCCB

