

## BUILDING BRIDGES

CASIMIR GNANDICKAM

### *The Most Reverend the Archbishop of Mylapore Madras*

Dear esteemed members of this group, I was a bit surprised when I was asked to speak to you, because I am not a specialist on political or economic issues. I had a scientific training. I have a Ph.D. in Chemistry that I obtained in Paris. Afterwards, in the Church, they slowly drafted me into administration, spiritual administration if you like, and so today I am considered less of a scholar, and more of a leader of the Roman Catholic community in Madras. Certainly whatever happens in the country affects me and affects all our community. And in such situations sometimes our community indeed expects some kind of leadership.

What happened on the 6th of December in Ayodhya certainly shocked many of us. I am very happy to hear that you in the Centre have been reflecting on these events. The country is really passing through a crisis, and it is for all of us, whatever religion we may profess, to think in terms of restoring and preserving the unity of the country. Although I am not a specialist in politics, I will try to reflect on what happened, and on what might be the lines of thoughts that would allow us to help India rebuild herself.

### *A volcanic eruption*

Of course, we are all familiar with the context of the events of December 6. The events involved, first and foremost, the destruction of the Babri Masjid. But, it was not merely the destruction of a building; it was the destruction of a relationship between Hindus and Muslims. It was a tearing apart of these communities. Whether this tearing apart of the two communities will reach a point of no return or whether it will be somehow mended, depends on us.

The destruction has also been considered a sacrilege, because it touched a place of worship. Although the place was not being used

for worship at that time, it still carried with it a certain sanctity. Destruction of a place like that, especially in an atmosphere of emotional frenzy and fury, accompanied even by dancing at the site, as if it were a great accomplishment, must have looked like a sacrilege to the Muslims.

It was also an act that was premeditated. Although many people have said that they were not aware of it, or they did not plan it, or they considered it unfortunate, yet I think there is enough material to show that it was a premeditated affair. It was a premeditated misdeed, if I may call it that. It was not just a symbolic protest. It was a betrayal of many promises that were made in the courts and to the central government. It was a betrayal of trust. It was also a betrayal of Gandhiji's doctrines of Ahimsa and non-violence. And all this, I think many people have now said it, was carefully planned and engineered. The leaders of the Ayodhya movement presided over this destructive event. The police were silent, or they fled the place.

Not only was it a sacrilege, and a premeditated act of destruction, it was also clearly an act of disregard for the constitution. It was definitely politicisation of religion. The act had been prepared for by other events, like the rathayatra of Lal Krishna Advani or the march of Murali Manohar Joshi. So it was something that seemed to disregard the constitution and therefore went against the dreams of the founders of the constitution, of the founding fathers. It was certainly, as has been described by many, a watershed in the history of India. History repeated itself, like a volcano erupting periodically. We had the experience of such a volcanic eruption during the partition, and now after 45 years the volcano has erupted again.

#### *The bishops' appeal*

Of course, as a leader of the Christian community, I can only reflect on how the Christians feel. I am sure you have heard what the Muslim leaders say about how the Muslims feel. I myself made a statement here in the press, expressing the reaction of the Christian community to the events of December 6. I shall not read that to you. But, I would like to read the statement made jointly by the bishops of India when they met in Bombay in the beginning of January. I was present at the meeting, and we made a statement and an appeal for peace and communal harmony. I will read it. It is only a page.

Of course, it was essentially addressed to the Christians but it is of interest to others too:

“We the members of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India, meeting at Bombay from 4th to 6th January 1993, deplore strongly the tragic events of 6th December 1992 at Ayodhya, and the consequent wanton killings of innocent persons and destruction of buildings and property. [Of course, at this time the events of Bombay had not taken place. The tremendous violence, the orgy of violence, that took place in Bombay happened just after we had left.] We share the agony and sorrow of these families and the victims.

“The disaster undermined the very basis of our nation, its constitutional rule of law, democracy and secular character. A severe blow has been struck at the very foundation of the Indian ethos of tolerance and of non-violence. Though the entire nation is in a state of shock, we have great confidence in the wisdom and resilience of our people. So while we condemn these actions in no uncertain terms, we equally denounce all forms of communal violence. We appeal to all sections of people to preserve peace and harmony in the face of the gravest provocation. Together with all law-abiding citizens, let us affirm our faith in our constitution and support the state in its supreme duty to uphold the law and protect the citizens.

“While acknowledging our fundamental rights, especially freedom of religion and conscience, we emphasize our duty equally to work for the eradication of discrimination, poverty and injustice in the social fabric of our country. This can only be ensured by integral human development.

“In this hour of trial we look to the future with hope and we appeal to all people of goodwill, and in a special way to our Catholic brothers and sisters, not to remain silent spectators to any kind of injustice and exploitation, but to stand up and be committed on the side of saving the Bharat of the dreams of our founding fathers. This is a time to reassert the inviolability of the human person, made in the image and the likeness of the Creator, to be respected as the true example of the living temple, the true temple of the living God.”

As you would have noticed, in this statement of the bishops there is an allusion to a temple. Destroying a temple does not just mean destroying a brick structure. It has something to do with the person,

the human person. "To be respected as a true temple of the living God", this constitutes the basic dignity of man, and it transcends all differences of caste, creed and community. In order to restore mutual trust and fellowship, it is also essential that we forgive one another. This is another important aspect of the appeal we made to bring about reconciliation among all sections of the people. So this is our statement and I will comment on some of the points we have raised in it.

*Glory of God is a man fully alive*

You have heard the words used: "We deplore the tragic events, we condemn violence, we share the agony and sorrow of the innocent persons. We pledge to maintain the constitution, its democratic and secular character, and to work for the eradication of discrimination, poverty, injustice and exploitation in the social fabric of our country."

The first thing is to reaffirm our faith in the constitution, to reassert our faith in the ideal of equality and justice for all, in the right of all to exist and follow religions of their choice. Next we have to ask ourselves what freedom has meant for us. It is nearly 46 years now, since we achieved freedom. What has it really meant for us?

Sometimes I get the impression, that during these so many years we have spent all our energies in trying to somehow keep up the unity of the country, and that we have had no time to work for the economic and social development of the nation. Our preoccupation has been constantly with keeping up the unity. The situation is such that some people have begun to react, asking whether it is worth spending all our time, our energy and our efforts to keep up this unity. Why not let each one go apart, like in Russia, and develop on its own and thus attain the real aim of our freedom.

The aim of our freedom is to develop, and to develop is to reaffirm the importance of the individual person. This is what reaffirming our faith in the constitution implies. It implies respect for law and order, which is an essential condition for the exercise and enjoyment of our freedom. If we do not have law and order how are we going to enjoy our freedom, how are we going to use our freedom to grow? The security of our people and the integrity of

the country as a sovereign secular democratic country must be unconditionally guaranteed. Living in constant threat of disintegration prevents us from really working for development.

The greatest respect and devotion we can pay to God is to help man flower into a fully active human being. It was a very ancient Christian author, probably of the first century A.D., who made this beautiful statement in Latin, which is now often repeated among the Christians: "*Gloria Dei vivens homo, vita omnis visio Dei.*" "The glory of God is a man fully alive and the life of man is the vision of God." At least the first part of this sentence we hear quoted very often in our Christian circles. "The glory of God is a man fully alive." There is no such thing as the glory of God independent of man. The two cannot be separated. It is only when man is fully alive, when his personality is fully growing, when he really brings out all the potential that he is capable of, only then God is seen in his real glory. It is in this sense I say that respect for democracy, and democratic values, is one of the great things that our constitution has given us.

*Secularism is to take the world seriously*

Another important concept to reflect upon is the one conveyed by the word "secular". Today there is a lot of controversy about secularism. Some people call the secularism which we are accustomed to as "pseudo-secularism", and some others have said that those who talk about "pseudo-secularism" are "pseudo-intellectuals".

The word "secular" comes from "seculum" in Latin. And, the Latin "seculum" means the "world". So secularism really means to take this world seriously; not to consider it as something worthless; something to be discarded, something to be avoided, or to be escaped from. No, the world must be taken seriously. This is the meaning of secularism.

Of course, we all know that the word "secularism" originated in the west, not in the positive sense we are accustomed to in India, but as a reflection of the desire of man to get away from religion. It originated in the emancipation of man from, and later the opposition of man to, religion. It happened in the "age of enlightenment", during the 18th and the early 19th century. It was the age when even a philosopher like Immanuel Kant spoke of "the coming out

of man from his self-imposed immaturity”. Religion at that time was considered to be something that kept man imprisoned, and enlightenment was the movement to escape from this “imprisonment” in religion, to escape from what were thought to be the “clutches of religion”.

We also know that it was that emancipation which gave a very great fillip to the development of philosophy – secular philosophy – on the one hand, and to the development of science and technology, on the other. The whole of the industrial revolution can be traced to the coming into force of this kind of secularism, of the western concept of secularism.

So, in Europe secularism meant the maintenance of a distinction between religion and science, and religion and the state. In fact, science and the state were often seen to be in opposition to religion. In the western world, the secular state thus implied a state distinct from religion, and even a state opposed to religion. In the United States, for example, separation of the religion and the state is considered one of their fundamental doctrines.

But in India we did not take the concept of secularism in this western sense. Our founding fathers had a more positive outlook towards religion, and therefore in India we simply took secularism to be the doctrine of “respect for all religions”. The principle of equal respect for all religions and equality of all religions under the law is what we called secularism.

We know that the separation of the state from religion in the west has greatly helped in the development of science and technology. It brought many of its own advantages; it led to great material benefits, and to a great advance in the knowledge of the world, and so on. But in India secularism did not mean separation of the state, or the public life, from religion. It only meant respect for all religions.

#### *Two visions of India: Secular and Gandhian*

Looking at the time when India got independence, we find that Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru had two different visions. Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru were the ones who really shaped the development of our country; they were the ones who were in the forefront in our fight for independence. And, they had two different visions of India.

The two different visions should have complemented each other, but perhaps they were not really complementary.

Gandhiji's vision was of an India living in her villages. He dreamed of people developing their villages, people getting purged of untouchability, of all kinds of social discriminations, and thus developing a society in which people of all religions would not only tolerate each other, but really respect each other. This was Gandhiji's vision of India. Pandit Nehru, of course, had another vision. He thought more of a modern India, modern India with the west as her model. He thought of an India that would achieve self-reliance and economic prosperity through industrialisation, and thus would develop into a strong nation, capable of imposing her will on the rest of the world.

Two generations have now lived with Pandit Nehru's dream. During the last four decades, the secular values of the west have been penetrating India. We have in a way tried to take the development of the world seriously. We have seriously attempted to implement the vision of Pandit Nehru. Economic Planning, Mixed Economy, decolonisation, leadership of the non-aligned world, all the concepts that we have worked with since Independence, all of these were elements of the vision of Pandit Nehru.

But looking at ourselves honestly today we find that the dream has not been realised. Gandhiji's dream we did not even attempt to fulfil. But we did try to realise the vision of Pandit Nehru, and that too has not been realised. We see it more and more everyday. And what happened in December in Ayodhya, is perhaps the culmination of this fact that we really have failed to achieve the vision of Gandhiji or of Pandit Nehru.

*Corruption has made the secular vision bankrupt*

P. V. Narasimha Rao has very cryptically summarised the present situation, saying that what we have come to is politicisation of crime and criminalisation of politics. That is a very good characterisation of the present times. What we see is corruption, corruption, corruption everywhere. Like water, water everywhere, not a drop to drink, we can say corruption, corruption everywhere, not a place to rest. That is the reality everywhere in India today.

Ultimately for me there is only one problem in India, and that is corruption, which also leads to black money, smuggling, land-grabbing, and so on. So the problem of India is really a moral problem. Democracy and democratic mechanisms have only contributed to confirm caste divisions. All the reservations, the preferential discrimination for the Harijans and others, have served only to further entrench people within their castes. And therefore we can say, as someone has said in the newspapers even today, that the secular vision of Indian nation is bankrupt. It is bankrupt. We have not been able to take the development of the world seriously.

*Religion is the soul of polity*

When there is a vacuum, somebody jumps into it. Many say that today the BJP has jumped into fill up the vacuum generated by the apparent bankruptcy of the secular vision.

But is that a solution? We have to reflect on that. Does the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wish to use religion to recapture a vision, or merely to use a religious ideology to capture power? This is the question we have to ask. In the case of the BJP the answer, most probably, is the latter. This is what we feel. Religious ideologies are being used to capture power. And, to use religion for the sake of gaining power is to make a mockery of true religion. There is something wrong with the very idea of religion being used thus.

This kind of perversion of religion comes about because often religion is considered as a part of, is identified with, the structures of power. It occurs in all religions, including in my own, in Christianity. Of course, if I consider Christianity to be identical with the Vatican, with the power and the organisation of the Vatican, then I am wrong. But the error is often made.

However, religion aligned with power is not true religion. Religion is not to be identified with the structures and organisations of power. It is not the right sense of religion. Religion is not an emotional outburst, related to the affirmation of one's superiority over others.

Religion is essentially a spirit. It is faith in God. Religion is the spirit and the faith that pervades all actions. Religion is the light

that reveals to us God's plan for humanity. If we do not look for God's plan for humanity then we are missing something in religion.

Therefore religion is not to be used to gain political power. Religion is not to be used as a vote-bank. Religion is not to be used to justify thirst for power, or to justify injustice.

Religion is a spirit that purifies and enlightens. Religion is like the conscience of a society. In that sense, I say, religion is absolutely essential for the state. Very often people go about saying that religion should not be allowed to enter the state. What they mean is religion as identified with the structures of power should not enter the state. But religion as a spirit, as a conscience, must enter the state. If the people running the state refuse to be judged by religion, then they are not doing the right thing. Religion has to enter the state as its conscience, as a judge of what is right and what is wrong. Religion is like the soul. It should be the soul of the body politic.

Therefore, religion is not to be banished from the public life. This is the idea of pluralism. If religion is seen any other way, or used any other way, I think that is a wrong use of religion, and a wrong understanding of religion.

*Take the world seriously and march forward*

It seems as if the BJP wants to go back to the past, imagining a theocratic society. I think this will be like an ostrich burying its head in a desert of illusions. Because, no one can stop the march of society. No one can stop the march of time. Therefore there is no question of just going back to the past.

If we take the world seriously, there are so many good things in the world: So many good things, which will help man to attain the ideal that God planned for him. The progress of mankind, in science, in technology, and in communications, has opened new vistas. There is now the possibility of working towards the removal of frontiers erected by ideologies and religions, of working towards a peace-loving, harmonious, just human society, in which equity and respect for all is ensured. There is such a vast horizon open for us.

What we need is not to go back, simply go back, to the past. But, rather to go forward, purifying this concept of secularism that we have. The concept of secularism is not wrong, though we may have interpreted and used it wrongly. The solution, therefore, is not

to throw away the baby with the bath-water; it is to keep the baby, throwing away the bath-water. This means that we must purify the concept of secularism. Because, secularism in its correct sense means merely the true development of man and true development of the world.

What we need is not an obscure return to the past, but an enlightened march into the future. We desire neither a religion with no bearing on the present and the future, nor a society which will escape the chastening and purifying impact of religion. What we need is a religion that is a spirit that enlightens and vivifies all that is good and condemns all that is evil. What we need is a society that is truly secular.

Just as I spoke of true religion, we can also speak of true secularism. A truly secular polity is the polity that provides the possibility for the blossoming of all potentialities of man, guided however by the actions of the spirit. So being truly secular means that we take the world seriously, that we want to build up the world, we want to build up the human person, and respect his rights.

#### *Protect and preserve nature*

We also need to build up nature. We need to prevent the plundering of nature, prevent the unchecked destruction of nature, so that there is harmony between man and nature, so that development does not amount to the development of man alone, but the development of the whole of creation.

There is a certain trend in Christianity wherein man is considered the master of creation. But we are now beginning to understand, that he is not the master, he is not the absolute master. God alone is the master. Man is only a steward of creation. He is the steward of creation, therefore, he needs to learn from creation. Only when he starts learning from creation then alone will he be able to accomplish the plan of God.

#### *Take the minorities along*

So what we need is true religion and true secularism. Then we can go forward. Events that took place on the 6th of December and later followed up by what happened in Bombay, the hell that was let loose

in Bombay, have driven the minorities into a state of shock and great fear. We have, especially during the last few months, spoken so much about the minorities. Naturally as a Christian, I have also emphasised the need for preserving the rights of the minorities. Because, our founding fathers really did something great in inserting into the constitution the clauses concerning protection of the rights of the minorities.

But I would like to emphasise that the minorities do not have any rights that the majority does not have. What the minorities have is a protection of the rights. They have a right to the protection of their rights, they do not have any new rights. They have got the same rights as all the others. The founders of the constitution only wanted to provide a guarantee of the protection of their rights. It was a very noble gesture on their part. They realised that in any society the minorities are likely to be relegated to a secondary place, especially in a democratic society, where numbers are of paramount importance in the process of decision-making. It is to prevent that relegation of the minorities to a secondary place, that our founding fathers were noble enough to insert guarantees regarding the protection of the rights of the minorities into the constitution.

In any case, as someone remarked in the parliament recently, today we have no right to divide people as minorities and majorities based on religion, on ethnic origin, or on language. The real minorities and majorities today are the rich and the poor. This is the division that we have to concentrate upon more and more. If we were to concentrate only on this, if we were to insist that the rights of the poor are protected, and the rich do not exploit the poor, then we could be evolving a new concept of the minority and the majority. The minority rich are the real majority, and the majority poor are the real minority. That is what we have to concentrate upon.

*And pray together*

I have told you what we as Christians think we should do. I have read the statement of the bishops. We should affirm our faith in the constitution, acknowledge our fundamental rights, we should not remain silent spectators to injustice and exploitation, we should respect each other, understand each other. We should abide by the sanatana dharma, which perhaps is the most beautiful concept

evolved by man, and which incorporates in it what we might call pluralism and secularism. We should pray to God together and individually. Religion is a spirit, and thus much more than an instrument of power.

I would like to end with what Mother Theresa said when she went to Bombay. There was a big meeting there in January when people of all religions had gotten together to appeal for peace. I would like to read a few things that she said:

“Religion is the gift of God. It is meant to help us to be one heart full of love. God is our father, and we are all His children. We are all brothers and sisters. Let there be no distinction of race, colour or creed. Let us not use religion to divide us. In all the holy books we see how God calls us to love. Whatever we do to each other, we do to Him, because God is our father. Religion is a work of love. It must unite us, and must not destroy peace and unity. Religion is meant to be a work of love. Therefore, it should not divide us to destroy the peace and unity. But let us use religion to help us become one heart full of love in the heart of God. By loving one another, we will fulfil the reason of our creation—to love and to be loved.”

## DISCUSSION

BAJAJ: Thank you, your Grace, for a very enlightening exposition of the issues concerning us today. With your permission may I now request queries and comments from the audience.

### *Religion in public life*

VARADARAJAN: Reverend sir, there are several ways of looking at the Ayodhya problem. It can of course be seen as a conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims of India over a particular site. But at a more fundamental level the issue is that of the role of religion in public life. Of course, in India today nobody objects to the practice of religion, religion after all is a major attribute of

Indian civilisation. But, it is generally expected that religion should be confined entirely to the private domain. It should not influence the activities and affairs of public life. Preferably, religion should not even be seen or heard about in public.

I recall a minor event that happened in my life sometime ago. It is really a trivial matter. But it bears mentioning. About ten years ago I began wearing *thiruman* in public. And when for the first time I went to the college, where I teach, with this mark of my religion on my forehead, almost everybody was surprised, scandalised is perhaps a more appropriate description of their reaction. The practice used to be, and it remains more or less unchanged even now, that whatever religious mark you wore, whether it was *vibhuti* or *namam* or anything else, you removed it before you left your house and entered the public domain. I recall that one of my colleagues even said, admiringly perhaps, that I must have marshalled great courage to have dared to go to college with *thiruman* on my forehead.

I also remember that during the last meeting we had in this series here, when Professor Guhan spoke, one of us rendered an invocation from the Taittiriyaopaniṣad at the beginning of the meeting. And Professor Guhan took objection to that. During the discussion he told us that in a truly secular India such invocations, however lofty the ideas and thoughts expressed in them, would not be allowed in any public institution.

This seems to be the formal position about public functioning in India. It is assumed that there is no role or place for religion in public life. And to me this does not seem to be right.

Incidentally, the constitution does provide some space for the minorities, for the Christians and the Muslims, to express their religious identities in the public domain. They have some possibilities of extending their religious activities into the public institutions. They can for example establish educational institutions around their religion and its organisations, or they can, to some extent, even practice religion based politics, as is done for instance by the Kerala Congress. But the majority community does not have even this limited freedom to express its religious preferences and sensitivities in the public domain.

If you are going to ask people to compartmentalise their lives into the private and the public, to keep their feelings of the sacred

closely guarded within the former and make the latter entirely secular, it cannot work for too long. You cannot tell people to confine all their civilisational sensibilities and expressions within their private life, and not to air these in the public domain at all. But this is what we have been telling the Hindu society all along. You can appreciate that such constraints on a people create great difficulties and dilemmas, which they try to resolve in various ways.

Many of us remember the rather painful way in which the Ramakrishna Mission tried to resolve the difficulties and dilemmas created by our insistence that religion must find no expression in the public institutions. The Ramakrishna Mission is a religious Matham, a seminary that, perhaps following the example of the Christian missions, has gone into the fields of education and health in a fairly big way. But they were told by the West Bengal government that whatever might be their religious moorings, they could not be allowed to express them in the educational and other fields. They could not bring religion into the public areas. And so the worst that could happen in such a case happened. The mission renounced its connections with Hindu society. They said that they were not in the Hindu fold, that they too were a separate independent religion, and therefore a minority! These are the kind of dilemmas that sections of Hindu society have been facing in the almost vengefully secular public life of India.

Another instance that comes to my mind is again from the college where I teach. Some four or five years ago the teachers' union of the college began to take objection to the morning prayers and made it into a major issue for agitating against the college. The teachers said that because the college was a government-aided institution it could not have prayers for the students, nor could it continue to have the usual Monday morning hour devoted to religion.

These are the kind of embarrassments we have been suffering in the name of the secularism. I would like to have your views, sir, on this question. What, from the point of view of the Church, is the role of religion in public life? And what do you think should be the attitude of the Hindu society towards the prevalent practice of secularism that denies the majority community the right to any public expression of its religious and civilisational sensibilities?

HIS GRACE: I think Hinduism perhaps does not have the structure and organisation that Christianity has got. But religion is not only

this. Religion is, above all, two important elements. First of all it is the light of God coming into our lives, and it illumines not only the life of prayer and of other external symbols and rituals, it lights up life as such, the whole of life. A man not only practices religion when he adores God or prays, but he practices religion in all that he does. His religion must influence him in whatever he does. It should influence his politics, his economics, and his social relationships. He cannot say that his religion has nothing to do with the relationship he has with his friends, with his wife, or with other women, or the relationship he has with money or with property or with acquisition in general. Religion, which does not influence the entire domain, all the domains of a man's life, is not really religion. Religion is finally the voice of God speaking within me, and that voice will regulate every one of my actions, not only my prayer, but every one of my actions.

Some limit religion only to a moral code. From whom and where the code comes, they may not bother about. They are concerned only with the moral code. Some others say that this moral code comes from a person, from a personal God. But whatever may be perceived as the source of religion, religion has to be something that touches every aspect of our life—every thought, every word, every action, every relationship, and every attitude. Religion guides all our actions. Every one of our actions is performed before God, to be purified, to be judged, to be pardoned, to be promoted and so on. So Christianity emphasises unity and not the kind of separation of the private and the public that you have been referring to. Such separation is not possible, at least not in Christianity.

#### *Church and politics*

Varadarajan: Sir, I have one more question. Some of us have been looking at the developments in Russia and Eastern Europe. It is generally thought that the people there are moving towards free-market economy and democracy. But we also know that they have in fact rallied around the Church. The state, it seems, dominated the polity there for such a long time that society lost all independent existence. And therefore the movement there can also be seen as a seeking of the society for its own roots, for its religious anchor.

Similarly in the Indian context also, the state has been to some extent in conflict with the society. It has curbed the freedom of society to express itself and to assert its identity. The state in fact has imposed an identity upon the Indian society; it has declared India to be a secular and socialist nation. But that is perhaps not how the Indian society perceives itself.

If we grant that in any polity, society must have a certain amount of autonomy, then it follows that the state and the society must not be on a collision course. The state must run parallel to the society, supporting and facilitating the society in its expressions, and in the fulfilment of its seekings. If that is the understanding, then it can perhaps be said that since the Ayodhya movement is after all a manifestation of the aspiration of the people to have a temple for one of their most revered and loved civilisational heroes, therefore ideally the state should have helped the people in this effort of theirs, instead of placing obstructions in their way.

If this sentiment were widely appreciated, then some sort of interaction would have been possible among the Hindus and the Muslims, and through such interaction the seeking of the society for the temple would have been fulfilled in a better and smoother manner. But the state did not appreciate the sentiments of the society. Instead of facilitating, it interfered with and obstructed the efforts of the society. It tried to bottle up the aspirations and the seekings of the society. It is therefore no wonder that the bottled up sentiments exploded the way they did in Ayodhya. And then, we began to interpret the events as the collapse of the constitution and of the state.

A more perceptive way of looking at the events perhaps would be to realise that the state ought to provide opportunities for the expression of the genuine aspirations of the society, the state ought not to take a confrontationist course with respect to the society.

I shall like to have your reaction to this formulation of the Ayodhya issue.

HIS GRACE: Regarding your observations about the situation in Russia and East Europe, I would not say that the people there rallied around the Church, or that the Church called forth this movement of the people. I believe, the movement there represents the spirit of man, the spirit that had been repressed so long, trying to break the shackles and come out. Of course, one of the essential components of the spirit of man is the religious hunger and thirst for the absolute.

This too has contributed to the opening up of the societies there. But, finally it is the man who was the cause of this. The movement may have been facilitated or catalysed by the Church. But it is certainly not the Church which engineered this, because the Church always comes after the person – the person is primary. The Church or any other religious structure is there only to help a person to express himself or herself in the best possible manner.

*Ayodhya can be understood but not condoned*

Now, about the Ayodhya events, I quite understand these. I myself have said that we should have asked what the society wanted. The Muslims should have asked the Hindus about their feelings. There were indeed real, genuine aspirations of the society, which we should have been sensitive to. The state is of course concerned more with law and order. Once it has achieved its law and order, it does not bother whether there are any opportunities within the polity for the expression of man's most profound feelings.

So what happened at Ayodhya, as you say, was an explosion of the bottled up aspirations and sentiments. We can understand the explosion. Only we cannot justify the way the events happened. That is all we can say. We cannot justify those events, but we understand them. Yes, we understand.

*Dialogue at Nilakkal*

AMBADI: Your Grace, more or less in the same context in which my friend spoke and in the context in which you responded, I would like to point out the contrast in what happened in Ayodhya, and what happened in another corner of India in a similar situation a few years ago. In a place called Nilakkal in Kerala, a similar problem had arisen among the Hindus and the Christians. And that problem could have led to, although on a smaller scale, to reactions and counter-reactions similar to the kind we witnessed on the question of Ayodhya. But it did not happen. The leaders of both the communities sat together, a solution was thrashed out, and peace was restored.

I think that became possible, because the leaders of the Christian and the Hindu communities in Nilakkal, particularly the leaders of the Christian community there and the Church itself, took an attitude

which the Muslim community and its leaders could not have taken. And I think they could not have taken it for a serious and important historical reason.

The Roman Catholic Church, with its world-wide organisation and its extremely well-organised structures, has passed through the experience of the renaissance, the reformation, and the counter-reformation. In the process it has been imbued with some of the values of renaissance and enlightenment, and now embodies them. It is no more like the Church of the pre-renaissance period, of the period that is referred to, perhaps wrongly, as the dark ages. And, because now it embodies the values of renaissance and enlightenment, therefore it is able to react to the sort of situation that occurred in Nilakkal in a way that Islam cannot, and could not, in the case of Ayodhya. Islam has not undergone this process of reformation, counter-reformation and enlightenment, which Christianity was fortunate enough to undergo, because of its historical circumstances.

Therefore what happened in Ayodhya, in contrast to Nilakkal, is the result of a confrontation of the larger society with a religious group which has not been able to embody within itself the secular values which Christianity has been able to do in Europe. This is one point I would like to make and would like to know your Grace's reaction to it.

The second point I want to raise is regarding your assertion that religion should not become a vehicle of political conflict. Now, we know that the Catholic Church played a very important role in the dismemberment of the Polish state. It was a very definite political role. Similarly, in Spain at the time of Franco, the role played by the Church was definitely a political role. In the present too, the relation between the Christian Democratic Party in Italy and the Roman Catholic Church is definitely a political relationship.

I have spoken so far of only the conservative Catholics. There are also non-conservative Catholic actors, like the liberation theologians, who have been very active politically. The liberation theologians have been playing definitely political roles, particularly in South America, and also to some extent in certain pockets in India.

It is possible that the Holy Office may not approve of the role of conservative actors like the Opus Dei in Spain, of Cardinal Sin and the whole of the Polish Church in Poland, or of the Christian

Democrats in Italy. The non-conservatives, like the liberation theologians, of course do not have the approval of the Holy Office. But, in all these cases, Catholic Christians, those belonging to the congregation of faith, have played a very definite political role as religious actors. How do you react to this activism of the congregation? HIS GRACE: What you say about the incident at Nilakkal is quite true. Nilakkal is a very good example of dialogue. And as you said, the possibility of dialogue arises probably from the evolution of Christianity following the renaissance and the reformation. But, Jesus himself, when he spoke to the Samaritan woman, said that neither on this hill nor on that hill do we adore God, we adore God in spirit and in truth. This was said by Jesus, who went to the Jerusalem temple, who considered the Jerusalem temple as the rallying point of the entire Jewish community.

We, of course, have the belief that St. Thomas had come to Nilakkal. Having a Church there would have been a good remembrance of the coming of St. Thomas. But, we are very free with regard to our relationship with God. It does not depend on material structures. If we can't have a Church there, it does not matter. We will go somewhere else. Because, the Church is after all a very secondary thing.

The difficulty of a dialogue between the Hindus and the Muslims may have arisen from, as you said, the failure of Islam to undergo experiences like the renaissance and the reformation. It is possible, therefore, that the Muslims may not have as free an attitude towards God, as we have learnt to have. They probably have a set pattern of thought, which is perhaps more rigid than that of the Christians.

All this may be true. But, the question in my mind is whether the party which played a big role in the Ayodhya events would really have liked the dialogue to proceed? It perhaps had its own aims which could not have been attained if the dialogue were to succeed. Perhaps it avoided a dialogue in order to obtain the maximum possible political mileage out of a difficult situation. This also could be a reason why there was no dialogue.

AMBADI: Six months had been given for dialogue.

ARCHBISHOP: Yes, but the dialogue did not succeed. And to my mind it happened because of two reasons. One reason, perhaps, was the very conservative attitude of the Muslims, and the other reason,

it seems to me, was that one of the parties to the dialogue had its sights fixed on acquiring power.

*Christians as Christians must be active in public life*

Now let me come to your second question, the one regarding the political role played by the conservative Catholics and the liberation theologians in various countries at various times. The events you have referred to represent the involvement of religious people in public affairs, and of course this involvement can be of various kinds, it can be political, it can be economical, it can be social. The ideal of religion can take various forms, this is quite normal. That is why I said religion affects every aspect of life.

The question really is whether the Church engineered these varied political expressions. That too may have happened in history. There are examples where the Church involved itself directly in political affairs. But today, if you ask the theologians, they would say it is not the Church as Church that should involve itself in such matters. But the Christians as Christians have to involve themselves in matters of public concern. The Christians as Christians organise themselves to fight against injustice, to fight against poverty, to fight against political deviation, to involve themselves in politics. And this is how it should be.

I would, therefore, not say that the involvement of the Christian people in political movements, whether it happens in Italy or Poland or South America, is the same as the involvement of the Church. It is the involvement of the Christians who understand their responsibility. We, as Christians, cannot be silent spectators to injustice. Standing up against injustice is one of the very important aspects of human development, of the development of the human person.

But, I would not say that the Church as Church is involved in the various political events and actions that the Christians participate in. For example in Philippines it was evident that Marcos was guilty of so much corruption, of indulging in inhuman attitudes, and giving rise to inhuman organisations and actions. So the Christians protested. Perhaps that was one of the biggest examples of Christian protest. There were a million Christians who sat on the roads. I was in Philippines two weeks ago. They showed me the roads, where they had sat for three days and three nights, ready to die if Marcos

wanted to march on them with his tanks. Finally the tanks refused to obey Marcos. Because somehow the soldiers got enlightened that this would be an immoral thing to do, that it would be immoral to go and shoot at those people sitting on the roads. And therefore the situation was completely changed, and the society moved towards a more democratic, more humane government. But I would not say it was the Church that did all this.

AMBADI: Cardinal Sin in my memory made a specific statement...

ARCHBISHOP: Yes, he made certain statements. But Cardinal Sin could not have asked the Christians to vote together as a Church for so and so. If he did that, I would say he was wrong. But he could have advised the Christians to vote for the people who stood for justice, for truth, for respect of the human person. He had the right and the duty to say that. Because, that is the teaching.

#### *Islam and Christianity*

SRINIVAS: Your Grace, in November last, the Pope went to the Americas, in the context of the 500th year of the arrival of Columbus there. And there he made a statement saying that the advent of Europeans into the Americas was not entirely a blessing, and that it did lead to extreme deprivations for the indigenous people of the Americas. I read that statement as an expression of remorse by the Pope for the crass barbarism that the Church and the Christians had practiced upon other peoples of the world not so long ago.

In contrast, in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, there was no country in the Islamic world which said that it understood what had been done to India by the barbarians who invaded this land in the name of Islam. They may not agree with the way we reclaimed the Janmabhoomi, but they must understand the historical acts of barbarism, perpetrated in India by invaders belonging to their lands and their faith, which led to this situation. But instead of showing such understanding, and expressing some kind of remorse, the Islamic countries actually demanded rebuilding of that symbol of barbarism, and even suggested that otherwise they would come and build it for us. Would you care to comment on this reaction of the Islamic world?

HIS GRACE: I think the difference is that in the Catholic church there is somebody who is the symbol of Catholic unity, and who has a certain authority to speak for all Christians. In Islam, I believe, there is no one who can speak for the whole of the Islamic community.

AMBADI: Your Grace, recently the Pope also went to Sudan. He went to Sudan at a time, when the Christian community there was under threat of not merely political but also physical assault and liquidation. And the Pope appealed for that sort of persecution to stop. Now, in the context of the Islamic fundamentalism rising throughout the world, and particularly in the context of Africa, where highly fundamentalist Christian and Islamic communities are coming into severe conflict, do you think that dialogue of the kind that happened in Nilakkal shall be possible elsewhere in the world? Do you think in the international context, say in Sudan or in Chad, dialogue is possible between the Christians and the Muslims? Are Nilakkals possible there?

HIS GRACE: I am not optimistic about the possibilities of such dialogue in the international context, because fundamentalism is gaining ground. That itself is a bad sign. Fundamentalism is gaining ground in more and more countries of the world. But, I have also seen, that as we go towards the East, even Islam tends to become somewhat more liberal. Islam seems to become more and more liberal as we go, for example, from here to Malaysia, from Malaysia to Indonesia, and so on. Indonesia is incomparably more liberal than, say, Chad or Arabia.

#### *The Ayodhya issue*

S. KRISHNAN: Your Grace, I quite agree with you that a religious place should not be destroyed. But the Ayodhya movement is not about the destruction of a Masjid, it is about the restoration of a temple. Unfortunately or fortunately, a vast section of the Indian people believes that the site where the Masjid structure stood is the Janmasthan, the place of birth of Srirama. They also believe that a temple was destroyed to build this structure. And there are pictures taken by archaeologists, which show the Masjid structure standing above the temple columns; the whole structure seems to be supported over temple columns. Of course, it can be said that all this evidence is fabricated. But much of the evidence is of the time

before the Ayodhya issue had become so contentious. And anyway there is a limit to the extent of fabrication.

It cannot be denied that alien invaders, who came here as Islamic fighters, had devastated the country from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. Indians only asked for the removal of one particularly humiliating symbol of that devastation. They did not ask for the removal of all things Islamic. In this restoration of the glory of the birthplace of Srirama, there is nothing particularly against Islam or against the Muslims of India. Srirama is the ideal man of Indian civilisation, and Rama Rajya is the ideal of Indian polity. Why should any Indian find anything objectionable in the attempt to restore the dignity of this great Indian ideal?

HIS GRACE: I have no difficulty in accepting that there was a temple below the Babri structure. It is true. There was a temple, it was destroyed, and a mosque was built. But the question is whether we should now go back and do what we condemn in others. How do we describe what happened 500 years ago, when Babar came, destroyed a temple and put up a mosque on the site? Undoubtedly, it was barbaric. Then how do we describe what happened on December 6? I believe that we need not repeat the errors of the past. Should we repeat what happened earlier? Why can't we accept that what happened in history has happened? We are not going to rewrite history. We are not going to go back and recreate conditions that existed five hundred or a thousand years ago. Because if we do that, where shall we stop? At 500 years ago, or 1000 years ago, or 2000 years ago? Where?

S. KRISHNAN: But your Grace, this was a mosque standing on top of a temple, built at the birthplace of Srirama! How could free India leave it like that? We are not removing all mosques built on temples. We are not asking for that. But how could free India continue to tolerate such disgracing of the birthplace of Srirama?

*Sentiments of the Majority must be Respected*

Parthasarathy: Your Grace, it is convenient for the minorities to isolate the issue of Ayodhya and to condemn the Hindus. But, in the name of their special rights, the minorities continue to denigrate the sentiments of the majority.

In the city of Madras, under the very eyes of your Grace, in a girls' school run by the Church, the students are prevented from wearing flowers and kumkumam. Is this some part of the minority rights? And take the case of Madras Christian College. That college has been repeatedly flouting government directives for protection of the rights of the teachers and students. They say it is their right to ignore government directives. Is that also one of the minority rights? HIS GRACE: I certainly will not justify anybody who abuses minority rights. I do not justify this. If somebody abuses minority rights, I would say that he is wrong. If you bring to me any example of a school under my care practicing this kind of abuse, I shall certainly take action. Telling the students not to wear flowers or kumkumam, I think, is obscurantist. I certainly shall tell them this. Not to give holidays on Deepavali or Pongal, that too is obscurantist. I shall tell them this.

#### *Christianity and Proselytization*

MUKUNDAN: Your Grace, one of the issues which has been creating tension between the Hindus and other religious communities over a long time is that of proselytization. Many Indian leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, have disapproved of this practice.<sup>1</sup> Would you comment on this? What is the position of the Church on this issue today? Does proselytization still remain relevant and important to the Church?

His Grace: I have heard this question many times. I would like to just cite what St. Paul, one of the greatest apostles and a direct disciple of Jesus, said, "I have come to preach but not to baptise." This is the position as far as the Church is concerned. We just spread the good news. We spread the truth about what Christ wanted to do.

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<sup>1</sup>[Mahatma Gandhi spoke many times on the issue of proselytization, especially in his meetings with Christian missionaries. Usually he spoke with great sadness and a firm conviction that proselytization is a non-religious activity, and that the greatness of no religion can possibly depend upon 'head-counts' and 'census figures'. In a discussion with C. F. Andrews in 1936, however, he patiently explained the absurdity of the idea of conversion from the perspective of the Indian understanding of man and his relationship with the universe. That discussion is reproduced in Supplementary Note 5, pp.253-5.- ed. ]

We preach what Christ preached. We tell the world about the Sermon on the Mount, and all the beautiful things Jesus announced.

Proselytizing in the sense of making others members of a Church through baptism is secondary. I will not at all say that proselytisation is the aim of Christianity. No. But, if somebody looking at the good work I am doing, looking at the sympathy I am showing, looking at the compassion I am expressing, says that he would like to follow Jesus in a society, then I shall be happy. I cannot say I shall be unhappy to receive him into the fold. I shall be happy.

But I certainly do not approve of the use of any force or any fraud or any temptation for the sake of increasing the numbers. I am very clear about that. We have our Loyola College here, where we admit all irrespective of their faith. More than three-fourths of the students in the Loyola College are other than Christians. Has there been any effort, at any time, on our part to say to anybody that he must come and join the Church before he may be admitted to the college?

There have been instances perhaps where an unenlightened overzeal has been shown with a desire to increase the numbers. There may have been such mistakes. There indeed have been such mistakes, faults. I certainly do not justify them. Of course, I am speaking for the Roman Catholic Church. There are other Christian Churches; there are Protestant Churches, some of which might have been very aggressive. But, I certainly do not approve of such aggressive proselytisation.

But on the other hand, if you tell me, "Don't do any good work, don't run any hospitals, don't do any charitable work, because by such work you are going to tempt the people", then I certainly cannot agree to that. What else should I do? How can I not do any charitable work, not show any compassion, not do any good work? To serve others, to do good, is the command we have received from Christ. "Love one another." "Do good to those who are suffering." These are the commands we follow. If someone having seen our work says, "Yes, I think you treat me more as a human being, I would like to join you", then that makes me happy. I cannot say no to him. I cannot prevent him from joining the fold. But if I were to tempt him with money and other inducements, that would be wrong. That I condemn.

FATHER KRIPAKARAN: I am a witness to the answer His Grace gave just now. This evening we began with the invocation “Sahanavavatu...”<sup>2</sup>, and I was able to join in the Upanishadic prayer. It is because by birth I was a Hindu. I studied Yajurveda for six years. I was trained as an officer of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha. All members of my family, excepting myself, remain Hindu. And I have become a Catholic priest after having worked in a Bank as a manager for 15 years. I was not converted for any other reason except my faith in Christ. Many people still ask me that I have become a Catholic priest, but have I ever influenced at least one person from my family to become Catholic? I say that is not my intention. It is God who enters into the mind of a person and then he comes into the fold. During the course of my ten years of priesthood I have baptised people, but I have also always dissuaded them. I have always told them that until and unless they are convinced in the depth of their hearts, I shall not baptise them. So being a physical witness, I thought I should not be a mute spectator here.

BAJAJ: Sir, may I take the liberty of adding to this discussion? About a couple of months ago we had a professor from a university in the United States of America. He is a professor of comparative religions. He was talking to us about his subject of expertise. And then some question arose about the concept of Hindu tolerance and its relevance to the issue of conversion. One of the points made from the audience was that for the Hindus it is very easy to accommodate Jesus Christ as another incarnation of divinity. And many Hindus would accept that, they would have no great problem in this, as they have no great problem in accepting Mahatma Buddha as another incarnation of divinity. Conversion in this sense, coming to Jesus Christ in the sense of putting one’s faith in a specific incarnation of divinity, is nothing unusual for the Hindus. Because, they also convert from Saivism to Vaishnavism, from Hinduism to Sikhism, and so on. And if this is what is meant by conversion, the Hindus really would not be concerned about it, and they would be tolerant of it. But our guest from the United States said, “Look, this is not tolerance and this is no conversion either. You convert only when you grant that Jesus is the only incarnation of divinity. And the Hindus

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<sup>2</sup>Santipatha at the beginning of Brahmanandavalli of Taittiriyaopanishad. All meetings in this series began with recitations from the Taittiriyaopanishad.

can be said to be tolerant only if they accept not merely the divinity but also the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Without that acceptance there is no tolerance, and no conversion.”

This emphatic assertion of the professor of comparative religion surprised me at that time. Would you care to comment on it, Your Grace?

HIS GRACE: The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is a matter of the personal faith of Christians. You are not obliged to accept it. I accept it, but you are not obliged to accept it.

#### *Secularism and Indian perception of the divine*

SRINIVAS: Reverend Sir, you have very clearly told us what in your view ought to be the role of religion in public life. You also explained the kinds of meanings we have had for secularism. One of these meanings, which you seem to approve of, is that of having equal respect for all religions, which is said to correspond to the Indian concept of *sarvadharmā samābhava*. You also explained to us the origins of the term “secular”.

All this discussion raises some fundamental issues, which the Indian civilisation, it seems, has been trying to grapple with for several centuries. For instance, there is an old text, of may be seven or eight centuries ago, called the *Sukraniti*. At one stage this text describes various *vidyas*, and one of the 32 *vidyas* it talks of is what it calls *yavanamata*. *Yavanamata* the text describes as, “*Isvarah karano yatra adrisyo asti jagatah sada*”<sup>3</sup>—the *yavanamata* is the thought that holds that there is an *Isvara* who is the cause and the creator of the universe, but who always stays apart from the universe, separated from it, “*adrisyo asti jagatah sada*”. The term *yavanamata* at that time would have stood for both Islam and Christianity, for the Semitic religions in general, and this is how Indian civilisation comprehended the fundamental tenet of these religions.

On the other hand the way the Indian civilisation looked at the relationship between the creator and the universe was perhaps as described in the Upanishadic *Richa* that was recited at the beginning of this meeting. We believed that the creator, the Brahman, is the un-

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<sup>3</sup>See, *Sukraniti*, chapter 4, *rashtraprakarnam* 62, in the Chowkhamba, Varanasi, 1968 edition, p. 231.

manifested reality; and He Himself manifests as the universe. He does not create the universe and then sit outside it. He manifests as the universe. So the universe itself is Brahman, and therefore sacred in all its manifest aspects.

In that sense, *seculum*, the world, itself is sacred. Mountains, rivers, temples, structures, words, beings, all have a divine element. Not merely that they are symbols of the divine, or creations of the divine, they are divine in themselves. That is the basic thought of Indian civilisation.

This way of thinking has of course led to a certain way of living in the world. This has led to a certain harmony between man and all other aspects of the universe, the harmony that you have so strongly emphasised in your presentation.

In recent times there has been a fresh concern with the question of how man should relate with nature. Recent concerns of ecology have led to a certain debate within Christianity, as to the place of God and man within the scheme of the universe. There have been doubts raised about the Christian idea of man as the lord of the universe, as God's vice-regent on earth. In this context, the best that the Christian thinkers have been willing to concede is that man is not the lord; he is the steward, the shepherd, into whose care God has delivered nature with all its diversity and its varied forms of life.

Indian thought is fundamentally different. According to the Indian way of comprehending the universe, man is merely a part of nature, but along with all other aspects of manifest universe, he shares in the divinity of the un-manifest Brahman, who has manifested Himself in these varied aspects. Nature is sacred, so is man. There is nothing that does not have the element of the divine in it, there is nothing that God created and walked away from.

Is there any meeting point between the Christian and the Indian thought at this basic level? More importantly, wouldn't the idea of secularism, the idea of separating one institution from another, of keeping things separate, have to ultimately contend with this basic Indian thought regarding the universe and the place of man in it? While secularism can be acceptable within the Christian universe of thought, does it have a place in the Indian view of the world?

HIS GRACE: I think the difference may not be as deep as you say. Deep down I think there is a unity. There is a distinction between

Isvara and the human person at the level of expression even in the Indian thought. This distinction is probably much sharper in Christianity than in Hinduism. However, in Christianity too God is imagined as both immanent and transcendent. And, among the Christian mystics, say in John of the Cross, there is a strong closeness with what is said in Hinduism about the living God.

So if you hold both ends of the chain, the immanent and the transcendent, however difficult it may be to reconcile them, I think you will find a unity. Even in Christianity immanence is very much emphasised, although it looks as if transcendence is emphasised more. It is true that in Hinduism the human person is not seen to be separate from the divine person, the separation is not accentuated, as in Christianity. But if we keep the two concepts, transcendence and immanence, together we can explain a lot of things.

It is a question of coming to understand. For example, in St. Thomas Aquinas, God is “Being”, and I am also “being”. Only He is Being with capital “B”, my “being” is with a small “b”. And then he says that there is an analogical existence. God is the existent, I am only analogically existent. I cannot say I am fully existent, it is only God who is fully existent. What St. Thomas Aquinas was trying to do was to save the independence of the human personality. But if we are ready to say that this distinction of man from God is not that important, then Christianity and Hinduism can come to some kind of a common understanding.

SRINIVAS: I was talking more about the question of secularism. As you have also emphasised, from the point of view of Indian thought, it seems very difficult to grant the non-divinity of any institution, any physical structure. To me this seems to be the essence of Hinduism—that it does not grant anything to be non-divine. Whereas, secularism, whichever way you define or explain it, always leads to the separation of one from the other, of the world from the divine. Secularism defined as equal respect for all religions, of course, has no meaning theologically or philosophically. This is only the common, naive Indian definition, probably derived from the Hindu view of non-distinction between the divine and all His manifestations and expressions, which is of course the opposite of secularism. Secularism as a philosophical term of any school of thought, in India or abroad, would imply a philosophical doctrine that emphasises the separation of one thing or the other. Therefore,

secularism seems to be irreconcilable with the fundamental Indian realisation of the immanence of divinity in all of creation.

HIS GRACE: Yes, there is a difficulty. In philosophy we speak about 'univocal' and 'analogous'. In Hinduism if you say the word divine is univocal, that it is applied to God exactly in the same way as it is applied to a tree, then of course I would have a little difficulty. You will say the tree is part of God. I can see it only as a creation of God. Philosophically both systems can be well justified. But in practical life these differences are perhaps not that important. You accept the divinity of the tree because you see God manifest in it. I also accept that the tree is divine because it comes from the hand of God. But I cannot somehow use the Greek Theos in the same way for the tree and for God.

BAJAJ: Sir, it may be true that Christianity and Hinduism perhaps can come together on their understanding of God and His relationship with the universe, though it seems difficult. But what Srinivas seems to be insisting upon is that, given the Indian understanding of the place of God on earth, the concept of secularism is itself a sacrilege. The concept of secularism is not possible, cannot be meaningful, within the Indian view of the world, and therefore it cannot be acceptable to the people of India.

HIS GRACE: If secularism means completely removing any divine connotation from the world, then you are right. But when we say *seculum*, we simply mean the world, and secularism then is the doctrine of taking this world seriously. It can even reinforce the Indian view of the world. If everything is divine then everything must be taken seriously. We should not allow the world to be neglected, to be destroyed, to be desecrated.

#### *Praying together*

JHUNJHUNWALA: Your Grace, I only want to know what you think can be done in the present situation. Since you think that the situation has gotten very bad, what can be done by the Hindus and others to improve the situation? I have heard your condemnation of the events. But what is that we can do beyond the condemnation?

HIS GRACE: I think one of the beautiful examples of what we can do is what we are doing now. It is a beautiful example. There are Muslims here, there are Hindus, there are Christians, all together. Let

us talk, let us express ourselves, let us say that we can live together, that we have to live together, and that it is beautiful to live together. We can do similar sitting together and talking things out in a school, in a church, in a temple, and in other public places.

I think the most important thing is to create an atmosphere of openness and friendship. Very often much of the resentment and similar other feelings arise from a lack of communication. What we need is more communication among ourselves. I am very happy that we have met together and discussed so many things today. Even though we may not agree on certain things, but certainly we can live together and we are meant to live together. This sitting together and discussing issues I think is a good example. We can continue this in many other places, in schools and sabhas.

And, the other thing we can do is to pray. After all we all pray to the same divine being. Pray for peace and pray for the upliftment of all in our country.