Chapter 5

Inter-religious Dialogue in the Contemporary World

This chapter will consist of the critical examination of the inter-religious dialogical process initiated at various platforms in the contemporary world. Effort will be made not only to assess its strong points and achievements but also to examine its limitations and hurdles in its way. In the previous chapter, while evaluating various ways or methods of resolution of violent conflict it has been found that communication between the adversaries is part and parcel of all those methods and also that the communication in all other methods, except dialogue, is in the form of debate, aimed at maximising the gains by each party by convincing the other, as such the emphasis was on the demand to be heard and gain position of dominance in the whole scenario. Dialogue is also a communicative encounter with the other, but here listening becomes a crucial part of the process because it demands not only “a deep experience of one’s own tradition ... [but also] sufficient knowledge of the other one.”¹ Listening is very important in development of the otherwise very complex process of human cognisance as the acoustic system of a child is critical in his identifying phonemes, making meaningful sounds and understanding her surroundings.² Nanak, the first Sikh Guru puts listening before speech when he says: “As long as we are in this world, O Nanak, we should listen, and speak of the Lord.”³ Now the question arises, if inter-religious dialogue is confined to

³ Guru Granth. 661.
the religion specific or theological/dogmatic matters only, then how can it help in resolving conflicts which have religious hues but their origins are not only in the religious but social, political or economic factors also. Panikkar says that inter-religious dialogue is concerned with human beings passing through the day-to-day struggles of life where justice, peace and happiness are no less cherished goals than the matters related to the narrow confines of religion alone and the true “other” is not someone with whom to indulge in pedagogical discussions but is a “fellow traveller in the concerns of real life.”

But has dialogue or more precisely, the inter-religious dialogue arrived on the horizon recently? Why it has become so important? What is changed? Inter-religious dialogue arises out of interaction among the adherents of different religious traditions, and religions have always been there in various parts of the inhabited earth with intermittent emergence of new ones in the form of new sects or traditions with simultaneous claims of being distinct from the earlier ones and being universal truths but “universal truths are often in competition.” There has been interaction between the adherents of various religions sometimes through trade and commerce or the others chores of the daily life and some times trough violence generated out of conflicts, as such, communication of a sort has always been there but at certain times there were pedagogical discussions and debates which were labelled as dialogue. Therefore, dialogue of religions (through their adherents) is not a recent addition, it has been there on conscious or unconscious level, however, it might have undergone certain changes over the period of time. Bouma and Ling say that the official rhetoric of every religious tradition has been the achievement of unity within its boundaries but the net outcome so

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4 Raimundo Panikkar (1993) op. cit. ix.
far is more diversity with emergence of more sects in established traditions and “new religious movements” and “the twenty-first century has begun with burst of religious diversity [and] religious conflict...”

Bohm says that religious people have their own hardened opinions and assumptions and are hardest to get together and, perhaps, no such instance can be cited where “two religions, or even sub-groups of any given religion, where they ever got together once they had split.”

Actually we are nostalgic in constructing a stable past which in reality was not that stable as life is always in a flux. The tendencies to down play the internal diversity of one’s own tradition and looking at the other through the prism of one sect only are not new. Bouma and Ling say that the nineteenth century scholars, under the influence of colonial values, “constructed the World’s Religions as homolithic blocs [ignoring the] substantial and vital differences within these entities.” Such tendencies about the other arise out of ignorance which can be overcome through dialogue as well as the other means in quest to know the other. The Westphalia treaty in 1648, paving way for nation-states, drew religious boundaries in Europe “which lasted into the twentieth century” but migration of people of different religions along with new means of travel and communication, threat of terrorist attacks, concern for human rights etc. in the globalizing world of today have changed the scenario. There are countries like India and the U.S. where the original inhabitants have been lost or gone to the peripheries and the floods of immigrants over a period of time have brought the people from diverse cultures face to face with one another. Whereas, the European colonization of the U.S. began with its discovery by Columbus in 1493, Indian

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8 Gary D. Bouma and Rod Ling (2009), op. cit. 509.
subcontinent has received immigrants since last ten thousand years. Therefore, almost all parts of the world today are characterised by diversity or plurality of religious traditions and cultures.

In case of multicultural society in a nation “a person’s sense of self-worth is intimately and unavoidably bound up with their cultural identity” then the state may try to root out all cultures except one and such is the case with the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, massacre in Central Africa; or coercive assimilation may be attempted through institutions such as schools, legal system or fixing qualifications for citizenship and as a result other cultures either escape or accept subjugation. This happened in the U.K. in early 1950s and 1960s when the Sikh immigrants were asked to encourage their children to “give up their turbans, their religion, and their dietary laws.”

Even the Britain born children were labelled as immigrants and it was ensured that these children were no more than 30 percent of the school strength. The attitude of many European countries still continues to be hostile as is evident from the law concerning ban on headgear, which forms the intrinsic part of the religious identity of the Sikhs, Muslims and Jew etc., in France and Italy and has been rightly termed as secular fundamentalism. The ban on Islamic and Judaic ways of killing animals in many European countries and ban on circumcision in Cologne state of Germany are other

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10 See end note 207 in Chapter 3.
13 Ibid., 38.
14 “French turban ban gets Sikh group into action” *The Times of India* [Chandigarh]. 6 Jan. 2004. Also see notes 144 and 160 below.
such instances when option is given – either accept the dominant culture or go! Another way is assimilation which is also referred to as “melting-pot”, a term originally coined by Israel Zangwill in 1908 indicating encouragement to the immigrants for assimilations into the single American culture.\(^\text{17}\) This term may be new but concept is not as Mughal Emperor Akbar who was ruler of North India from 1556 to 1605 set up a place called Ibaadat Khana in Fatehpur Sikri where he invited religious leaders of different religions and there were intense debates there, and he himself presided over them. He adopted a policy of Sulh-Kul i.e., amity to all and he created a new religion by amalgamation of various precepts of different religions and he named this religion as Din-I-Ilahi.\(^\text{18}\) But enthusiasm for this melting pot could not last long and went into oblivion soon after his death and he was termed as renegade by many Islamic clerics.\(^\text{19}\) However, after, 1960s there is a trend to accept the divergence and integration became a preferred term in place of assimilation and in melting pot was replaced by “salad-bowl” where each ingredient has not only its own distinct taste but a presentable composite recipe is also there.\(^\text{20}\) For the Western people this term may represent a new concept, however, in the East, this concept is there since long. For example, in India, Guru Nanak, the first Guru of Sikhism did not call people to shun their religions, Hinduism and Islam being two dominant religions at that time, rather he asked them to be true to their respective religions.\(^\text{21}\) He travelled from Sultanpur Lodhi in Punjab to places as far as Mecca, Multan, Sri Lanka,


\(^\text{17}\) Ibid. For definition of culture see endnote 87 in Chapter 1.


\(^\text{20}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{21}\) See note 269 in Chapter 2.
Assam and numerous other places including those of pilgrimage for twenty years during his four lengthy journeys and met Pandits, Sadhus, yogis, mullas, pirs, qadis and people of many other sects; and he won over his opponents not by magic or intellect but “by moral persuasion and power of loving devotion.”

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru said that the whole humankind should be recognised as one and said, “Some call themselves Hindu, some Turk (Muslim), some Hafzi and others Imamsafi. But the entire human kind should be recognised as one.”

John Hick also tries to articulate this fact that all religions are equally concerned with “transcending the ego point of view which is the source of all selfishness, greed, exploitation, cruelty and injustice, and to become re-centred in that ultimate mystery” which has different names in different religions.

Multiculturalism involves cultural paradigm which is a more encompassing term, therefore, for religious diversity and integrity the term pluralism is used. Diana L. Eck gives the following four points which together, she says, define pluralism:

1. Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious ghettos with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given [fact], but pluralism is not a given [fact]; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

2. Pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know

23 See note 270 in Chapter 2.
24 Quoted in Martin Forward (2007), op. cit. 42.
anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.

3. Pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

4. Pluralism is based on dialogue. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table -- with one’s commitments.25

Thus pluralism does not mean merely acceptance of diversity and tolerance of the other, it is rather vigorous encounter for understanding the other without compromising one’s own identity and commitments and all this is possible through dialogue only. Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh went a step further when he said, “[m]y faith tradition tells me that to have a “tolerant” society is to demean society. If I say that I tolerate you I am demeaning you. If I say that I will accept you, I am still demeaning you. Now, if I was to

say, ‘I will respect you,’ that would be slightly better. But what if I said, ‘I will lay down my life for you’? You have to try and have that kind of spirit of sacrifice.”

What Bohm gave and Frank Boulton articulated further as the salient differences between dialogue and debate on the basis of his study helps in understanding and making conceptual clarity as to what “ideally” dialogue should be. The Decalogue prescribed by Swidler stipulates normative standards, which ought to be adhered to have the true and meaningful dialogue. But all this, as Panikkar says, “does not engage in dialogue” but is, what he calls “about dialogue” and is the description of “the state of art” – “the knowledge and insight that are indispensable for proceeding further and deeper” in the dialogical process.

Swidler’s “Dialogue Decalogue” first appeared in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies in the winter 1983 issue and was revised in 2003 and 2008 and this version was basis of our study in the previous chapter. But Decalogue is such an attractive word being originated from the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses in the Bible, that some other scholars prescribed their own “decalogues”; for example Wazir Singh prescribed the following ten guidelines “for living together in the contemporary world of ours”:

1. Cast not God into one mould.
2. Keep alive the Quest for Truth.
3. Imbibe the Spirit of Sharing.

27 See note 285 in Chapter 4.
4. Shed prejudice, shed hostility.
5. Discover the Essence and Uniqueness of Faiths.
6. Pursue Analysis, followed by Synthesis.
7. Cultivate Tolerance, support Free Expression.
8. Thou shalt not Impose Dogmas and Doctrines.
9. Feed the needy, heal the injured.
10. Go beyond Discourse and Debate.\textsuperscript{31}

The above said decalogue though is more close to the original one as it is extensively normative all through, but so are injunctions by most of the religions, the real question is how to do, how the conflicting religious groups can get to dialogue. Balkar Singh criticizing it said that such endeavours were nothing but being “pretentious in intellectual exercise” and instead of barrowed structures involving western conceptual baggage or the “academic adventurism brought forward by western scholarship”, use of model based on Sikh revelations proclaiming well being of all – “sarbat da Bhala” - should be made.\textsuperscript{32} The actual inter-religious dialogue can and has to happen only between the followers of different religions which may include leaders as well as lay persons. In such efforts, sticking to one model, say, Christian, Islamic, Hindu or Sikh may give impression of being dominated in the mind of the other party. It is another matter that followers of all these religions may claim that dialogical process is inbuilt and natural outcome of their respective tradition and such claims a re to be critically evaluated before such strictly specific religious tradition based model are encouraged. The tension arising out of steadfastness of devotion to one’s own religious tradition and acceptance of the

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 30.
“other” is a perennial one as we will find in the ensuing discussion; therefore, we leave this issue, for the time being, here, as the study of actual dialogical processes may clarify the matter more.

We will discuss the dialogical process both at macro and micro levels, macro level includes efforts such as the Parliament of the World’s Religions, the World Congress of Faiths, Elijah Interfaith Institute etc. which are forums engaged in continuous multi-religious interactions and dialogue, and micro level includes dialogical efforts on real conflicts between the religions involved independently as well as within the macro-level forums mentions above. The Parliaments of World Religions have been most comprehensive efforts in this regard and present the microcosmic as well as macrocosmic view of the inter-religious dialogical process, therefore, these are being examined in more detail than the other efforts mentioned above.

**Parliament of World’s Religions 1893 at Chicago**

This Parliament was first of its type as “what were considered as world’s ten great religions” [the phrase itself is hegemonic with the question- were the remaining not great?] –Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shintoism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism gathered together.\(^{33}\) It is another thing that if we go by the number of major speakers or the essays presented, we find that out of total 177 speakers from all these religions, 137 (i.e., seventy seven percent) were from Christianity with further subdivision: 113 from the Protestant denominations alone, 16 from Roman Catholicism and 8 from Eastern Orthodox traditions; followed by 11 from Judaism, 10 from Buddhism, 9 from Hinduism, two each from Confucianism, Islam,

Shintoism and Zoroastrianism and one each from Jainism and Taoism.\(^{34}\) Though the World’s Parliament of the Religions, 1893 is seen as “dawn of pluralism” but Diana L. Eck says that the civilisation of India has long experience of “plurality of religious traditions and the task of creating a complex culture from its perennial parliament of religions.”\(^{35}\) The Chicago Parliament of World Religions was part of a bigger event “World’s Columbian Exposition” held to celebrate “the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of the New World,” \(^{36}\) the event, which “‘successfully’ led to near destruction of the indigenous tribes of the Americas”\(^ {37}\) and started colonisation of rest of the world.

Some scholars doubt the true motive behind organising such gathering of religions. Paul Knitter and Mathew Weiner wrote as follows in Reuters during the 2009 Parliament of World Religions at Melbourne:

In 1893, the Chicago Parliament of World Religions was convened to gather the world’s faiths together for the first time. The organizers had a subversive message they kept hidden from invited speakers from non-Christian traditions: Christianity is the one true faith. They assumed that if all the faiths had a chance to speak publicly to the world, it would be obvious that Christianity was superior. But things didn’t go as planned. As it turned out, the Hindu representative Swami Vivekananda from India stole the show, convincing everyone that Hinduism was as valid a way to worship and experience the divine as any other. The state of the

\(^{34}\) Appendix. Ibid., 477-492.
\(^{35}\) Diana L. Eck. Forward. Ibid., xiii, xiii-xvii.
\(^{36}\) Richard Hughes Seager. General Introduction. Ibid. 3, 3-12.
world’s religions was changed forever and the interfaith era had its symbolic beginning.\textsuperscript{38}

Though the authenticity of what they wrote can not be accepted merely on the basis of their academic credentials for Paul Knitter being the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York and Matthew Weiner being the Programme Director at the Interfaith Center of New York.\textsuperscript{39} However, if we go through the texts of some of the presentations, the veracity of their claim can be tested. Charles Carroll Bonney, the President of the World’s Congress Auxiliary which organised this event, in his inaugural welcome speech on September 11, 1893, said that for the Parliament, the word “religion” meant “the love and worship of God and the love and service of man”, and that no religion had to surrender or compromise which was believed to be truth or duty by it as mutual exchange of ideas and beliefs would remove serious misunderstandings and misjudgements about the each other.\textsuperscript{40} However, his missionary zeal was reflected in what he further said:

He who believes that God has revealed himself more fully in his religion than in any other, cannot do otherwise than desire to bring that religion to the knowledge of all men, with an abiding conviction that the God who gave it will preserve, protect, and advance it in every expedient way. And hence he will welcome every just opportunity to come into fraternal relations with men of other

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
creeds, that they may see in his upright life the evidence of the truth and beauty of his faith, and be thereby led to learn it, and be helped heavenward by it.\footnote{Ibid., 18. (emphasis added).}

Further we find that, there was only one essay on Taoism and that too anonymous, it presented Taoism in some negative light indicating that it had “deteriorated” and in the end there was a wish if any body could revive it, “explain the mysteries, understand it profoundly, and set it forth clearly, as Roman Catholics and Protestants assemble the masses to hear, and to explain the doctrines that their followers may know the ends for which their churches were established!”\footnote{Anonymous. “Taoism, a Prize Essay.” Ibid., 363, 361-63.} This coarsely written essay was given prize which Seager ascribes to the above said eulogy of the Christian denominations “[g]iven the missionary tenor of much of the proceedings of the Parliament.”\footnote{Richard Hughes Seager. Introduction (to Part X). 358, 357-59.}

Throughout the seventeen days of the Parliament there were many presentations which showed Christianity as the saviour of humanity, efforts were made by the speakers to compare the nuances of other religions with those of Christianity while expecting others to accept them as truth statements. George Washburn of Constantinople for example, in his long harangue against Islam concluded that Christianity was vibrant with life, whereas, the notion of its being already perfect made Islam too stagnant to make any progress contrary to the demand of the hour that “the faith which is to dominate this civilization must also be progressive.”\footnote{George Washburn. “The Points of Contact and Contrast between Christianity and Mohammedanism.” Ibid. 268, 251-268.} But without realising the harshness in his tenor, he said, “[t]he truth, spoken in love, is the only possible basis upon which this Congress can stand” and even demanded applaud from Muslims for his exegesis.\footnote{Ibid.} George F.
Pentecost said that Christianity was not intolerant to other religions “except as light is intolerant of darkness, but will in no case compromise with error... *Christianity is the only possible universal religion*, as it is certainly the only complete and God-given revelation.”

There were some verbal skirmishes also on the floor of the Parliament, for example, “Evangelical Pentecost of London” was reported in the Daily Tribune (at Chicago) to have concluded his address saying, “There are two or three Oriental bubbles which have been floating over Chicago for the last two three weeks which need to be pricked.” Virchand Gandhi, the sole Jain representative from India was reported to have responded by begging “leave to express the belief that Oriental bubbles might yet be found heavier than certain bloated balloons of self-conceit which were temporarily obscuring a large portion of the horizon.” Gandhi in his impromptu comments described an anecdote from the life of Emperor Akbar: A ship of Muslim pilgrims was looted by the Portuguese and some copies of the Qur’an which were part of the loot were hanged around the necks of dogs which were paraded through the streets of Ormuz. After some time a Portuguese ship was captured with some copies of the Bible by Akbar’s soldiers and his Mother who was a “zealous Mohammedan” asked to pay in the same coin to which Akbar replied: “Mother, these ignorant men do not know the value of the Koran, and they treated it in a manner which is the outcome of ignorance. But I know the glory of the Koran and the Bible both, and I cannot debase myself in the way they did.”

By September 27, 1893, the last day, the missionary agenda came fully to the fore. The closing ceremony speech by John Joseph Keane started with hope and feeling “that

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47 “Virchand Gandhi” Daily Tribune, 26 September, 1893 as reproduced in ibid., 334-35.
the only condition on which we can ever attain unity in the truth, is to dismiss the spirit of
hostility and suspicion and to meet on the basis of mutual truthfulness and charity." But
immediately his missionary tenor overpowered and he thundered: “As long as God is
God, and man is man, Jesus Christ is the center of Religion forever.” And he finished
his speech with: “Jesus Christ is the ultimate center of Religion. He has declared that his
one organic church is equally ultimate. Because I believe him, here be my stand
forever.” But the last speaker of the Parliament, George Dana Boardman though
declaring its august purpose “not to array sect against sect, or to exalt one form of
Religion at the cost of all other forms; but “to unite all Religion against all irreligion”,
made his true intentions visible when he said, “All other religions, comparatively
speaking, are more or less topographical. ... But Christianity is the religion of
mankind.” Using his eloquence to show superiority of Jesus Christ, his doctrines to
those of all other major religions which had deep fragmentations in each of them, and
above all the magnanimity of the Christians to love their enemies, he ultimately
proclaimed from the pulpit: “Jesus Christ is the sole bond of the human race; the one
nexus of the nations; the great vertebral column of the body of mankind.”

Was it all – a missionary endeavour? No. There were some voices like that of
Christophore Jibara who could announce from the dais: “I assure you also that by the
Koran we can understand Gospel better, and without the Koran it is impossible to

50 Ibid., 462.
51 Ibid., 464.
53 Ibid., 466-467.
54 Ibid., 474.
understand it correctly;”55 Serge Wolkonsky said, “[i]f you do not understand what another man says it does not mean that the other man is a barbarian.”56 The most prominent speaker was Vivekananda who had gone there uninvited57 and this “uninvited and perhaps unwelcome intruder”58 who was in the words of Merwin-Marie Snell “beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament”59 stole the show with his eloquence, simplicity and humbleness when in response to welcome he started his address with “Sisters and Brothers of America” and concluded as follows:

Sectarian bigotry, and its horrible descendent, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilization, and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.60

He started his discourse on Hinduism with these words: “Three religions stand now in the world which have comedown to us from pre-historic – Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism” and said that whereas, Judaism had failed to absorb

Christianity and a handful of Parsees were there to tell tale of Zoroastrianism, once a grand religion, “the religion of the Vedas” has faced the rise of sect after sect and has reverberated a thousand times with more vigour every time and he asserted that agnostic Buddhism and atheist Jainism along idolatry were part of the “Hindu’s religion.” 61 We find that even Vivekananda was no less eager to showcase the grandiose all-absorbing quality of his religion as had been the other speaker of the Parliament to show superiority of theirs’, however, his approach was more respectful, conciliatory and balanced and he like other participant from the East, used more polished and polite language in stark contrast the coarse aggressiveness of some of the Christian speakers. Moreover, he elsewhere said, “Just as we have recognized unity by our very nature, so we must also recognize variation. We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes.” 62 He asserted that the Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor is the Hindu or Buddhist to become Christian; but members of each religion must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve their individuality and grow according to their own law of growth. 63 Most of the speakers had talked about common grounds for the unity of religions and Vivekananda had supported it. While reacting to the aggressive missionary zeal of some Christian speakers he had cautioned that such unity was not possible “by the triumph of any one of these religions and the destruction of others ... [the Parliament] has proved to the world that

holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possession of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character.\textsuperscript{64}

From the above detailed discussion of what transpired at the World’s of Parliament Religions 1893 at Chicago it is clear that it was first of its kind both in scale and the expressed motives. The speakers from the East were though more tolerant than their Western brothers, and the over all tenor remained more of debate than dialogue. But we can not expect dialogue in its ideal form at such an early stage, nevertheless, the need for harmony among religions and superiority of none were the underlying ideas in spite of emphasis on polemics and grandiloquence by majority of speakers. The hidden or expressed agenda for establishing the Christianity’s superiority failed and rather, this platform paved way for what Eric J. Sharpe calls “the beginning of the modern Hindu “mission” to the West in person of Swami Vivekananda.”\textsuperscript{65} Any way, the experience generated optimism and a Chicago “continuation committee” was formed but “no further full-scale Parliament was ever held”\textsuperscript{66} for the next hundred years.

\textbf{Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions}

In 1988, on suggestion from some of the followers of the Ramakrishna Mission, a group of religious leaders, academics and local organisers met in Chicago and in some subsequent meetings, planned to hold a centenary celebration of the 1893 Parliament of World’s Religions. A council was incorporated as a non-profit organisation devoted to the spirit and legacy of that event by holding subsequent periodic Parliaments. Over the years, the council has evolved with more refined outlook and approach to the inter-

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 336-337.


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
religious dialogue and peace. There have always been new additions and revisions since the incorporation of the council. The target is not the unity of religions but harmony among religions and the professed goal is to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world. But the religions alone are not the only active partners but some guiding institutions have also been involved. The council has professed the vision for a world where:

1. Religious and spiritual communities live in harmony and contribute to a better world from their riches of wisdom and compassion;
2. Religious and cultural fears and hatreds are replaced with understanding and respect;
3. People everywhere come to know and care for their neighbours;
4. The richness of human and religious diversity is woven into the fabric of communal, civil, societal and global life;
5. The world's most powerful and influential institutions move beyond narrow self-interest to realize common good;
6. The Earth and all life are cherished, protected, healed and restored; and
7. All people commit to living out their highest values and aspirations.\(^\text{67}\)

Not only the initial aim of holding periodic Parliaments has been achieved by holding regular Parliaments since 1993, which we will discuss in the ensuing sections, but the council is engaged in inter-religious work through various modes and means of communication continuously. In addition to an official website there is an official social network namely PeaceNext where different people can express themselves through blogs

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and can form groups on various topics of their common concern; there is a News letter and regular Webinars are also held where religious leaders express their views on various issues and topics through videos and the same are available on the website for open viewership. In view of the scale of the spread of the activities of this council, it will naturally get more exhaustive attention and critical examination.

Parliament of the World's Religions 1993 Chicago

To celebrate the centenary of the first Parliament of 1893, an event more grandiose with more participation was held at Chicago from August 28–September 5, 1993 and this time, over six thousand delegates attended the Parliament along with the representatives of some 250 religious traditions worldwide. Many changes had occurred on the worldwide scenario – end of colonialism in the major parts of the world with its own consequences – division of the Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan on communal lines in 1947, conversion of the Biblical myth into reality by formation of Israel as a country for the Jews in the very heartland of the Arab world in 1948, formation of the United Nations in 1945, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 preceded by two world wars and use of atomic bombs evaporating thousands, maiming more than those killed, and leading to births of deformed children. Christianity saw some effort for ecumenism when in 1937, the church leaders of various denominations agreed to establish a World Council of Churches, but its official organization was deferred by the outbreak of the Second World War until August 1948, when representatives of 147 churches assembled in Amsterdam to constitute the World Council of Churches. The

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scientific development and commercial compulsions had necessitated as well as made possible the globalization of telecommunication and travel. R. Panikkar in his presentation at the 1993 Parliament said, “The Chicago Centenary of the World Parliament of Religions is not only a commemoration of the past, it is also a celebration of the present and a challenge for the future.”

He said that during the last hundred years, though great development was visible in the academic field, however, the world had not improved much externally (politically, economically, socially) and “[r]eligious institutions are still lagging behind the challenges of our time. Religious warfare and violence are rampant all over the world.”

Paul F. Knitter in his presentation said that the participants to the Parliament were more concerned in efforts to relate religion to what the official Parliament brochure termed as “the critical issues facing humankind” and which were enumerated as “Non-violence and Peace, the Earth, Social and Economic Justice, the Human Community, Science and Technology, Politics and Liberation.” He said that the Parliament was aimed to bring religions together so that “they might act together in addressing these global needs and crisis.” This, he said, could be done through inter-religious dialogue and as such dialogue and global responsibility were two dominant themes of the Parliament and more and more religious persons were becoming aware of not only of the “religious Other” but also of the “suffering Other” because of their “social or economic or ecological situation;” and a religious person today can not remain concerned with the

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71 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
religious other ignoring the suffering other as the multitude of the religious others and the suffering others “stare me in the face and ask me what my religious faith has to say to them.”

74 The Parliament was concerned with the shared responsibility as to address the suffering other, it was necessary to address the “fellow religious travellers in other traditions” and to carry on meaningful dialogue with the religious other, one must listen to the suffering other which implies that “dialogue and global responsibility, or religious pluralism and eco-human wellbeing, must go together.”

Eliot Miller pointed out that the Parliament of 1993 differed from the 1893 assembly in important ways:

1. **Inclusivity:** whereas, in 1893, many religious traditions such as Sikhism and native traditions were totally ignored and Islam was under-represented, the organisers of 1993 Parliament could boost that no religious group was excluded.

2. **Suitability:** whereas, the missionary motives and desire to dominate the show were main issues in 1893, the emerging global context made universal religious dialogue desirable and imperative in 1993.

3. **Testimony:** there was no concrete and expressed outcome of the 1893 Parliament, in 1993, according to *The San Diego Union Tribune*, parliament leaders hoped to “reach agreement on a universal declaration of human values, and perhaps even lay the groundwork for a future organization akin to a United Nations of Religions.”

74 Ibid., 105.
75 Ibid.
And while advancing towards this direction, on 4 September, 1993 “Declaration Toward a Global Ethic” was adopted\(^77\) which will be discussed subsequently. This time again, the star attraction of the Parliament was a leader from the East, the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal head of six million Tibetans, who during the closing festivities at Grant Park on the night of Saturday, September 4, drew a spirited response from the estimated 20,000 participants.\(^78\) In this Parliament, the Catholics were represented officially as it was not only that the local leader, Joseph Cardinal Bernadin, of Chicago, had warmly welcomed all on behalf of the world’s Catholics, but the official representative of the Vatican, Archbishop Francesco Gioia was also present who warmly invited all religions to initiate further dialogue with each other. His presentation was entitled “The Catholic Church’s Theology of the Religions.” He commented on how the Catholic Church “has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines of other faith groups which, although differing in many ways from [its] own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth that enlightens all.”\(^79\) Here the superiority of his tradition was presented in some what veiled manner. The other distinct religious leaders were Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda (the exiled head of Cambodian Buddhists), Swami Chidananda Saraswati (the Hindu leader of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh), Thich Nhat Hanh from Viet Nam, and Paulus Mar Gregorios (Metropolitan of Delhi and the North India Syrian Orthodox Church). There were Sikhs from America


\(^78\) Elliot Miller (1993), op. cit.

\(^79\) Ibid.
who performed regular *keertan* (singing of Gurbani) but no leader from recognised Sikh institutes from India was there.\(^80\)

Some of the main speakers were not religious leaders but were people like Dr. Gerald O. Barney who had directed the Global 2000 Report presented to the President Carter of the U.S. in 1980. This report was revised in 1993 as “Global 2000 Revisited: What Shall We Do?” To appreciate, the turn the things were taking at the Parliament, we will have to go through this document as it paved way for the Global Ethics Declaration which will be discussed in the next part. The report had identified some major Critical Issues which, in brief, said that the increase in population demanded more food and amenities but cultivable land was already being used to the optimum, any further increase could be very disastrous ecologically; the Green Revolutions initiated in 1950s, had though, increased crop yield, but the increased use of pesticides, fertilisers, ground water and fossil fuels therein had caused irreparable side-effects on ecology and health; the development in genetic engineering could not compensate as even if a species could be recreated by it, the scientists could not recreate its natural habitat, already lost; the increased food requirements need more energy which will make energy costly which in turn may render agriculture unviable forcing the farmer to change profession which will be very disastrous; due to excessive use of fuels which increase green house gases which along with speedily expanding hole in the ozone layer (which was discovered in 1985) will lead to global warming and exposure of all living beings to highly dangerous UV-B radiation; poverty and conflicts over depleting non-renewable natural resources had already caused much violence, hatred and despair and this fight will intensify to shatter “already frayed relationships between nations, between women and men, between adults

\(^{80}\) Ibid.
and children, and between peoples of differing cultures, races, and faiths. Some of the conflict will be motivated by greed, some by extreme poverty, and some by despair.”

He warned that “if we people of Earth are to avoid a massive disaster within the lifetime of our children, our most critical and urgent task is to bring forth a transformed vision of progress, one of sustainable and replicable development.” He wrote a letter to the world spiritual leaders for help in solving the above said problems and asking them to contemplate and bring forth their respective religious tradition’s teachings and opinions about:

- how to meet the legitimate needs of the growing human community without destroying the ability of Earth to support the community of all life?...
- the meaning of "progress" and how it is to be achieved?...
- a proper relationship with those who differ in race or gender (conditions one cannot change), or culture, politics, or faith?...
- the possibility of criticism, correction, reinterpretation, and even rejection of ancient traditional assumptions and "truth" in light of new understandings or revelations?

“What shall we do?” resonated throughout the Parliament but it did not remain a lament in despair as Barney concluded his presentation with a positive note: “Let us all listen to and allow ourselves to be guided by the creative energy that shaped and lighted the universe from the beginning. Let us all awaken to a new understanding of ourselves and the continuing revelation that takes place in and through Earth. Let us take back our

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82 Ibid., 14.
83 Ibid., 82-85.
lives from cynicism, optimism, addictions, and despair. Let us act with conviction and confidence.”

The other steersmen in the parliament were Robert Müller, a former United Nations assistant secretary-general and Hans Küng Roman Catholic theologian. Robert Müller in his plenary address on “Interfaith Harmony and Understanding,” offered the following advice: “Let all the religions work on what they have in common. And what divides them, put aside for the very end. If you want to have an agreement whether to believe in God, in several gods, or in no god you will never get an agreement because there’s no commonality. So leave these aside, and take the subjects which we have in common,” which he proceeded to describe as ethical concerns. Here he was suggesting to postpone a question – something which is raised in the inter-religious dialogue very frequently – how to make balance between openness to the religious other and the commitment to one’s religious identity and steadfastness to one’s tradition. We will come to it while discussing the Global Ethic below where the stand taken was pole-opposite to what Muller asserted above.

Dr. L. M. Singhvi, Jain scholar and Indian diplomat and parliamentarian, expressed the need for togetherness and unity among religions when he said:

The success of this centennial succession lies in the ability of humankind everywhere to mobilize the moral will of mankind to give a new sense of direction and purpose, a new momentum to the concept of the inherent unity and togetherness of all religions and spiritual traditions in the common cause of

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84 Ibid., 90.
85 Referred in Elliot Miller (1993), op. cit.
building in the third millennium of the Gregorian calendar an enduring, eternal
temple of the true togetherness of humankind. 86

The developments in the Parliament were moving towards a declaration which
was made one day before the conclusion of the Parliament: “Declaration Toward a
Global Ethics” a document prepared by Hans Küng. 87 As in the case of Barney’s “What
Shall We Do?” here also the background work was already there. Küng had published a
book in German in 1990 and its English translation appeared the very next year under the
title: “Global Responsibility: In search of a New World Ethic.” This book opens with
startling facts about armament race, deaths due to hunger, ecological blunders causing
daily extinction of one species, continuous human rights violations, increasing debt-
burden of the Third World, alarming trends of global warming. 88 The book is divided into
three main parts and the contemporary world situation along with the necessity of an
 ethic to guide decision making as well as role of religion in the making of a world ethic is
examined in the first part. 89 He accepts that “[r]eligion certainly cannot do everything”
but can play a fourfold task in ethic building by providing a depth dimension and
meaning to life “even in the face of suffering, injustice, guilt and meaninglessness;” by
giving a guarantee [of] supreme values, unconditional norms, the deepest motivations and
the highest ideals;” by creating “a sense of trust, faith, certainty, strength for the self,

86 Quoted in Ibid.
87 Richard H. Morgan. “Peace Among Religions: Hans Küng’s Analysis of Christian and Muslim
<forumonpublicpolicy.com> 15 May 2012. Küng had participated in the second Vatican
Council as a special advisor to the German cardinals. Due to subsequent controversies
about some of his writings, his licence to teach as a Catholic theologian at the
University of Tubingen was withdrawn in 1979, however, the same was subsequently
restored.
89 Ibid. 2-69.
security and hope;” and by providing “grounds for protest and resistance against unjust conditions.” He emphasized that instead of finding differences, the adherents of various religions should find “what they have in common ethically” and he refers to the 1970 “World Conference of Religions for Peace” in Kyoto, Japan when the adherents of all the participant religions had discovered that “the things which unite us are more important than the things which divide us.”

In the second part he explores the issues related to the establishment of a global ethic from the point of view of the religions themselves. He says that the question of truth has caused shedding of maximum blood and tears, in response to which three strategies have been evolved so far which he describes as:

(a) The fortress strategy which presupposes that only one’s own religion is true religion and all other religions are untrue. Religious ‘peace’ is guaranteed only through the one true (state/national) religion.

(b) The strategy of playing down differences asserts that the existential problem of ‘truth’ does not really exist since each religion is equally true in its own way, in its essence. Religious ‘peace’ will best be achieved by ignoring the differences and contradictions.

(c) The strategy of embrace proposes that only one religion is the true one, but all religions which have grown up in history have a part in the truth of this one religion. Religious ‘peace’ will best be achieved by the integration of the others.

He proposes a fourth strategy which he calls the “Ecumenical Strategy” in which each religion has to retrospect itself with regard to freedom, equality, brotherhood and

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90 Ibid. 54.
91 Ibid. 63.
92 Ibid. 78-80.
human dignity,\textsuperscript{93} because only through “such critical/self-critical basic attitude [they] can combine for themselves a commitment of faith and readiness for understanding, religious loyalty and intellectual honesty, plurality and identity, capacity for dialogue and steadfastness.”\textsuperscript{94} He emphasises to build capacity for dialogue as that determines capacity for peace but this he says is not possible “without research into theological foundations [of the religions].”\textsuperscript{95}

Finally, in the third part of his book, Küng goes on planning a future programme of study of the major religions in anticipation of the need for mutual respect and understanding because each religion is a living reality with “not only developments, historical sequences and dates but also structures, patterns of believing, thinking, feeling and acting.”\textsuperscript{96} He envisaged his plans for study the religions in all the above perspectives and to have inter-religious dialogue with all groups (religious or non religious), at all levels, everyday; and ends his book with “three basic statements”:

1. no human life together without a world ethic for the nations;
2. no peace among nations without peace among the religions;
3. no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions.\textsuperscript{97}

**Declaration Toward a Global Ethic:** Declaration Toward a Global Ethic was based on the findings and assumptions in the above said book by Hans Küng. This document was a call to action, of sustained collaboration of the religions to formulate a new course for the whole world covering issues relating to ecological degradation of the biosphere, depleting natural resources, sane use of technology, globalisation, pluralism, skewed development

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid. 86.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. 102.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid. 105.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid. 111.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. 138.
making the poor poorer, conflicts and war, need for peace, the nuclear threat and the role of science etc. and was signed by 216 of the 250 leaders in attendance. Künig clarified about this declaration in these words: “The global ethic is not meant to create a uniform religion or to water down a tradition’s specific moral teachings. That is why I never speak about unity of religion. I talk about peace among the religions.” Then as in the case of Gerald Barney’s “What shall we do?” the precarious condition of the world today on all fronts – environmental, economic, political, and social, was described and this declaration started with same pessimistic note.

This declaration was made by the people participating in the Parliament and was addressed to all people of the world and the commonly held convictions were expressed in the following words:

We all have a responsibility for a better global order.

Our involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the preservation of Earth is absolutely necessary.

Our different religious and cultural traditions must not prevent our common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and working for greater humaneness.

The principles expressed in this Global Ethic can be affirmed by all persons with ethical convictions, whether religiously grounded or not.

As religious and spiritual persons we base our lives on an Ultimate Reality, and draw spiritual power and hope therefrom, in trust, in prayer or meditation, in word or silence. We have a special responsibility for the welfare of all humanity and

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99 Quoted in Ibid.
care for the planet Earth. We do not consider ourselves better than other women and men, but we trust that the ancient wisdom of our religions can point the way for the future.\(^{100}\)

It was admitted that the problems being faced by the global community could not be solved by religions, however, religions could bring change in the inner orientation, mentality and the “hearts” to usher “spiritual renewal.”\(^{101}\) The foremost basic demand was for protection of human dignity and commitment to a culture with the following four “Irrevocable directives”:

1. Non-violence and Respect for Life in all forms – human, flora and fauna because all who “inhabit this planet with us deserve protection, preservation, and care.”\(^{102}\)

2. Solidarity and a Just Economic Order “with special care for the children, the aged, the poor, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely.”\(^{103}\)

3. Tolerance and a Life of Truthfulness for all people especially for those “in mass media, artists, writers, scientists, political leaders, and religious leaders because they have much more potential to cause damage by their lies.”\(^{104}\)

4. Equal Rights and Partnership between Men and Women as there should be no degradation and “[s]exuality should express and reinforce a loving relationship lived by equal partners.”\(^{105}\)

The above declaration was concluded with an appeal “to all the inhabitants of this planet” and with pledge “to work for such transformation in individual and collective

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 6.  
\(^{102}\) Ibid., 7-8.  
\(^{103}\) Ibid., 9-10.  
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 10-12.  
\(^{105}\) Ibid., 12-13.
consciousness, for the awakening of our spiritual powers through reflection, meditation, prayer, or positive thinking, for a conversion of the heart,” the commitment for unity and “willingness to take risks and a readiness to sacrifice” were declared imperative to bring fundamental changes in the world scenario and the document ended with this pledge: “we commit ourselves to a common global ethic, to better mutual understanding, as well as to socially beneficial, peace-fostering, and Earth-friendly ways of life.”

The 1993 Parliament paved way for a holistic approach to inter-religious dialogue, and the most basic need was identified to take human being as ends and not as means making human dignity first and foremost priority. Justice for all called for tolerance for the other. But some of the happenings in the Parliament portrayed a different picture which showed that it was not only dialogue which was in short supply but tolerance was also conspicuous by its absence. During a presentation on the “Voices of the Dispossessed,” various people had to recount the atrocities undergone by them but two such speakers from India were shouted down by the representatives of the Hinduism present there; the first was a Kashmiri and the second a Sikh from the Punjab who were recounting atrocities suffered by their people at the hands of government of India which they labelled as Hindu government, the shouting followers of Hinduism had to be escorted out of the lecture hall and in the second incident “the entire meeting was brought to a stop, and the speaker was not allowed to continue, which provoked a fresh outbreak of protests from Sikhs in the audience. The shaken assemblage — some weeping over the apparent inability of religious people to get along with each other, even at a gathering such as this — linked their arms and joined in a chorus of “We Shall Overcome”.”

106 Ibid., 14-15.
107 Elliot Miller (1993), op. cit.
Rifts in the ecumenical spirit became more visible day by day. The Orthodox Christian Host Committee withdrew out of the Parliament because they could not withstand the presence of “certain quasi-religious groups” with whom they shared “no common ground.”\textsuperscript{108} Buddhists being atheists expressed resentment on being put under “one religion under God,” some Jewish organizations cancelled their co-sponsorship of the Parliament showing their resentment when one Islamic leader was allowed to speak.\textsuperscript{109} Even the support to the Global Ethic declaration was split due to its excessive usage of Christian vocabulary and moreover, there was no authority with the assembly to pass such resolution; and an other very controversial resolution was condemnation of the then Pope’s decision to divide the territories of Americas among the colonising “European Catholic monarchs” which had “resulted in the genocide of 145 million indigenous people.”\textsuperscript{110}

**Parliament of the World's Religions 1999 Cape Town**

During the 1993 Parliament it was resolved not to let the spirit die and as a result, the next Parliament of the World Religions was called at Cape Town, South Africa from 1-8 December 1999 under the aegis of the Council for Parliament of the World's Religions and around 7000 people from around the world participated.\textsuperscript{111} The opening day being International AIDS day, the very first event engaged the world religious leaders in dialogue over the role of religious and spiritual communities in fighting the disease that has claimed the lives of so many people and then there was a march toward District Six from where the original inhabitants were forcibly made to leave to make

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
room for “all white area” by the then apartheid government. It was reported to be a very moving and pathetic when the religious and spiritual leaders from around the world spoke of other tragic examples of dispossession, and blessed the land and pledged that such incidents should never happen again.\textsuperscript{112} The beginning of the Parliament with these two issued was an attempt to emphasise the common predicament being faced by the world.

Whereas, the 1993 Parliament was mainly concerned with bringing peace, unity and harmony among the religions of the world as a first step towards world peace, this parliament had three major issues: identity, dialogue, and critical issues through which it explored issues of “religious, spiritual and cultural identity, approaches to interreligious dialogue, and the role of religion in response to critical issues facing the world today.”\textsuperscript{113} These were further split into simple themes of: Encountering Religion and Spirituality, Making Connections, Calling for Creative Engagement, Offering Gifts of Service, and Embracing South Africa.\textsuperscript{114} The whole event was well packed and spread over many venues with total over 860 programmes, lectures, performances, symposia, plenary sessions, and workshops; the participants were sometimes bewildered as to where to go and the most common suggestion received at the end of the Parliament was to decrease the number of programmes in the future Parliaments.\textsuperscript{115} Parliament presentations are said to have “offered a representative and remarkably inclusive cross-section of the concerns, creative thought, change agency, and programs of action that are shaping religious and spiritual communities... [and] offered countless opportunities for discovery and inquiry [not only others but] their own traditions at deeper levels ... [explore] the origins,
development, and perspectives of unfamiliar paths [through compare and contrast] of beliefs and practices from widely separated places and times.”

The most important part was symposia where presentation, discussions, workshops etc. on a single subject were held and it could be limited to a single day or extend over a number of days. The following symposia were held during this Parliament with period given against each:

1. South Africa Forum: Religion, Liberation, and Transformation - 7 days
2. America’s Shadow Struggle: Native American Religious Freedom - 5 days
3. Business Beyond 2000 - 2 days
4. Science and Religion: At Home in the Universe - 4 days
5. Interfaith in Action in a Global Context - 3 days
6. Sustainable Development: Ecology, Economy, and Community - 2 days
7. The Earth Charter - 1 day
8. Microcredit Summit - 1 day
9. World Movement for Non-Violence - 1 day

A Call to Our Guiding Institutions: In addition to cultural extravaganzas which included music, dance and drama from all over the world, there were evening plenary sessions every day with focused vision on a single subject and these were: Sharing Sacred Practice; Pursuing Universal Human Rights; Building Bridges of Understanding and Cooperation; Celebrating Life and its Possibilities; Working Together: Fostering Creative Engagement Between Guiding Institutions; Meeting Essential Needs; and Nurturing Transformative Community; and the final three days were unique as 450 persons were

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116 Ibid., 6-7.
117 Ibid., 7.
involved in “four-stage process dedicated to imagining and describing concrete action projects to be implemented around the world.” The most ambitious document that this Parliament attempted to give shape was “A Call to Our Guiding Institutions” which was declared to be just next step after Global Ethics and claimed to be neither prescriptive nor admonitory document as it was instead “an appeal for active, ongoing dialogue about the creation of a just, peaceful and sustainable future on behalf of the entire Earth community.” After the Chicago Parliament of 1993, not much had changed, communities were disintegrating, the unrelenting demand on Earth’s limited resources was increasing, there had been no decrease in the instances of injustice, the divide between rich and poor had widened, and above all spiritual indirection was still dominating the religious sphere. The hope was still there that to strive in the direction of solution to all this, the religious and spiritual traditions of the world have capacity to offer wisdom:

1. to move beyond our narrow self-interest, and to build community in the spirit of hospitality;
2. to recognize the interdependence of all life and the systems that support it, and to choose sustainable ways of living;
3. to see that the needs of others make a claim on our lives and to strive for justice and peace;
4. to remember our place in the human family and to find compassion that must be expressed in service; and

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118 Ibid., 8.
120 Ibid., 4.
121 Ibid., 8.
5. to deepen spiritual awareness as the wellspring of personal transformation and to embrace the whole human community.\textsuperscript{122}

Eight guiding institutions were identified and these were: 1. Religion & Spirituality, 2. Government, 3. Agriculture, Labour, Industry, & Commerce, 4. Education, 5. Arts & Communications Media, 6. Science & Medicine, 7. International Intergovernmental Institutions, and 8. the Organisations of Civil Society.\textsuperscript{123} In the preamble to this document, the identity of every person was asserted first as human being, then as religious and spiritual person and finally as the member of earth community with specific rights, responsibilities and commitments in each role. Effort had been made to include as many traditions as possible, as is evident from:

…we center our lives in an Ultimate Reality, which our traditions call by various names (the Absolute, Allah, Brahman, Dharmakaya, God, Great Spirit, the One, Waheguru), drawing hope and strength therefrom, in trust and vision, in word and silence, in service and solidarity;

…we seek to foster creative engagement among the guiding institutions that so profoundly influence life on Earth, in order that they may find imaginative new ways to address the critical issues that confront us all.\textsuperscript{124}

All individuals, communities, groups, and organisations engaged with each of the guiding institution were called to work and engage in creative engagement with other guiding institutions for a just peaceful and sustainable world. The call to Religion and Spirituality was for the vision for a world where “…the diverse religions, spiritual paths, and cultures are recognized and respected;…religious and spiritual communities exist in

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 9-10.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 12.
harmony; ...the pursuit of justice and peace is nurtured by religion and spirituality and by
dialogue between religious and spiritual communities; ...religious and spiritual teachings
on wisdom, love, and compassion are prized; ...service is seen as an essential, uplifting
religious or spiritual act; ...the Earth and all life are revered and cherished.”

The call to Government was for creation of a world where “…universal human
rights and responsibilities, grounded in fundamental ethical and moral principles, are
upheld; ...the structures of power are accountable to and serve the needs of all
generations; ...our leaders are worthy of public trust; ...peace within and among nations
is the rule and not the exception; ...the great decisions in human affairs are made with a
thoughtful care for the future of the planetary community.” Perhaps to give a more
practical shape, here governments were called “…to enter into close dialogue and counsel
with religious and spiritual communities concerning the peaceful resolution of conflicts
and the criteria (if any) for a “just war”” as well as to mitigate the very factors that lead
to violent conflict and war, which include economic exploitation, social or political
injustice; genocide along with persecution, oppression, and terrorism, is not only to be
denounced but countered and deterred.  

Agriculture, Labour, Industry, & Commerce were invited to create a world
with “…high moral standards and trustworthiness guide all interactions in the
marketplace and the workplace; ...[where] economic, social, and physical well-being is
not the exception but the normal human condition; ...agricultural policies, labor
relations, industrial development, and commercial exchange are just, harmonious, and
culturally enriching; ...agriculture, industry, business, and investment are conducted

125 Ibid., 13. (emphasis in the original).
126 Ibid., 16-17. (emphasis in the original).
with constant thoughtful regard for the vitality and fragility of the Earth and all life; ...the essential needs of all are met in a manner that can be sustained well into the future.”

**Education sector** was called for vision of a world where “…learning, as a singularly enlivening human pursuit, is available to all; ...intergenerational learning is cherished; ...ethical, moral, and spiritual questions are an integral part of academic and civil discourse; ...the world’s ethnic groups, cultures, and religious and spiritual communities are taught lifelong about each other in such a way that each becomes appreciative of the other; ...every human being has the opportunity to grow in personal and intellectual responsibility and committed service to the entire community of life; ...understanding and reverence for the vital yet fragile Earth provides the groundwork and incentive for sustainable living”.

Among others, learning about different cultures, religions, and spiritual practices to promote respect for other ways of life, non-violence and peacemaking are most cherished goals.

In **Arts & Communications Media** the vision was for creation of such stories and images which “enrich understanding, deepen responsibility, and nurture personal growth amid development”; the artistic expressions and networks of communication were to be used to link diverse people, regions and ways of life; media and communication plays a vital role not only in presenting the challenging issues faced by societies but help in discussing, analysing and finding solutions for the same, and help in bringing people closure by bringing the “sacred stories, symbols, and wisdom of the world’s religious and spiritual traditions” before the wider audience to diminish misunderstanding and

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127 Ibid., 19. (emphasis in the original).
128 Ibid., 22. (emphasis in the original).
prejudice and bring people closure. Journalism and media has not only to be critical of government and society but also socially and morally responsible, give voice to all people, cultures eliciting their concerns and problems, act a liaison between religious, inter-religious and intercultural groups to enhance solidarity through mutual understanding; one important function is to mitigate “caricatures and stereotypes” that devalue the human beings of particular religion, ethnicity or culture.

**Science & Medicine** have not only to engage in scientific pursuits of research but have to be socially responsible also. The vision of the Parliament for them was that they should explore the mysteries of life wisely and help in enrichment of all systems of knowing ensuring that medical care is not a privilege but a right; pursuit of knowledge brings people together and technology is used keeping in our responsibility to the rest of the Earth community.” A very important aspect is invitation for dialogue with “competent persons from the world’s religious and spiritual traditions” so that ethical and moral dimensions of research programme and its long term consequences are taken care of and also to ensure to continuous deliberations on over-all limitations “moral boundaries of science and medicine” through dialogue and exchange of knowledge with the guiding institutions.

The **International Intergovernmental Institutions** include a vast spectrum from United Nations and its organs to regional associations of nations, International Court of Justice, World Bank, World Trade Organisation to name a few. Here the basic principle is that “all peoples of the Earth have an equal voice and an equal claim to be

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129 Ibid., 25.
130 Ibid., 26-27.
131 Ibid., 28.
132 Ibid., 29.
133 Ibid., 32.
heard” with universal human rights of each person but not ignoring the personal moral responsibility towards care of others; here it was envisioned that everybody has right to fulfil personal need again checked by “personal ethical responsibility”, global perspective should be punctuated by “regional concerns for equality, security, prosperity, and sustainability”; the local concerns are not sacrificed for regional and global ones but are sustained and supplemented by these concerns; “any resort to arms” to resolve any conflict is clear indication of a “moral failure to engage in heartfelt dialogue.”

The Organizations of Civil Society consists of the network of voluntary, non-governmental associations whose role we discussed in the previous chapter. They were called to work with sense of accountability to enhance cooperation in a transparent and democratic way; provide exemplary moral leadership to society at large “through thoughtful, consistent service and advocacy”, rising above the narrow self-interest of a particular group; to work together with other guiding institutions and give voice to the poor, the illiterate, women, youth, indigenous people, and to the physically and mentally challenged; to dispel the assumption that dissent is equivalent to treason and encourage fearless expression without any compulsion; to listen to the critics and opponents to sort out internal controversies through participation and not through suppression so that dialogue becomes “possible and promising where it seems most unlikely, especially among groups that consider themselves long-standing rivals for power, prestige, or pride of place”

134 Ibid., 31.
135 Ibid., 34.
136 Ibid., 35-36.
This document was discussed at the Parliament and was dedicated to humanity consisting of the “broad diversity of the Earth’s religious, spiritual, cultural, ethnic, and racial communities” with a call to join in its cause.

**Parliament of the World's Religions 2004 Barcelona**

The 2004 Parliament of the World’s Religions held from July 7-13, in Spain at Barcelona’s Universal Forum of Cultures, was termed as one of the world’s largest and most inclusive inter-religious events as there were more than 9,000 participants from 74 countries. The following were the declared goals of this Parliament:

1. **Deepen our spirituality and experience personal transformation:** This involved efforts for deepening the individual’s relationship with the ultimate reality;

2. **Recognize the humanity of the other and broaden our sense of community:** This aimed at not only identifying, recognising and tolerating the Other, but accepting the humanness of each member of the whole humanity;

3. **Foster mutual understanding and respect:** The diverse religious traditions were not antagonistic but have much in common which has to be explored to know and respect the other.;

4. **Learn to live in harmony in the midst of diversity:** To relate to the diversity among traditions through what Rev. Lawrence Carter called the “common ground on the subterranean truths that run under those diverse traditions” and live in harmony;

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138 Ibid., 2-3.
139 Quoted in ibid., 2.
5. **Seek peace, justice and sustainability:** This called for extending the boundaries of interreligious dialogue to include other facets of life, the work which was started in the previous Parliaments through Global Ethics and Call to other Guiding Institutions to adopt holistic approach;

6. **Actively work for a better world:** Not only the human being, but the whole Earth, needs to be taken care of including ecology, flora and fauna and natural resources like water.

Though, the people from other spheres of human life had been participating in the previous Parliaments also, especially those of 1993 and 1999, however, in the 2004 Parliament a large number of “guiding institutions including government business, labor, education, media, science, intergovernmental organizations and organizations of civil society”\(^{140}\) also participated. The variety and diversity of a wide range of religious and spiritual traditions from the all corners of the earth was manifested in the variety of programmes, over 450 in number which included lectures, dialogues, workshops, symposia, performances and exhibits. A fine balance was made in terms of gender, region and format. This time the organisation of the whole function had been improvised and three tracks were chosen to be run each day: the intra-religious track, the inter-religious track, and the engagement track.\(^{141}\) We will take all three one by one. The **intra-religious** track was an effort to cull out what was within the whole spectrum of the religious and spiritual communities – their teachings, practices and dynamics – all that acted or could act as the resources and rationales from within these traditions for interreligious cooperation. Intra-religious programs included topics such as:

\(^{140}\) Ibid., 4. 
\(^{141}\) Ibid.
1. Struggle for the Soul of Islam.
2. Bahá’í Theological Basis for Interreligious Dialogue.
4. Teaching of Sincerity: A Shinto Pathway to Peace.
5. The Global Faces of Buddhism.
7. Native People and Environmental Justice.
9. The Art of War/ the Tao of Peace.
10. A Holistic Jain Approach to Peace with Reference to the Role of Women.
11. How to Facilitate Intra-religious Dialogue. ¹⁴²

The interreligious track focused on the “structured opportunities for dialogue with a wide range of panel discussions from a variety of religious and spiritual perspectives” and included the following among others:

1. Praying Together?
2. Do We Need Religion in Order to Have Stable Ethics?
3. Peace Initiatives to Bridge the Hindu-Muslim Divide.
5. Does the Media Promote Interreligious Dialogue?
8. Faith and Economics: What is the Bottom Line?

¹⁴² Ibid.


11. Middle East Stories: The Significance of the Holy Land in Our Sacred Texts.

12. Interfaith Encounters: Marriages, Child Rearing, Funerals and Other Practical Concerns.  

The engagement track was an effort to bring out the rational behind the interreligious dialogue and its outcome. It included an “exemplary selection of successful projects and initiatives” from around the world. Here the effort was to help in building “capacity for effective dialogue and collaboration” and it included the following topics:


6. How can Religious Communities be Engaged in Fair Trade.

7. Challenges Facing Sikh Identity.

8. Microcredit for Interreligious Community Development.

9. Religious Values and Social Activism.

10. Designing Interfaith Sacred Space.


143 Ibid., 4-5.
12. Peace Over the Korean Peninsula: The Reconciling Role of Faith Communities in the History of Confrontational and South Korea.\textsuperscript{144}

The various topics were covered in the \textit{Symposia} which included the following:

1. Crisis of the Holy: An Interreligious Think-Tank of the Elijah Interfaith Institute
2. Interfaith Education
3. Interfaith Peace building Skills
4. The New Awareness Summit
5. Religion and Conflict Resolution
6. A Dialogue of Civilizations: Islam and the West in Quest of a Just and Peaceful World
7. Religions and International Institutions
8. Religion and Human Rights: Towards a Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World’s Religions
9. Exploring the Face of AIDS
10. Science and Religion
11. Towards an Interreligious and Intercultural Theology of Liberation
12. The Future of Religion, the Media and Our Communities
13. Digital Storytelling and Appreciative Inquiry as Tools for Peace-Building
14. Abrahamic Reunion: Peacemaking in the Holy Land
15. Interreligious Organizing\textsuperscript{145}

In the din of all that was happening in Barcelona during those seven days, there was one happening which influenced and impressed the participants in its own peculiar

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 7.
way. The Sikh way of Sewa (service) without any discrimination of caste or creed, status, through its institution of Langar. The Parliament’s summary report mentions this in the following words:

2004 was the 400 year anniversary of the establishment of the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Sikh scriptures). In honor of this and other significant Sikh anniversaries, Guru Nanak Niskam Sewak Jatha—a prominent Sikh community based in the United Kingdom—established a major venue for celebration, education and hospitality. A memorable experience for all Parliament participants was the daily offering of langar—a blessed vegetarian meal. Three hundred Sikh volunteers travelled to Barcelona to provide over 6,000 meals each day. 

This was a unique way of holding dialogue through deeds became more effective than that done through word. After the August 2012 shootout by one Wade Michael Page in Wisconsin Gurudwara in the U.S. one can find many posts on internet remembering this gesture which was normal for any Sikh but something very special for other participants. 

Again, during August, 2012 a large number of people from North-East states of India had to flee Bangalore due to panic from Hate Messages spread through SMS and when the situation normalised people started returning. Along side this news there appeared a picture showing people being served food by some Sikhs at a railway station captioned: “Sikhs hold a ‘langar’ for the passengers of a Bengaluru-bound train at Guwahati railway station on Saturday.” Here also “Langar” appeared as a more

146 Ibid., 10.
effective mode of expression of communal harmony and conciliation than the mischievous SMS had been for spreading panic.

Much of the brainstorming done in the 2004 Parliament Assembly at the Benedictine Monastery at Montserrat near Barcelona where around 400 persons including “religious and spiritual leaders, eminent scholars, grassroots activists, influential persons from guiding institutions and young people from around the world” focused on four global crises of human suffering:

1. Supporting refugees world-wide
2. Overcoming religiously motivated violence
3. Eliminating international debt in poor countries
4. Increasing access to clean water

The people directly influenced by these crises also joined and the all together worked towards the creative engagement to come out with “constructive and effective” outcome and everybody was asked to commit to “simple and profound acts” in response to these crises so that the suffering was alleviated but maximum local involvement was also ensured. The method was very simple as the participants examined these issues from the perspective of the teachings, wisdom and practices of their own respective traditions in response to the following question:

What in their own tradition compels and inspires them to care about this issue?

How does the strategy for social change, embedded in the vision and teachings of one’s own tradition, shape their response?149

International Interreligious Encounter 2007 Monterrey, Mexico

This event was held during 21-24 September, 2007 in Monterrey, Mexico where the Universal Forum of Cultures decided to start its 80-day global event on intercultural dialogue with focus on spiritual and religious aspects. It collaborated with the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions (CPWR) to welcome around 7,600 people from Monterrey and around Mexico for the International Interreligious Encounter. The four days were spent in exploring the theme “With All Respect in Every Respect” and there were over 150 different lectures, dialogues, panel discussions, presentations, musical performances including recitation of Gurbani from the Sikh religion, group discussions and keynote plenaries.\textsuperscript{150}

The participants were asked to identify the values instilled in them by their respective religious tradition, and how these values informed their lives and decisions. Total sixty-five speakers from various countries such as India, Botswana, Sri Lanka and Columbia, representing a wide range of religions such as Indigenous, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian Catholic, Muslim, Sikh, African Indigenous, Christian Protestant, Jain, and Christian Orthodox offered insights into their religious traditions as they explored the principle of respect in light of their cultural and religious background. The local people interacted with these leaders, asked thought provoking questions and all had enriching experience. One important achievement was regarding the critical examination of fact of two most misunderstood communities in the world today – indigenous and Islam and it emerged that it is not that the fate of these religious communities is no way different from the world rather the factual position indicates the other way round and “the fate of these

communities may in some way mirror the fate of the world.”\textsuperscript{151} This episode has been described to show how the council is extending its area to encompass more areas and encourage indigenous people to participate.

**Parliament of the World’s Religions 2009 Melbourne**

The fifth Parliament of the World’s Religions was held at Melbourne, Australia in 2009 from December 3 to 9 in which there were more than 6500 participant representing over 200 religious and spiritual traditions from over 80 countries and the theme of the Parliament was: “Making a World of Difference: Hearing each Other Healing the Earth.”\textsuperscript{152} The change that has taken place or rather taking place was captured in the report published at the end of this Parliament which emphasised on the importance of the efforts made towards interreligious dialogue and understanding in the following words:

Ten years ago, interreligious dialogue was a footnote on the agenda of the United Nations. Today – in a post 9/11 world – it is a key instrument for exploring questions of conflict and peacemaking, poverty and development, climate change, sustainability, diversity and social cohesion. This change has come in response to the recognition that religious and spiritual traditions - Bahá’í, Buddhist, Christian, Jain, Jewish, Hindu, Indigenous, Muslim, New Religious Movements, Pagan, Secular Humanist, Sikh and Zoroastrian, among others – are influential and constructive forces in the grassroots realities they inhabit. They are directly engaged with pivotal issues at every level, from personal to global. The significance of various ways that religion can be understood, and harnessed, is

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 6.
relevant to all. Policymakers worldwide understand that pervasive and engagement of religious communities is in the best strategic interests of the people they serve, and with that understanding has come a fundamental change of approach.153

This Parliament was attended by various religious leaders like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Rev. Father Hans Küng, Islamic scholar Tariq Ramdan, Karen Armstrong, Sister Joan Chittiser along with former and present political figures like Jimmy Carter, Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan. Various Sikh organisations from India, the U.S., Europe and Australia participated in this Parliament. It was for the first time that the portal of the Parliament showed the photograph of Giani Gurbachan Singh, the Akal Takht Jathedar as one of the participants, however he did not attend and Roop Singh, Additional Secretary of the SGPC travelled from Amritsar, India to Melbourne, Australia to address the closing ceremony (on December 9) on behalf of the Jathedar and he shared the message of Giani Gurbachan Singh, and said “On the auspicious occasion of the Parliament of the World’s Religions that is being held in Melbourne, I have brought for the entire humanity a message of mutual respect and universal brotherhood from Sri Harmandar Sahib, Sri Amritsar, the holy place of worship for all and the centre for the betterment of humanity.”154 The wording of the message was in the spirit of genuine dialogue, and the true ethos of Sikh religion was represented through the highlighted portion. A highlight of the World Sacred Music Concert on December 6 was a Shabad

153 “Now is the Moment.” Ibid., 1.
(verse from Sikh scripture set to its original *raag* sung by Bhai Kultar Singh Jatha (of Delhi, India) before thousands gathered at the evening event.\(^{155}\)

There were “over 600 programmes, including a dazzling array of evening plenary events, provocative panel discussions, sacred and cultural performances... art exhibits and countless impassioned and impromptu conversations,” but in continuity to the previous Parliament the organisation of the whole function was on three lanes: the intra-religious, the interreligious, and the engagement,\(^{156}\) however, the major critical issues to be explored “through the many lenses of diverse religious perspectives” were as follows:

1. Healing the Earth with Care and Concern
2. Honouring Indigenous People & Self-Determination
3. Overcoming Poverty in an Unequal World
4. Securing Food and Water for All people
5. Building Peace in the Pursuit of Justice
6. Creating Social Cohesion
7. Sharing Wisdom in the Search for Inner Peace

And some additional subjects for symposia were:

8. HIV/AIDS
9. Islam in the Global Context
10. Women in Leadership
11. Conflict Resolution
12. Nuclear Non-Proliferation

\(^{155}\) Ibid.
The concern for global interconnectedness was visible in the selection and presentation of the subjects as mentioned above. We shall not go into details of what was said from the dais by various presenters but will cite some instances, some reactions from the participants to fathom the depth of what was transpiring in Melbourne during those seven days. Sean Rose, a Faith Acts Fellow from the U.K. said that the Parliament was not about religion but relationships. He reports on incident of his attending Peace Breakfast with Dalai Lama where the Tibetan spiritual leader paid special thanks to the Chinese among his audience as he said that it was essential for people on both sides of Tibetan issue not to vilify or demonise “the other.” Rose further says that that was a good reminder for all interfaith and intercultural in charged political context. He raises a very important question when he says that it is easy for dialogue to become a talking shop for those already in agreement, but what is essential is to talk to those we disagree with as “[d]ialogue without these groups, risks being shallow and unproductive.”

Rev. Dirk Ficca, Executive Director of the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, said that though the power of persuasion was at the heart of each Parliament, however, due to divergence in “matters of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices,” most of the panel discussions on intractable issues before the Parliament, were heated discussions with no unanimity in the end, but still he could find some positive trends in the form of “recognition of the moral urgency ... [t]he sense that, as never before, we’re facing monumental challenges that won’t be met unless we address them together. The obligation to protect the only Earth we have. The mandate to eliminate abject

\[157\] Ibid.
\[158\] Quoted in ibid., 4.
poverty. The need to resolve conflict peacefully. Of these things, at least, participants were mostly persuaded.”

As we find in the above official statement, the Melbourne Parliament was not trudging the beaten track, rather innovation was being encouraged which can be seen from the topics discussed there, one such topic was “How Can Interreligious Dialogue Address Global Food, Water & Climate Problems?” and another was “The Headscarf Debates: Religious Dress & Secular Fundamentalism” which was a topic for engagement in the Barcelona Parliament also. The first topic questioned the relevance of interreligious dialogue itself vis-à-vis its capacity to address the basic challenges being faced by the humanity and the second questioned the fundamentalist approach by some of the European governments in the name of secularism. There was another unique event wherein “The International Indigenous Assembly” was held under the auspices of two committees namely the International Indigenous Task Force Committee and the Aboriginal Planning Committee and in which Indigenous and Aboriginal representatives from around the world discussed the “issues of critical importance, such as shared loss of heritage, identity, language, natural resources, land and desecration of sacred sites.” This gathering drafted “An Indigenous People’s Statement to the World” which in addition to urging for the above said issues called for implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Before we conclude it is necessary also to mention the principles professed by the Council on which the “practical

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159 Ibid., 3.
160 Ibid., 8.
161 Ibid., 7.
162 Ibid.
framework” for common action by various communities is based. There are three such principles:

1. Harmony, not unity: as uniqueness of each religion is obscured by efforts for unity, whereas harmony in contrast “respects and is enriched by particularities of each tradition.”

2. Convergence, not consensus: Consensus in beliefs and practices is a far fetched goal but convergence helps in entering “appreciative and cooperative relationships” while retaining own convictions and commitments; and

3. Facilitation, not formality: the approach in Parliaments was facilitative as each religious or spiritual community has freedom in its choice of “conversation partners, activities and issues of its own.”

The importance of role of religion in solving political issues was confirmed when reports appeared in press (and also confirmed by the Council) that the Obama administration had secretly sent three officials to Melbourne, to ask religious leaders how to win hearts of Muslim world, the officials expressed their position in these words: “we are here to learn from you.” Their mandate was to ask three questions – what should the Obama Administration do, what should it not do, and have you any immediate or long-term suggestions and then they just listened and took notes. But what has happened, especially in the Muslim populated areas with the immense loss of human lives and property by the “humanitarian intervention” ever since 2009, speaks more loudly than any verbal rhetoric that the advices received in Melbourne remained in notebooks only.

163 Ibid., 11.
164 Ibid., 13, 12-13.
The World Congress of Faiths

In this section we shall have a brief discussion about another interreligious organisation namely the World Congress of Faiths (WCF). If the 1893 Parliament of the World’s [ten great] religion in Chicago was part of the 400th centenary celebrations of the arrival of Columbus to the “New World,” i.e., the beginning of colonialism, the WCF was conceived and founded in 1936 in London, the capital of the “multireligious empire” i.e., the epitome of colonialism, by Sir Francis Younghusband. The roots of this Congress are traced back to three sources – first, the Religions of Empire Conference held in London in 1924 which was a sort of exhibition and was also called a Congress of Religions; second, the “almost forgotten interfaith gathering” in Chicago in 1933 said to be the “second” Parliament of the Religions, though its given name was “the World Fellowship of Faiths.” It was initiated by Charles Weller and Das Gupta and Sir Francis Younghusband had also attended it; and the third source was the self motivation of Younghusband from his own mystical experience of Oneness with all beings during his sojourn in Tibet and his personal acquaintance with the members of several religions.

Younghusband was encouraged by the organisers of 1933 World Fellowship of Faiths to hold its second International Congress in London in 1936, meanwhile Das Gupta had also come to London. The influence of the 1933 gathering was evident even from the literature of the World Congress of Faiths of 1936 as the same had name of the

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166 Ibid., 9.
167 Ibid., 15.
169 Ibid.,
Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda who was the President of the World Fellowship of Faiths.\textsuperscript{170} There was not much enthusiasm among the religious leaders for the London Congress; however, Younghusband was able to persuade some eminent scholars like Yusuf Ali, translator of the Qur’an, the philosopher C E M Joad, the Buddhist scholar Dr D T Suzuki and the Hindu philosopher Dr. Radhakrishnan to participate.\textsuperscript{171}

The underlying subject of the London Congress was to be “World Fellowship through Religion,” however, three main ideas taken from the “Second” Chicago Parliament were:

1. Working for world fellowship.

2. Welcoming the necessary differences among fellows in any fellowship.

3. Uniting the inspiration of all faiths upon the solution of man’s present problems.\textsuperscript{172}

The hindrances in the “world fellowship” were: fear, suspicion, hatred and other forms of spiritual instability which led to wars between nations and conflict between individuals; nationalism in excess or defeat; racial antagonism and race domination; religious differences; class domination; poverty; and ignorance; similarly aids to the achievement of fellowship were: education; improved economic conditions; drama, music or other forms of art; saintly and heroic lives for emulation; prayer; concentrated meditation on the supremely perfect things in life; sharing spiritual experience; common pursuit of truth.\textsuperscript{173}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[170] Marcus Braybrooke (1996), op. cit. 16.
\item[171] Marcus Braybrooke (2011), op. cit.
\item[172] Marcus Braybrooke (1996), op. cit. 35.
\item[173] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
If we go by religious traditions which participated, we find Anglican Church was under represented as most of the clergy was against this congress, however, the Ahmadiya, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Confucian, Copts, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim both Sunni and Shiite and Sikh scholars gave their presentations. In addition of matters of spirituality and dogma, some contemporary issue like impending war were also discussed. Prof. J.L. Magnes, president of Hebrew University posed questions like – whether it was possible to make fellowship during the war and questioned the religious leaders’ readiness to endorsed war. The outbreak of the World War II affected this new organisation badly; still Younghusband continued working for it till his death in July, 1942. This organisation was based on individual membership on payment of certain fee which was £1 in the beginning. After Younghusband’s death Herbert Samuel, a liberal Jew became the Chairman of WCF. A major happening during this period was the American Three Faith declaration of October 1943 issued under signatures of 143 Catholic, Protestants and Jew leaders which is said to be precursor of 1993 Global Ethics discussed above and proclaimed as follows;

1. that the moral law must govern the world order;

2. that the rights of individuals must be assured;

3. that the rights of oppressed, weak or coloured [sic] people be protected;

4. that the rights of minorities must be secured;

5. that international institutions to maintain peace with justice must be organised;

6. that international economic co-operation must be developed;

174 Ibid., 39-46.
175 Ibid., 44.
176 Ibid., 55.
177 Ibid., 34.
7. that a just social order within each state must be achieved.\textsuperscript{178}

The WCF was asked to garner support of the world religious leaders and enlist it which was done through embassies.\textsuperscript{179} The subsequent period was of low activity mainly because of poor finances.\textsuperscript{180} And at one time it suffered from the identity crisis also – whether its goal, as Braybrook articulates, was, while remaining a small group of individuals “who sensed a spiritual unity that transcends religious differences,” to promote fellowship among people of different religions\textsuperscript{181} or to promote the academic study of comparative religion for its own sake\textsuperscript{182} or ecumenical or syncretistic (at the worst) as alleged by certain critics.\textsuperscript{183}

Efforts were continued to hold annual conferences on specific subject with participation of the scholars as well as religious leaders. But not much tangible has been achieved so far but certain important questions came forward from these conferences such as: whether dialogue has some use or it is “an exercise in futility”; “can a member of one faith really understand another tradition?”; “who speaks for religion?”; is there competition to takeover among different religions?; does not the denial of such takeover on part of followers make them suspect in the eyes of other members of their faith community?; are only the self critical willing and qualified to engage in dialogue?\textsuperscript{184} The series of Younghusband lectures being conducted since 1970s covers more diverse subject not only concerned with peace but general wellbeig and justice in the world.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 61-62.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 94.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 96.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 106.
There are no resolutions in the formal sense; however, the presentations by the individual scholars or religious personalities support the Congress prayer: “May the Spirit of Fellowship quicken within us and abound among all people.” But there are always some voices which show consonance rather than discord as the scholars and the religious leaders generally go back to their respective traditions to elicit message of peace – Sheshagiri rao, a Hindu scholar could go back to Rigveda to come out with: “Truth is one: sages call it by different names” or to Gandhi: “to ignore any of the religions meant to ignore God’s infinite richness and to impoverish human spirituality.” Zaki Badawi, a Muslim scholar could emphasise on Islam’s acceptance of diversity in Allah’s will as “If he so willed He would have made you unto one religious community.” Norman Solomon, a Rabi could go back to Noah to say, “The “covenant of Noah” offers a pattern for us to seek from others not necessarily conversion to Judaism, but rather faithfulness to the highest principles of justice and morality which we perceive as the essence of revealed religion.” Robert Runcie, the Archbishop of Canterbury emphasised the importance of the inter-religious dialogue when he said that it “can help us to recognize that other faiths than our own are [also] genuine mansions of Spirit with many rooms to be discovered, rather than solitary fortresses to be attacked.” M. Vajiragnana, a Buddhist scholar referring to edict of King Asoka said, “Let us be prepared to accept our crucial differences without trying to throw a threadbare rope between them. Rather let us build bridges of better understanding, tolerance for diverse views, plus encouragement

186 Quoted ibid., 77.
187 Quoted ibid., 78.
188 Quoted ibid.
189 Quoted ibid., 79.
for morality and ethical culture. This is where harmony is to be found.” The WCF draws its Executive members from the all major religious communities in Britain, it became a member of the Inter Faith Network (UK) and also works with other interreligious organizations in Britain and across the world and it has helped in establishing the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford and works closely with the London Interfaith Centre.

**Elijah Interfaith Institute**

Elijah Interfaith Institute (“Elijah” in short) is a comparatively new entrant on the inter-religious scene and is based in Israel. It was founded in 1996 by Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein when he received a phone call from some one enquiring: “Where can I take a course on the lives of the Christian saints?” The caller wanted access to the wisdom of another religion but there was no such institution in Israel at that time and to fill that vacuum the Elijah School for the Study of Wisdom in World Religions was established in Jerusalem with vision to “provide safe bridges to members of all faith traditions seeking wisdom and inspiration from other traditions without compromising their own religious integrity.” It was a consortium of thirteen institutions engaged in imparting training to the future seminaries and religious leaders of the three Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam and it was not only a centre of interreligious interaction but became a place where even the people from different denominations of Judaism could feel to come together. The beginning was with summer schools from 1997

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190 Quoted ibid.
to 2002, at Jerusalem and since 2001 through McGill University, in Montreal, but with passage of time, other traditions were also involved and as a result a community of scholars and students was created. The institute was named after the prophet Elijah from Hebrew Bible as he is recognized and venerated in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions “as an ever-present teacher, spiritual guide, harbinger of peace, and precursor of a better world to come.” These academic excursions provided opportunity for in depth study of various topics basic to religious life including Law, Mystical Prayer, Representation of God in Icons and Images, Leadership, Saints, Sacred Space, and many more; Elijah became a partner to the programme of a visit of world religious leaders to Jerusalem, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama and subsequently it organized an interreligious congregation on the occasion of Pope John Paul II’s millennial pilgrimage to Jerusalem; however, to realise the original vision fully, an interfaith academy was created and to rule out ownership by any one institute or denomination by any one religious tradition, the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders was created. 

We can say that Elijah Interfaith Institute is just an another inter-religious institution but it claims to be distinct as “Elijah” has brought almost all the major religions on a common platform and its forte is innovation in the field of interreligious education which it shares with many other institutions. It also aims at social change through “a top-down approach, starting with the heads of religions, continuing with scholars and reaching the community at large”; it involves a continuous and sustained work through its structure which is spread over many countries and involves many

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194 Ibid.
traditions; it endeavours to tackle the central issues of religion through its academic and scholastic resources; and at the centre of all this is its claim to be bridge-builder between:

1. theoretical study of religion and the quest for wisdom and spirituality;
2. theoretical study and action oriented programs, geared at creating social change and advancing the long term goals of peace-making;
3. not only between the Abrahamic religions but also between them and the religions of the East;
4. [through dialogue and collaboration] between world religious leadership, scholars and thinkers of diverse religious traditions and lay leadership;
5. thinkers and religious teachers in different parts of the world through its international programs and networks; and
6. religious thinkers, policy makers and educators, allowing the best of our religions to serve as an inspiration to society.  

The Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders has been convening a biennial meeting since 2003 at various places for discussions centred on a chosen topic. The first such meeting was held at Seville Spain from December 14 to 17, 2003 in which more than forty religious leaders from diverse traditions such as the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim from over fifteen countries met and the topic of discussion was: “Religion, Democratic Society and the Other: Hostility, Hospitality and the Hope of Human Flourishing” on which the religious leaders shared “the teachings, perspectives and wisdom” of their respective traditions. The second meeting was held from

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November 28 to December 2, 2005 at the Museum of World Religions, Wu-Lai, Taiwan and the topic of discussion was “the Crisis of the Holy” that is the crisis created by the “pervasive intrusion of globalizing political and economic developments ... sense of surely demanded in and promised by a culture dominated by science” pose a threat to the very foundations of religions but at “Elijah” it was taken as a mix of threats, challenges and opportunities for religions and it was concurred that this crisis had brought opportunities by providing contexts to correct the past wrongs, to reconsider the longstanding positions and to ensure “creative and spiritual” rejuvenating of religions by adopting inclusive positions.197

The third meeting was held at Amritsar from November 26 to 30, 2007 and the topic of discussion was “Sharing Wisdom: The Case of Love and Forgiveness” and scholarly and student community got participation as the local Guru Nanak Dev University was also involved. There were papers by one eminent scholar from each of the six major religions and each scholar was given certain questions to which the answers were to be given for example in Pal Ahluwalia’s paper on the Sikh perspective the questions were – 1. How does wisdom differ from intelligence? 2. What role does selfless service play in sharing wisdom? 3. The Sikh faith believes wisdom can only be acquired through the quelling of the ego. Does this differ from other faiths? 4. Is the Sikh belief in the universality of humanity a challenge for other faiths? 5. Why is love a requirement for gaining true wisdom? 6. Does the notion of forgiving yourself have an echo in your tradition?198 In the paper on the Christian perspective the very first question

was: How can our religions guide us beyond being self absorbed, and at the same time, foster a culture of peace? And the answer may be found in these lines in its concluding part that in order to prepare atmosphere where religious conflicts can be resolved: “[w]e need to resist the temptation to “help” wisdom gain a footing in people’s lives by manipulating or forcing others to embrace wisdom. Similarly, we need to resist the lure of pridefully perceiving ourselves as only givers of wisdom, rather than also receiver...” 199 The papers by other scholars had slightly different questions and interestingly, all the papers were posted on the “Elijah” website much before the meeting. At the end of this meeting a concluding statement was issued in which it was admitted that no readymade or simple solution for the world’s ills could be offered, however, various religions could offer their “finest teaching as resources to guide humanity to safe harbor”, and that the religions have become more interdependent therefore challenges could be faced in a “collaborative” way only through shared awareness of the other religions’ “life wisdom and spiritual wisdom” by practitioners of all religions though not at the cost of:

1. violation of the integrity of religious identity by any means;

2. dignity of the human beings and their religious freedom on account of any forms of limitation; and

3. respect of the integrity of religious teachings by “cheapening of teaching” or the loss of authenticity; however, at the same time feeling the limited sphere of influence of the deliberations, a strong need for taking them to the larger world was felt.200

The Steering Committee of “Elijah” made a declaration at Paris in May 2008 which consisted of seven points and expressed “the ethos and vision” of the Elijah leaders and these points included among others: the need of virtues of humility and principled spiritual life among the leaders; the need for growth and transformation of the participants while collectively owning responsibility to world at large; to recognise and respect differences while seeking common grounds of spiritual as well as the worldly understanding with humility, and the need to impart the shared experience and learning to the respective communities by engaging those who were not associated with religion, “especially the younger generation, in dialogue with the sense of complexity and wisdom as they are known to us through our own search.”

The fourth meeting of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders was held in Haifa and Galilee cities of Israel and the topic of discussion was: “The Future of Religious Leadership.” Swami Atmapriyananda welcoming the participants said that the religious leaders had responsibility to awaken the followers of their traditions in order to save them; but the moot question was: who will awaken and save the leaders as they have to prepare not only to face the challenges of modern times themselves but also lead others. It was felt that in this pursuit, the extensity and intensity, both are required – to “be vast as the skies and deep as ocean”, one has to learn to be “enthusiastic and intense” about one’s religion but not fanatic, to be tolerant and liberal about others’ religions but not at the cost of being superficial, to gain conceptual clarity but not loosing practical approach.

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and above all to combine “intense idealism and intense practicality.” Here the scholar enters the scene but the scholarship is not merely “academic voyeurism... more obsessed with footnotes and textual variants” but with matters of spirit. Elijah brings together scholars and religious leaders to develop innovative resources and fresh reflections and acknowledging the vital role being played by the scholars Rabbi Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein said that the scholars working with Elijah had formed a community of their own and work in such “deep friendship, close collaboration and [have] ability to think together as a group” which he said was worth emulating even by the religious leaders. But before this meeting Elijah had conducted an international survey (through internet) about the expectations of the laypersons about the religious leadership and the results were called “an alarming wakeup call” to the religious leaders.

The fifth Meeting of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders was held at Oxford (UK) from 18 to 22 March 2012 with the hospitality of the Brahma Kumaris with their leader Dadi Janki. The topic for deliberations this time was “Friendship Across Religions.” In his welcome address Alon Goshen-Gottstein said that after “nearly a decade long collaboration” the real problem was not about conversations, discussions and friendship but rather how to optimise the realisation of the actual potential of the group and “how to make it a visible and powerful voice in our communities and in the world at

There was again a fine blend of scholastic and religious personalities and their presentations. It is not surprising that in many a personality both the traits are there in abundance.

Different scholars in their respective papers raised such questions: What do we mean by ‘friendship’ and what makes friendship across religions different? What are the Risks and Challenges to friendship across religions? What is attitude of a particular tradition towards friendship and more specifically interreligious friendship? Alon Goshen-Gottstein in his paper described the various historical as well as scriptural obstructions in the way of interreligious friendships. The conditions of persecution, fear of forced conversion, constant threats of expulsion along with abuse made it nearly impossible for the Jews to cultivate such friendships. As such there is no taken for granted concept of interreligious friendship in Judaism, however, there are certain personalities like Rabbi Kook and Abraham Joshua Heschel who took such friendship instrumental in spiritual development. But here He pointed out the impossibility of cultivating friendship under conditions of persecution, forced conversion, repeated expulsion, abuse and fear that characterized many moments in Jewish life. The Sikh religion was no less persecuted during its formative period, however, a Sikh scholar found that the relationship with others on the basis of “amity, goodwill and friendship” had its roots in the religious and historical experiences of the Sikh Gurus; he said that observing the suppression of religion by the cultural boundaries of “caste, creed, race, and ritual” Guru Nanak proclaimed that irrespective of the religious affiliations all were

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equals and moreover, there were practical manifestations in the shape of institutions like *Sangat* (congregation), *Gurudwara* (religious centre) *Langar* (community kitchen) inculcate the values of equality, brotherhood, selfless service, and welfare towards others.  

In this meeting, some parallels to the Parliament of the World’s Religions were also visible as there were Intrareligious discussions side by side with the interreligious deliberations. On the closing day there was programme titled “Workshop on Faith and Economic Development: Translating Hope & Belief into Real Economic Actions.” The main agenda was regarding how business and faith based organisations could collaborate to address the issues afflicting the world today. On the final day of the meeting, participants were asked to reflect on what had been accomplished. They were asked to consider three questions:

1. What does Interreligious Friendship mean to you?
2. How do you practise Interreligious Friendship?
3. What messages and practices of Interreligious Friendship can you take back from this meeting to your community?  

Here not only was an effort to know what the participant thought about interreligious friendship— in theory and practice, both, but most of the emphasis was on how to sensitise the respective communities back home about the need for it and impart what had transpired in the meeting to them. When we see the list of the participant in the various meetings and the Elijah Board of Religious leaders we find that most of them are regular at other such forums. The problem of intrareligious dialogue has been pointed out

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209 Fifth Meeting of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders op.cit. 6-7.
time and again. The discussions and dialogue among the “frequent flier” leaders, have
their utility only when the masses back at home are also interacted with and the leaders
have to work like some inverter so that the religious tenets and need for dialogue with the
other are amalgamated to be imparted without any shock or repulsion.

**World Conference on Religion and Peace**

Efforts have always been made to make religions work for peace; however, there
were concerted efforts in nineteenth century in the U.S., Europe other parts of the world
as A.C.F. Beals estimated that by the end of that century there were four hundred and
twenty-five peace bodies in the world.\(^{211}\) But nothing more than the germination of the
idea of arbitration in international dispute was achieved and this idea ultimately got
matured into the International Court of Justice at the Hague after the First World War. In
February, 1914, an American industrialist, Andrew Carnegie, called meeting of some
Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish representatives to his house to discuss “how
religion can be made to function for peace.”\(^{212}\) He offered money for the combined
efforts of these religions for abolition of war and a new organisation namely, Church
Peace Union was born; but tragically the First World War started in August, 1914, the
day this forum was holding a joint meeting with the members of another such forum
World Alliance for International Friendship at Constance in Germany.\(^{213}\) The work was
continued after the War, and the network was enlarged even to include religions and
people from India, China, Burma, Japan and several other countries which were visited
by Dr. Henry Atkinson, the Secretary General of this forum, who even met Mahatma
Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore and set up committees in the above said countries of

\(^{211}\) Marcus Braybrooke (1992), op. cit. 122.
\(^{212}\) Ibid., 123.
\(^{213}\) Ibid.
Asia, but despite all these efforts and even intentions, no interreligious conference could be held and the rest of the work was done by the outbreak of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{214}

Japan is a country with people of many religions, and in 1931 a National Religious Conference for International Peace was held in which three hundred and forty five delegates participated and at the end a resolution was passed some part of which is reproduced as under:

If all religionists in the world co-operate and do their utmost, then our ideal of a war less world will not only exist in our religious faith but also it will become a matter of practical international affairs. Therefore, we appeal to public opinion at home and abroad, proclaiming our belief and decision:

1. The Conference declares that we religionists should assume responsibility for frequent occurrence of war.
2. The Conference declares that all religions can and ought to co-operate to bring about international peace, admitting the unique characteristics of each religion.
3. It is our conviction that moral law should govern international relations as well as personal relations. ...
7. The Conference hopes for the total removal of all racial and religious discrimination.
8. The Conference declares that religionists should take the leadership of the League of Nations and the Treaty of Renunciation of War.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 124-127.
\textsuperscript{215} Reproduced ibid., 127.
Braybrooke says that the outbreak of the Second World War disappointed these hopes, which though could not be extinguished completely; nevertheless, the churches in the fifties and early sixties of the last century remained unconcerned with the interreligious dialogue.\footnote{Ibid., 127-30.} The hopes were rekindled after mid sixties, and the beginning was made with a symposium at New Delhi in 1968 under the aegis of the Gandhi Peace Foundation. The delegates were welcomed by the President of India, Dr. Zakir Husain, who also happened to be a Vice-President of the World Congress of Faiths and the Sarvodya worker, Jaiparkash Narayan in his keynote address, lambasted the Indian religions saying, “They do not seem to be even concerned with the question of peace.”\footnote{Quoted ibid., 136.} However, the symposium could claim to have papers of very high quality to be read by eminent scholars who excavating the sources in their respective traditions, elicited firm dedication to peace in each of them with stringent checks for initiating wars; Dr. Gopal Singh elucidated about the Sikh reverence of truth from any quarter and quoted the following words of the third Guru Amardas, “The world is on fire. Save it, O God, save it in Thy mercy through whichever door it comes to Thee.”\footnote{Ibid.} There were speakers from almost all religions, except the Shintoists, Muslims from outside India, and religions from Africa and the Latin America.\footnote{Ibid., 137.} About two years thereafter, an assembly was held at Kyoto, Japan which has been being held at almost regular intervals since then, at different points in the world. We will discuss some of these assemblies in brief.

**Kyoto 1970:** It was a six day assembly held from October 16-21, 1970. There were well planned and successfully executed programmes separated in three commissions namely,
disarmament, development, and human rights. The reports of these commissions were debated on the last day and there was a heated discussion on Middle East. Thich Nhat Hanh titled his critique “Saved by Man.” But the most challenging had been the address by Professor Werblowsky when he said that merely citing “peace-texts” was not sufficient and warned the religionist against the dangers of getting intoxicated with their own verbiage . . . and overestimating what they were doing . . . The Kyoto Conference will be more than a wasteful exercise if instead of producing high-sounding declarations of principles, or beautiful phrases about peace, brotherhood, freedom and human rights, or making the participants “feel good”, it will succeed, in its group discussions and commissions, in addressing itself to the task of isolating problem areas, assessing their dynamics as well as the extent to which the dynamics of religion can impinge on them and interact with them, and sketching out concrete modes of action both inside the religious world and in the contact of the latter with other sectors of society . . . Ultimately, it is not to the world but to themselves that religionists have to send a message. ...

The challenge for religionists is not what to say, but how to be.²²⁰

Leuven, 1974: The conference opened on 28 August, 1974 in Belgium with one hundred and seventy three delegates and throughout it there were fewer speeches which in the words of Braybrooke “indicated that the conference was not directly for dialogue, but for looking together at the fundamental needs of humanity,” and the same was evident from what Thich Nhat Hanh said in his critique, “It is not for producing more papers that we have come to Louvain. Documents even the most perfect ones, are not sufficient to make peace. It is our way of life, arising from the spirit of love and understanding and co-

²²⁰ Quoted ibid., 142.
operation, that will make peace.” After that there have been a conference after a gap of five years and the subjects like ecology and AIDS have also become part of the agenda.

**Nairobi, 1984:** In this conference, there were voices against apartheid, as peace and justice were called twin sisters; here the declaration made was intended to reply the persistent criticism against interreligious dialogue that it demanded disloyalty to one’s religion as it was asserted: “We have shared in worship and meditation. We have discovered once again that our differences of cultures and religion, far from being a threat to one another, are a treasure.”

**Rome and Riva del Garde, 1994:** In the Sixth Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace around one thousand representatives of various religions of world gathered at Rome and Riva del Garde in Italy, and the theme was “Healing the World: Religions for Peace.” The picture of the agonised world demanded immediate relief and need for common ethics, building peace and security, equitable and sustainable development, care for child, and ecological harmony etc. was felt and made part of the declaration.

### Inter-religious Dialogue at Micro Level

Though, in all the macro level, forums discussed above, there have been simultaneous, micro-level dialogue. We also find that as there has been emphasis on the need for more co-operation among almost all religious traditions, similarly, there has been a gradual development towards holistic approach towards dialogue, the forums for interreligious dialogue are not confined to the bilateral or multilateral conflicts concerning the religious

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221 Quoted ibid., 146.
222 Quoted ibid., 153.
or theological matters or spirituality only, but to all aspects of human life and questions concerning ecology or global ethics have become central as they are related to the human predicament. We can not examine all the efforts made or being made world over, therefore, we take the Indian scenario in brief first followed by the dialogical efforts by the Roman Catholic Church, especially since the Vatican II.

**The Indian Endeavours and Contribution of the Academic Fraternity**

The Indian religious traditions are said to have innate dialogical propensity, however, the way the dialogical efforts are propagated in the European or American contexts is not the case here. The Department and the University under whose aegis, the present research is being done has been pioneer in the field of inter-religious dialogue. Only within two years of its inception the Guru Gobind Singh Department of Religious Studies, an interreligious symposium was organised in 1969 to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of Guru Nanak’s birth and there has been continuous work in this direction ever since. The department itself is a monument of interreligious studies and understanding. Even during the period when Punjab state and its people were undergoing great hardship after gory episodes of 1984 which not only left thousands dead and a large number of refugees first time in independent India but also deep wounds on the Sikh psyche, a seminar on ‘Religious Pluralism and Co-existence’ was held in which eminent scholars from all over India participated. In January 2002 a seminar on “Contribution of Interfaith Work to Social Harmony and World Peace” was held in collaboration of the Department of Encyclopaedia of Sikhism and the World Congress of

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224 Marcus Braybrooke (1992), op. cit. 241 & 266.
Faiths (England).\textsuperscript{226} The papers presented in both these Seminars were subsequently published in book form. In other efforts can be included the first Sikh-Christian Conference, held at Baring Union Christian College, Batala in 1963 when Christian Institute of Sikh Studies was established\textsuperscript{227} which has produced scholars on Sikhism like William Hewat McLeod, who taught there, and his ilk most of whom are working in the foreign universities, but whose credentials and intentions are always doubted being under the influence of missionary zeal of Christianity by the mainstream Sikh intellectuals.\textsuperscript{228}

In India, there have been unilateral, bilateral or multilateral initiatives for interreligious dialogue, the need of which is most intensely felt when there is antagonism and violent conflicts. There have been Sarva Dharma Sammelans where leaders of various religions gather together to discuss the matters of religious and mutual concerns. There is a temple namely Shridharamsthala at the banks of the Nethravathi River in the Belthangadi taluk of the Dakshina Kannada district in Karnataka where not only Sarva Dharma Sammelana have been conducted annually since 1933 but the temple is involved in various schemes for the upliftment of the poor and down trodden through programmes such as Shri Kshethra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project which has the following objectives:

1. To work towards the upliftment of the rural poor.

2. To organize the rural populace in mobilizing the rural infrastructure for a swift development.


\textsuperscript{227} Marcus Braybrooke (1992) op. cit. 241.

3. To utilize locally available natural and human resources for progress.

4. To introduce gainful sustainable means for development of agriculture.

5. To encourage farm sector and the non-farm sector activities.

6. To blend integrity, discipline and values in the process of development.

7. To facilitate participatory community and village development programmes.²²⁹

The other schemes initiated by this temple include micro credit scheme, rural insurance for the poor, sustainable farming, provision of quality seeds to the small farmers, water harvesting etc.,²³⁰ which are parallel to the concerns addressed at the macro level fora discussed above.

There are many permutations and combinations for pairing of religions for mutual dialogue depending on the demography and include the Sikhism- Hinduism, Hinduism-Buddhism, Hinduism-Christianity, Christianity-Islam, Hinduism-Islam, Islam-Zoroastrianism etc., further every religion mentioned above is an umbrella with various sects and even sub-sects in many cases. There can hardly be any religion, the followers of which have not been engaged in dialogue with those of any other religion. The dialogue has been in various forms ranging from meetings between the religious leaders to grass-root level of local communities. It could be in the form of intense discussion on the matters of faith, spirituality, prayers, ethical concerns, doctrines and beliefs etc. or it could be through interaction by involvement in common project involving “peaceful


²³⁰ Ibid.
exchange and productive collaboration” and affecting the participating religious communities.\textsuperscript{231}

**The Roman Catholic Church in Dialogue with other Religions**

Now we come to the dialogical efforts being made by the Roman Catholic Church, the separate entry for which is imperative as the proselytizing nature of this religion, always creates doubts about the true intentions behind such efforts. As we have seen above, the 1893 Parliament was a veiled endeavour to emphasise salvation through Christ only. But with the changing times, the approach of the Roman Catholic Church to other religions has also undergone some change. The Roman Catholic Church takes Vatican Council II as the starting point of its active involvement in the dialogical process. It is claimed that from here onwards people of all other religions were treated on the basis of equality and professed universal fraternity and adopting “as so far they are good, the abilities, the resources, and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she [the Church] purifies, strengthens, and elevates them.”\textsuperscript{232} However, this statement itself clearly shows that the without Church people are impure, weak and lowly, because eschatological character of Missionary activity is negated otherwise and missionary activity is “God’s plan;”\textsuperscript{233} it is only through “the sincere and patient dialogue”\textsuperscript{234} that the it can be known that all the nations have been endowed with riches by God and the riches

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 56.
should be illuminated with “the light of the Gospel.” It was prescribed that the Catholic Church has to prepare evangelical workers to dialogue with other religions as Christ had clearly said: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead;” and in compliance to the last command to his apostles to go and “make disciples of all nations;” the Church takes this mission as charity and gives it the name of dialogue “which has in these days come into common usage” because “[e]ven before converting the world, nay, in order to convert it, we must meet the world and talk to it.” Vatican II was a turning point for the Roman Catholic Church as inclination for dialogue emerged, though with certain reservations, as we have seen above. Another initiative has been joint prayer where the leaders of various religions assemble for prayer at the Church’s initiative, for example, the year 1986 being the International Year for Peace, Pope John Paul II invited leaders of major religions to join him for one day prayer and fast for peace on October 27 that year at Assisi, the city of Saint Francis who had opposed not only any hostility towards Muslims but crusades also. The people prayed in their own respective traditional ways, as there was no common prayer; in the end olive branches were distributed among them and people from different religions exchanged handshakes or embraces also. In his address to the representatives of various religions, the pope said, “The very fact that we have come to Assisi from various quarters of the world is in itself a sign of this common path which humanity is called to tread. Either we

235 Ibid., 57.
236 Ibid., 61.
237 Pope Paul VI. “Solemn Magisterium of Paul VI.” Francesco Gioia, ed. (2006), op. cit. 70, 67-93.
238 Ibid., 72.
239 Ibid.
240 Ibid., 73.
learn to walk together in peace and harmony, or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others.”

We discuss this tension between proselytising as religious duty and need to engage in genuine dialogue further, in the next section below.

**Conversion and Interreligious Dialogue**

Most of the Indian religions being not missionary in outlook are comparatively more tolerant, whereas, the dominant sections in Islam and Christianity especially the Roman Catholic denomination find salvation only in themselves and make it imperative to convert others so as to save them. The Roman Catholic Church advocates freedom of religion. Vatican II defined it as such conditions that “within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in private or in public, alone or in association with others ... the right to religious freedom is based in the very dignity of human person as known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself.”

On one hand the Church is against any kind of intolerance against the minorities and favours “the inalienable right to follow one’s conscience and to profess and practise one’s own faith,” at the same time mission to convert is a duty, though distinction between Evangelisation and proselytising is made. All this make the intentions of the Catholic Church about interreligious dialogue doubtful for many people. For example, on a Hindu right website, the following lines from a long essay by Sandhya Jain are worth mentioning: “Our fight is to ensure the scuttling of further Christian-Hindu / Jain / Sikh dialogue that serves no native interest and can only end in

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Hindu disempowerment. Christians like Reverend Clooney are driven by the mission to convert the world, especially a resisting pagan civilisation like India’s. Hindus have no worldwide spiritual-cum-political mission of conquest and must remain focused on resisting missionary activity. Hindus have no reason to engage in inter-faith dialogue, which is a futile and destructive activity from their point of view.\textsuperscript{248} Francis Arinze, who has already been referred to, and was the President of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue from 1984 to 2002, claimed that they respected identity of every participant in dialogue and there was no hidden agenda of converting others but at the same time said, “My respect for non-Christian convictions, does not necessarily exclude my desire that others become Christians too.”\textsuperscript{249} The reaction of Sandhya Jain smacks of forced syncretism from which the “native” minority religions in India always try to get rid of.\textsuperscript{250}

**From Saying to Being: Hurdles in Interreligious Dialogue**

Most of what we find in much of the literature on interreligious dialogue is normative in nature and as Panikkar says – does not engage in dialogue but is about dialogue. The ethics and other prescribed parameters for such dialogue are the ideals, adherence to which is “ought to be”, but the real life situations involve the living human beings who carry their religious baggage consisting of knowledge, devotion and stubbornness which may not be equal in proportions and degree with all the participants. The conditions for dialogue we have already seen may consist of as many decalogues as many scholars are there and these conditions again vary due to different social, political,


\textsuperscript{249} Cardinal Francis Arinze (2004), op. cit. 99.

\textsuperscript{250} See endnote 156 in Chapter 3
economic, psychological or cultural setting where the dialogue is to take place as well as the backgrounds of the parties involved which further depend on the meaning and purpose of interreligious dialogue.\textsuperscript{251} But the moot question is about the chances of achieving the conditions or preconditions in a dialogical setup which lead us to the hurdles or pitfalls. As discussed above, at Kyoto 1970, Professor Werblowsky had rightly concluded that mere citing peace texts was not enough; the real problem was “not what to say but how to be.” This shows the difficulties in translating dialogue into praxis. The tension between the ideal and the actual was acute, as each effort to realise the ideal conditions for interreligious dialogue was intrinsically having certain hurdles too, to make this point more clear, let us critically examine the prescriptions of the Decalogue as given by Swidler (which appears to be the most representative of the dialogue decalogues, as we discussed in the previous chapter).

The first commandment indicates that the ultimate purpose of dialogue is action which it does by imparting learning to bring change and growth; in this way dialogue equips the conflicting parties by clarifying their perception and understanding of reality.\textsuperscript{252} The problem of imparting the learning of dialogue to communities back home is what the leaders at Elijah stressed again and again. Here Swidler takes dialogue as an instrument which prepares the way for the praxis which he leaves upto the parties “to act accordingly”\textsuperscript{253} because the concerns of life constitute the agenda for dialogue. But change and growth are the targets which find hurdle in the religious tradition itself, as Cornille says, “... with its innate resistance to change. While religious traditions may overtly support and even encourage dialogue, they are generally less than receptive to the

\textsuperscript{251} Catherine Cornille (2008), op. cit. 3.
\textsuperscript{252} Leonard Swidler (2008), op. cit. 20.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid.
new insights arising from dialogue, especially when these might challenge established way of thinking or acting.” In this way we find that convincing the masses or majority of the adherents for recognising the “other” as an equal partner which is first step towards interreligious dialogue, is difficult task, the solution to it is suggested in the second commandment.

The second commandment tells that dialogue is both intra and inter-community pursuit because the whole community should “learn and change, moving toward an ever more perceptive insight into reality.” This means intra-religious dialogue is necessary not only for internal harmony of a religious tradition but a prerequisite for inter-religious dialogue also. Swidler et al. say that if there is no intrareligious dialogue and that too between the persons engaged in the interreligious dialogue and their communities at home then “the individual dialogue partners will grow in knowledge and consequently be changed, thus slowly moving away from their unchanging community and becoming a third reality, a tertium quid – hardly the intended integrative goal of dialogue.” And some times, issues are more complex with not only religious but strong political dimensions, in absence of intra-community dialogue, the consequences become tragic. The following two instances (discussed in the previous chapter also) will illustrate this further. In 1985, to bring peace to the trouble-torn, Punjab Sant Harchand Singh Longowal signed an accord with Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India but it did not go well with all Sikhs and he was gunned down shortly thereafter (most probably) by a disgruntled Sikh youth. Similarly, Yitzhak Rabin the Israeli Prime Minister signed the Oslo Accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization Chief, Yasser Arafat in 1993

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254 Catherine Cornille (2008), op. cit. 82.
255 Leonard Swidler (2008), op. cit. 20.
256 Quoted in Catherine Cornille (2008), op. cit. 81.
which generated very high hopes of peace and end of one of the most long drawn and deadly conflict, but the Israeli hard liners declared it null and void and Rabin was also gunned down in 1995 by a youth, who claimed to have acted under the Jewish law.  

The third commandment demands not only complete honesty and sincerity in the parties but each should also have assumption about the honesty and sincerity of the other. Now, this being third party prescription, needs to be examined because, if honesty and sincerity dominate the real life relationships there will be least conflict, but when there is conflict the prisoners’ dilemma better explains such real situation. The hurdle in bringing the conflicting parties on common platform for dialogue is not easy. There may be mere lip service in this regard, concealing the real emotions, as we will see, initial coming together even if it is to make the other hear, can be a step in positive direction. The fourth commandment prohibits comparing one’s ideals with the other’s practice but in real life situations this is what actually happens most of the times, and creates hurdle for dialogue. Arriving at such situation can be goal or outcome but not a precondition because, it is only when we hear the other and come closer that this commandment may start taking place gradually.

The fifth commandment says that it is the participants from respective religions who will define themselves – what is meant to be a Hindu or a Muslim or a Sikh, or a Jew etc. and the definition should be formulated with such sincerity that not only the opponents but it should be critically verifiable by the observers also who are not involved, and Swidler emphasises that the authentic definition emerges from intra-religious

\[257\text{ See end notes 114 and 116 in Chapter 4.} \\
258\text{ see end note 84 in Chapter 4.} \]
Here the question of commitment “to a particular religious tradition” comes to fore, because during interreligious dialogue the truth of one’s own tradition may be questioned which may shake the weakling. Arinze says that persons with very vague ideas about their religions and faith should not engage in interreligious dialogue concerning deep questions of dogma and should limit themselves to “the dialogue of daily life, in which people of different religions meet in every day situations.” The steadfastness in commitment to one’s own religious tradition and openness to other religions – tension between these two positions is always there, Cornille says that firm commitment to one’s tradition may lead to intolerance and tolerance may be a result of loose relationship with one’s own commitment as a result “interreligious dialogue has often come to be conducted by individuals who find themselves on the margins of their own respective tradition, whether by necessity or by choice” because the mainstream self understanding is characterised by self-sufficiency and superiority. A person who has no say in his/her community will engage in dialogue only in his/her personal capacity therefore, to engage in genuine interreligious dialogue, commitment of the participants to their respective religious traditions is must because “it provides for individuals engaged in the dialogue a solid point of departure and a critical place of return.” Commitment requires knowledge which may come not only knowing the tenets but question the same with in the religious community itself, therefore, only the leaders who are actively involved within their communities can be authentic interreligious dialogists, but all such leaders may not be willing to participate which may leave such dialogue to peripheral

259 Leonard Swidler (2008), op. cit. 21.
260 Ibid., 4.
261 Cardinal Francis Arinze (2004), op. cit. 94-95.
262 Catherine Cornille (2008), op. cit. 59.
263 Ibid., 60.
leaders only. But differentiating between the authentic and peripheral leaders is another problematic area.

The sixth commandment demands from the participant to shun any “hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are” but can it be possible in real life where the conflicting parties are steadfastly stuck to their respective stands. If the parties do this then the conflict is almost over because sticking to one stand generates protracted conflicts. This condition can be fulfilled only where dialogue is frequent; it can be possible for people in Diasporas but not at back home, where the real life conflict situations are more frequent and more complex. But the continuity in dialogue at some platform regularly possible only if there is some permanent forum. Lack of initiative in this direction at local levels is another hurdle in the way of interreligious dialogue; moreover, the real conflict generates and escalates due to the positions of the staunch hardliners and not those of the soft ones.

The seventh commandment says that dialogue “can take place only between equals” and no party should take the other’s religion as inferior to one’s own. This condition termed as “indispensable” to respecting the difference by Jean-Claude Basset whereas Paul Knitter says that feeling of superiority of one’s own tradition will stifle not only the dialogue but also understanding of, or receptivity to what is different in the other. But in real situation, many times, one party has hegemonic dominance and tries to get its way accepted. Thus the whole process leads to a situation where, as D. Jones says, “a stronger party slowly and deliberately crushes the aspirations of the weaker

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264 Leonard Swidler (2008), op. cit. 21.
265 Ibid.
266 Catherine Cornille (2008), op. cit, 85.
party ... [and the process may] reproduce structures of inequality and domination.”

It may also happen that the whole process is dominated by the religious tradition that sets the agenda or which “is most at home in the language and culture in which the dialogue takes place.” The religious claims of different religions are “at times directly opposed or mutually exclusive, but the very claim to ultimacy of one religion necessarily precludes the truth claims of others.” Reality can not be altered and dialogue has to be a meeting place for strong convictions as by abandoning the claim of uniqueness may leave such commonality where there dialogue is no more required.

The eighth commandment by Swidler makes mutual trust imperative for dialogue and Swidler suggests that the issues with some common grounds be first taken instead of difficult one so that trust starts building, this implies that in the beginning trust is lacking and it is likely to be built during the dialogical process that means dialogue is an effort towards trust building and trust can not be a pre-condition. Mere words can not earn trust and without trust words are meaningless or monologues. We have seen above, that in 2009 Melbourne Parliament the U.S. sent its emissaries to know from the religious leaders of the world how it can win the hearts of the Muslims, whereas, in practice it continued bombing the civilian areas of Pak-Afghanistan border and its efforts in forced democratization of selected areas in the “Muslim World” sparing its friends, forgetting the old dictum that deed speak loudly than words. Former American President George W. Bush, speaking to Israeli Knesset (assembly) in May 2008 had said that those who advocated dialogue with countries like Iran are like people who favoured engaging Adolf

268 Catherine Cornille (2008), op. cit. 86.
269 Ibid., 87.
270 Leonard Swidler (2008), op. cit. 22.
Hitler. This somewhat confirmed the al Qaeda’s allegation expressed through its
spokesman, Sulayman abu Ghayth that America knew the language of force only and “does
not know the language of dialogue or language of peaceful coexistence! America is kept
at bay by blood alone.” On the other hand the serving of Langar by Sikhs at Barcelona
and at various other occasions not only earned recognition for their selfless service but
also respect for their religious identity.

The ninth commandment demands healthy self criticism by the participant not
only of themselves but of their tradition also, this implies there is no place for claim of
inerrancy in one’s tradition in dialogue. Cornille calls it humility and puts it as the first
condition of dialogue and is in the form of “certain degree of admission of the finite and
limited ways in which the ultimate truth has been grasped and expressed in one’s own
religious teachings, practices, and/or institutional forms.” But in religious sphere it is
very hard to take this concept to the grass root level. We have already examined the case
of the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II. In such circumstances where primary
motive is conversion of other people to one’s own religion self criticism may scuttle all
the plans. Pope John Paul II is credited with promoting the interreligious dialogue, but his
successor, though carried forward the work started in Vatican II and matured by him,
however, in a letter to Marcello Pera, an Italian writer who in his book had emphasised
that Europe should stay true to its Christian roots, Pope Benedict XVI wrote – “an inter-
religious dialogue in the strict sense of the word is not possible ... a true dialogue is not

as an Instrument of Peace. Ed. Donald W. Musser & D. Dixon Sutherland. Cleveland: The Pilgrim
273 Ibid., 4.
possible without putting one’s faith in parenthesis.” Here the opposition to the interreligious dialogue by a Hindu hardliner, Sandhya Jain and the head of the church appear to be mitigating apparent difference between them.

The tenth commandment entails the experience of the partner’s religion “from within.” This is possible only through empathy. Raimundo Panikkar says that when one religion claims to have absolute truth, intolerance and contempt for others is the outcome, whereas, “[t]ruth is many-faceted and even if you assume that God speaks an exclusive language, everything depends upon your understanding of it so that you may never really know whether your interpretation is the only one.” But some times, the presence of the others is accepted but with inferior status. The Vatican II council professed that the duty of (Catholic) Church is “to foster and elevate all that is true, all that is good, and all that is beautiful in the human community..., consolidates peace among men for the glory of God.” But simultaneously, the missionary zeal was to be maintained as foremost duty as Pope Paul VI said, “[n]either our respect for these religions nor high esteem in which we hold them nor the complexity of the question involved should deter the Church from proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ to these non-Christians...[because] by virtue of our religion a true and living relationship with God is established which other religions cannot achieve even though they seem, as it were, to have their arms raised up towards heaven.” When we are sure of the inferiority of the others’ religions we will not find it worthy to experience the partner’s religion from inside or our endeavour will be only to find faults.

Achievements and Hope?

As we have seen above, missionary activity is indispensable to the Catholic Church and the ultimate purpose is conversion of the people from other religions. This zeal to convert makes the target religions’ adherents to stall such process and even reconvert the people already “lost” through conversion. This situation is faced even during the deadly violent conflicts between people of different religious communities. This leads to what Ramsbotham et al. call radical disagreement which leads to linguistic intractability – “when other communicative possibilities fall away... an unproductive dead end ... [called] a terminus to genuine dialogue – a dialogue of the deaf.” But Ramsbotham et al. are not pessimistic and say that in intractability, still there is a dialogue though it is “agnostic dialogue – that is to say, the dialogue of struggle, dialogue between enemies – nothing less than the war of words itself... [and it] needs to be acknowledged, explored, understood – and managed.” The acknowledgement of the radical disagreement, though a rare event, is the first step followed by exploration where role of third party is important. In the “clash of discourse – radical disagreement”, each conflicting party strives to “impose it own language ... to provide a lens through which the conflict is viewed.” They further say that what lies at the heart of verbal intractability is “the breakdown of distinctions between facts, values and emotions.” It goes beyond mere description and explanation as may be case for a third party. For example the Palestine Strategic Group in 2008 said “But what is centrally at issue is not a mere Palestinian narrative, but a series of incontrovertible facts - facts of expulsion,

278 Oliver Ramsbotham Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall. (2011), op. cit, 375.
279 Ibid., 377(emphasis in original).
280 Ibid.
281 Ibid., 378.
282 Ibid.
exclusion, dominance and occupation bitterly lived out by Palestinians day by day over the past 60 years and still being endured at the present time. This is not a narrative. It is a lived reality.”

Interconnection is the feeling of commonality or relatedness among religions because “any notion of radical singularity or the fundamental incompatibility would render dialogue superfluous” and the common ground may be found either in past (origin) or future (goals). But truth claims by religions for distinctiveness create hurdles. Here some factors like common external challenge may tone down the antagonism for example the ban on the Judaic and Islamic ways of killing animals for religious and well as secular purposes in countries of Europe and ban on circumcision in Cologne state of Germany, which were mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, brought Jews and Muslims (at least on these issues) together who otherwise are dreaded foes mainly due to Arab-Israel conflict. In addition to common external threat, some other such areas can be threat of secularisation, need for peace, human suffering, or natural catastrophes etc. The domains of mystical or spiritual experience can be other commonalties along with their “common reference to a transcendent ultimate reality.” Interreligious dialogue will be meaningless if there are no differences among religions and there will be no dialogue if no common grounds are found. Actually, knowledge either of one’s own religion or that of the other can never be full and final because every religion involves living human beings and ever changing external factors and environment affecting them, therefore dialogue becomes a continuous process in enriching that knowledge.

284 Catherine Cornille. (2008), op. cit, 95.
285 Ibid., 96-97.
As we discussed above, in the Parliaments of the World’s Religions in 1993 and 1999 some documents were presented and dedicated to the world at large with the hope to supplement the dialogue among religions to extend its scope and more common grounds are there for mutual cooperation so that creation of a just, peaceful and sustainable future for the whole humanity becomes possible. Some scholars advise to avoid discernment during interreligious dialogue. But can such judgements be totally avoided? The very choice of the dialogue partner starts from judgement and as Cornille says such judgements have been operative “consciously or unconsciously, implicitly or explicitly throughout the encounter of the religions.”286 It is not the “external or neutral criteria” imposed on religions but “very realization” of the respective religion that determines such criteria. 287 Each religion has “certain essential or irreducible” characteristics which may be embedded in particular religious framework and therefore the interreligious dialogue can not avoid the complex procedure in which steadfastness to one’s own tradition and openness to the other, being critical in self-awareness and involving seriously with the theory and practice of the other, some bold judgements and receptiveness for correction all go hand in hand. Continuity in dialogue may ensure deeper understanding not only the other but own tradition also.

While presenting Global Ethics, Hans Küng had admitted that religion cannot do everything and the same can be said about the interreligious dialogue. It can not solve problem as final decision taking power in most of the matters, lies with the political power, however, it changes the hearts and spirits of the people. Many outcomes of dialogue died before being translated into praxis, as were their proponents were silenced

287 Ibid., x-xi.
through bullets, but these instances, whether it was Punjab in 1985 or Israel-Philistine in 1995, confirmed that the fact that dialogue could be harbinger of change was accepted even by the hardliners as they acted in violent ways to mitigate any would be impact of the dialogical process in both the cases. The strategy of taking holistic approach to interreligious dialogue has brought in certainty of consensus into the interreligious dialogue and it is no more a monologue of irreconcilable dogmas, rather it is the voice of the people facing the common predicament with hope for change which is inevitable. We have reached a juncture where at least, it has been realised that without catering to the material wellbeing of the people, their spiritual wellbeing is difficult if not impossible to achieve.