

References to Hindus and Hinduism in Catholic Documents since 1952

TEXTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (1962-1965)

. . . “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, (Cf. Acts 17,25-28.) and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. (Cf. 1 Tim. 2, 4.) Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. (Cfr. Epist. S.S.C.S. Officii ad Archiep. Boston.: Denz. 3869-72.) . . .

. . . Through her work, whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples, is not only saved from destruction but is also cleansed, raised up and perfected unto the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man.”

Lumen Gentium, 16-17
Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, November 21, 1964

“ . . . Thus, in **Hinduism** men and women contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiries. They seek freedom from the anguishes of our human condition either through ascetical practices or through profound meditation or through a flight to God with love and trust. . . .

“The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of acting and of living, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the one she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim, Christ as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (Jn. 14:6), in whom men and women may find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself. (Cf. 2 Cor 5:18-19.)

“The Church therefore exhorts her sons and daughters to recognize, preserve, and foster the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among the followers of other religions. This is done through conversations and collaboration with them, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life.”

*Nostra Aetate, 2, Second Vatican Council, Declaration
on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, October 28, 1965*

“ . . . Even as Christ Himself searched the hearts of men, and led them to divine light, so also His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should show the people among whom they live, and should converse with them, that they themselves may learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth.”

*Ad Gentes, 11, Second Vatican Council,
Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, December 7, 1965*

PAPAL ENCYCLICALS AND LETTERS

“This first proclamation is also addressed to the immense sections of mankind who practice non-Christian religions. The Church respects and esteems these non-Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray. They are all impregnated with innumerable "seeds of the Word" [References to Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, *Ad Gentes* 11, *Lumen Gentium* 17] and can constitute a true "preparation for the Gospel," [Reference to *Praeparatio Evangelica* and *Lumen Gentium* 16] to quote a felicitous term used by the Second Vatican Council and borrowed from Eusebius of Caesarea.”

Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 53, December 8, 1975

“What we have just said [regarding Vatican II and ecumenical dialogue] must also be applied—although in another way and with the due differences—to activity for coming closer together with the representatives of the non-Christian religions, an activity expressed through dialogue, contacts, prayer in common, investigation of the treasures of human spirituality, in which, as we know well, the members of these religions also are not lacking. Does it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions—a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body—can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness?” **John Paul II, Encyclical *Redeemer of Humanity* 6, March 4, 1979**

[Originally a passage from a letter of John Paul II to the Fifth Plenary Assembly Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (June 23, 1990), this quotation was incorporated into the encyclical]

“Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, **Hinduism**, and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all men [Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*], this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is ‘the way, and the truth and the life. . . .’ The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.”

“. . . The missionary must be a “contemplative in action.” He finds answers to problems in the light of God’s word and in personal and community prayer. My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation.” . . . (91) **John Paul II, Encyclical *Mission of the Redeemer*, 55 & 91, December 7, 1990**

“In preaching the Gospel, Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy; but this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded. Today, as the Gospel gradually comes into contact with cultural worlds which once lay beyond Christian influence, there are new tasks of inculturation, which mean that our generation faces problems not unlike those faced by the Church in the first centuries.

“My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, **India** has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads **Indian** thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems.

“In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought. In this work of discernment, which finds its inspiration in the Council’s Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, certain criteria will have to be kept in mind. The first of these is the universality of the human spirit, whose basic needs are the same in the most disparate cultures. The second, which derives from the first, is this: in engaging great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This criterion is valid for the Church in every age, even for the Church of the future, who will judge herself enriched by all that comes from today’s engagement with Eastern cultures and will find in this inheritance fresh cues for fruitful dialogue with the cultures which will emerge as humanity moves into the future. Thirdly, care will need to be taken lest, contrary to the very nature of the human spirit, the legitimate defense of the uniqueness and originality of **Indian** thought be confused with the idea that a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference and affirm itself by opposing other traditions.

“What has been said here of **India** is no less true for the heritage of the great cultures of China, Japan and the other countries of Asia, as also for the riches of the traditional cultures of Africa, which are for the most part orally transmitted.”

John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 72, September 14, 1998

“An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. This dialogue is in first place a conversation about human existence or simply, as the bishops of **India** have put it, a matter of “being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows”. [**Indian** Bishops’ Conference, Final Declaration of the XXX Assembly: *The Role of the Church for a Better India* (8 March 2013), 8.9.] In this way we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking and speaking. We can then join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace, which should become a basic principle of all our exchanges. A dialogue which seeks social peace and justice is in itself, beyond all merely practical considerations, an ethical commitment which brings about a new social situation. Efforts made in dealing with a

specific theme can become a process in which, by mutual listening, both parts can be purified and enriched. These efforts, therefore, can also express love for truth.”

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation, November 24, 2013

SPEECHES AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF POPES

“Secondly, it is hardly necessary for Us to remind you, that the Catholic Church demands of no one to give up one’s native ways and customs, forces no one to adopt foreign ways of living. The Church belongs to the East as well as to the West. She is bounden to no particular culture, she is at home with all who respect the commands of God. What is consonant with man’s God given nature, is good and simply human, the Church permits, furthers, ennobles and sanctifies. This once made clear, beloved sons and daughters, it is for you to be conscious of your duty to your country and people. . . .”

“The people of India should rejoice in the religious spirit rooted in their soul. . . .”

Pius XII, Radio Broadcast to the Catholics of India for the Centenaries of St. Thomas the Apostle and St. Francis Xavier, December 31, 1952

“This visit to **India** is the fulfillment of a long cherished desire. Yours is a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and in hymns of fervent prayer. Rarely has this longing for God been expressed with words so full of the spirit of Advent as in the words written in your sacred books many centuries before Christ: ‘From the unreal lead me to the real; from darkness lead me to light; from death lead me to immortality’ (*Br. Up.* I, 3, 28).

“This is a prayer which belongs also to our time. Today more than ever, it should rise from every human heart. The human race is undergoing profound changes and is groping for the guiding principles and the new forces which will lead it into the world of the future. Your country also has entered into a new phase of her history and in this period of transition you too feel the insecurity of our age, when traditional orders and values are changed, and all efforts must be concentrated on building the future of the nation not only on a stable material basis, but on firm spiritual foundations.

“You, too, are engaged in the struggle against the ills that darken the lives of innumerable people all over the world: against poverty, hunger and illness; you too are fighting the relentless battle for more food, clothing, housing, for education, for a just distribution of the wealth of this world.

“Are we not all one in this struggle for a better world, in this effort to make available to all people those goods which are needed to fulfill their human destiny and to live lives worthy of the children of God?

“Therefore we must come closer together, not only through the modern means of communication, through press and radio, through steamships and jet planes, - we must come together with our hearts, in mutual understanding, esteem and love. We must meet not merely as tourists, but as pilgrims who set out to find God - not in buildings of stone but in human hearts. Man must meet man, nation meet nation, as brothers and sisters, as children of God. In this mutual understanding and friendship, in this sacred communion, we must also begin to work together to build the common future of the human race. We

must find the concrete and practical ways of organization and cooperation, so that all resources be pooled, and all efforts united towards achieving a true communion among all nations. Such a union cannot be built on a universal terror or fear of mutual destruction; it must be built on the common love that embraces all and has its roots in God, who is love.”

Paul VI, Address to representatives of the various religions of India Bombay, December 3, 1964

“Coming to the peoples of Asia—just as all those before me who, in different periods of history, proclaimed here Jesus Christ—I encounter today, in the same way, the local heritage and the ancient cultures that contain praiseworthy elements of spiritual growth, indicating the paths of life and conduct that are often so near to those found in the Gospel of Christ. Different religions have tried to respond to man’s search for the ultimate explanation of creation and the meaning of man’s journey through life.

Hinduism uses philosophy to answer man, and **Hindus** practice asceticism and mediation in their ascent toward God.” **John Paul II, Address to the peoples of Asia Manila, February 21, 1981**

“Here, however, we must define our terms. That ‘religious sense,’ that is, the *religious knowledge* of God on the part of people, goes back to the *rational knowledge* of which man is capable through his natural powers, as we have seen when we spoke about that. At the same time it is distinguished from the *purely rational speculations* by philosophers and thinkers on the subject of the existence of God. It involves the whole person and becomes in him a life force. It is distinguished about all from Christian faith as knowledge based on revelation and a knowing response to the gift of God present at work in Jesus Christ. I repeat that this necessary distinction does not exclude a similarity and an agreement in positive values, just as it does not hinder one from recognizing, with the Council, that the various non-Christian religions (among which the conciliar document mentions especially *Hinduism and Buddhism*, and gives a brief outline of them) ‘strive variously to answer the restless searchings of the human heart by proposing ‘ways’ which consist of teachings, rules of life, and sacred ceremonies’ (NA 2).”

John Paul II, General Audience Rome, June 5, 1985

“My purpose in coming to India has both a religious and human dimension. I come to pay a pastoral visit to the Catholics of **India**, and I come in friendship with a deep desire to honor all your people and your different cultures. As I begin, I take this occasion to express my sincere interest in all the religions of **India**—an interest marked by genuine respect, by attention to what we have in common, by a desire to promote interreligious dialogue and fruitful collaboration between people of different faiths.”

John Paul II, Address to the people of India, New Delhi, February 1, 1986

“My visit to India is a pilgrimage of good will and peace, and the fulfillment of a desire to experience personally the very soul of your country.

“It is entirely fitting that this pilgrimage should begin here, at Raj Ghat, dedicated to the memory of the illustrious Mahatma **Gandhi**, the Father of the Nation and ‘apostle of non-violence’...

“From this place, which is forever bound to the memory of this extraordinary man, I wish to express to the people of **India** and of the world my profound conviction that the peace and justice of which contemporary society has such great need will be achieved only along the path which was at the core of his teaching: the supremacy of the spirit and Satyagraha, the ‘truthforce’, which conquers without violence by the dynamism intrinsic to just action.

“The power of truth leads us to recognize with Mahatma **Gandhi** the dignity, equality and fraternal solidarity of all human beings, and it prompts us to reject every form of discrimination. It shows us once again the need for mutual understanding acceptance and collaboration between religious groups in the pluralist society of modern India and throughout the world.” **John Paul II, Tribute to the Monument of Gandhi**
New Delhi, February 1, 1986

“I have been longing to visit India, the land of many religions and of a rich cultural heritage, and I have looked forward to this meeting. I am very happy to have this occasion of spiritual fellowship with you.

“India is indeed the cradle of ancient religious traditions. The belief in a reality within man which is beyond the material and biological, the belief in the Supreme Being which explains, justifies, and makes possible man’s rising above all aspects of his material self – these beliefs are deeply experienced in India. Your meditations on things unseen and spiritual have made a deep impression on the world. Your overwhelming sense of the primacy of religion and of the greatness of the Supreme Being has been a powerful witness against a materialistic and atheistic view of life...

“As an inner attitude of the mind and heart, spirituality involves an emphasis on the inner man and it produces an inward transformation of the self. The emphasis on the spiritual nature of man is an emphasis on the sublime dignity of every human person. Spirituality teaches that at the core of all outward appearances there is that inner self which in so many ways is related to the Infinite. This spirituality of inwardness which is so predominant in the **Indian** religious tradition achieves its complement and fulfillment in the external life of man. **Gandhi**’s spirituality is an eloquent illustration of this. He says: ‘Let me explain what I mean by religion... that which changes one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the Maker and itself’ ...

“The abolition of inhuman living conditions is an authentic spiritual victory, because it brings man freedom, dignity, and the possibility of spiritual life. It enables him to rise above the material. Every man, no matter how poor or unfortunate, is worthy of respect and freedom by reason of his spiritual nature. Because we believe in man, in his value and in his innate excellence, we love him and serve him and seek to relieve his sufferings. As a sage of Tamilnadu, **Pattinattar**, puts it: ‘Believe the One above. Believe that God is. Know that all other wealth is naught. Feed the hungry. Know that

righteousness and good company are beneficial; Be content that God's will be done. A sermon this is unto thee, O Heart!' ...

"In the context of religious pluralism, the spirit of tolerance, which has always been part of the Indian heritage, is not only desirable but imperative and must be implemented in a framework of practical means of support. It is the teaching of the Church that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or social groups or any human power, so that no one is forced to act against his convictions or is prevented from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. The world notes with great satisfaction that in the Preamble to her Constitution **India** has assured to all her citizens liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship. It therefore becomes a duty incumbent on all citizens, especially on leaders in religious life, to support and guard this precious principle which specifically includes the right "to profess, practice and propagate religion". The way to do so is to show its effectiveness in the reality of public life. Everyone is called upon to uphold this religious liberty and to work for peace and harmony among people of different religious traditions, among societies, and among nations."

John Paul II, Address to the representatives of the various religions of India, Madras, February 5, 1986

"One significant aim of my pilgrimage to India was to meet the great spiritual traditions which have enriched the life of your country for thousands of years. The Second Vatican Council bequeathed to the Church the task of entering into sincere and respectful dialogue with the followers of other religions. This dialogue does not mean a superficial disregard of the profound differences that exist between us. Rather, it is precisely because we often differ on certain important points that an attitude of mutual respect and esteem is all the more necessary. Furthermore, it is consonant with the Christian message of unity and love to insist especially on 'what human beings have in common and on what promotes fellowship among them' (NA 1). The Church is strongly convinced that there are many religious, social, and public questions in which close and fruitful collaboration is possible, indeed necessary."

John Paul II, Address to the Representatives of the Indian Community of Rome, June 12, 1986

"Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true' (Eph. 5:8-9).

"Today throughout this vast country many people are celebrating the Festival of Lights. We rejoice with them, and in this Eucharist here in New Delhi, in **India**, on the continent of Asia, we too exult in the light and bear witness to the One who is 'the true light that enlightens every man' (Jn 1:8).

"Here today, dear brothers and sisters, you represent the Catholic community not only of **India** but of the whole Asian continent, and I place in your hands the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation as a guide for the spiritual and pastoral life of the Church on this continent as we enter a new century and a new Christian Millennium.

“It is fitting that this document has been signed and issued in India, the home of many of Asia’s time-honored cultures, religions and spiritual traditions. These ancient Asian civilizations have shaped the lives of the peoples of this continent and have left an indelible mark on the history of the human race. Distinguished representatives of various Christian Communities and of the great religions of India are present here today. I greet them all with esteem and friendship, and I place before them my hope and dream that the next century will be a time of fruitful dialogue, leading to a new relationship of understand and solidarity among the followers of all religions.”

John Paul II, Address to the faithful of New Delhi, November 7, 1999

“It is a great joy for me to visit once again the beloved land of India and to have this opportunity in particular to greet you, the representatives of different religious traditions, which embody not only great achievements of the past but also the hope of a better future for the human family. I thank the Government and the people of **India** for the welcome I have received. I come among you as a pilgrim of peace and as a fellow-traveler on the road that leads to the complete fulfillment of the deepest human longings. On the occasion of **Diwali**, the festival of lights, which symbolizes the victory of life over death, good over evil, I express the hope that this meeting will speak to the world of the things which unite us all: our common human origin and destiny, our shared responsibility for people’s well-being and progress, our need of the light and strength that we seek in our religious convictions. Down the ages and in so many ways, **India** has taught that truth which the great Christian teachers also propose, that men and women “by inward instinct” are deeply oriented towards God and seek him from the depths of their being (cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 60, art. 5, 3). On this basis, I am convinced that together we can successfully take the path of understanding and dialogue...

“In India the way of dialogue and tolerance was the path followed by the great Emperors Ashoka, Akbar and **Chatrapati Shivaji**; by wise men like **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** and **Swami Vivekananda**; and by luminous figures such as **Mahatma Gandhi**, **Gurudeva Tagore** and **Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan**, who understood profoundly that to serve peace and harmony is a holy task. These are people who, in **India** and beyond, have made a significant contribution to the increased awareness of our universal brotherhood, and they point us to a future where our deep longing to pass through the door of freedom will find its fulfillment because we will pass through that door together. To choose tolerance, dialogue and cooperation as the path into the future is to preserve what is most precious in the great religious heritage of mankind. It is also to ensure that in the centuries to come the world will not be without that hope which is the life-blood of the human heart. May the Lord of heaven and earth grant this now and for ever.”

John Paul II, Address to the representatives of other Religions and Christian Confessions, New Delhi, November 7, 1999

“Secondly, yesterday at Madhu (the Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu) I saw something which I would never have expected: not everyone there was Catholic, not even the majority! There were Buddhists, Muslims, **Hindus**, and each one came to pray; they

go and they say they receive graces there. There is in the people – and the people are never wrong – they sense that there is something there that unites them. And if they are so naturally united in going together to pray at that shrine – which is Christian but not only Christian, because all want [to go there], then why shouldn't I go to a Buddhist temple to greet them? What happened yesterday at Madhu is very important. It helps us to understand the meaning of the interreligious experience in Sri Lanka: there is respect for one another. There are small fundamentalist groups, but these are not with the people: they are ideological elites, but they are not with the people.”

**Pope Francis, Press Conference Flight from Sri Lanka to the Philippines,
January 15, 2015**

CONFERENCES OF BISHOPS

“We respectfully greet all our sisters and brother in Asia who have put their confidence in other religious traditions. We gladly acknowledge the spiritual values of the great religions of Asia such as **Hinduism**, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam...We esteem the ethical values in the customs and practices found in the teachings of the great philosophers of Asia, which promote natural virtues and pious devotion to ancestors...Together with all Asian peoples, we wish to grow in sharing our richness and in having mutual respect for our differences. We resolve to work together to improve the quality of life of our people. We consider our faith as our greatest treasure and would like to share it with all, fully respecting their religious beliefs and their freedom...

“The church in Asia is called upon to enter a triple dialogue: a dialogue with the cultures of Asia, a dialogue with the religions of Asia and a dialogue with the peoples of Asia, especially the poor. To carry on such a dialogue, formation for dialogue is all-important, especially in our formation centers.”

**Catholic Bishops of Asia, Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,
the Synod for Asia, *Message to the People of God* (1998)**