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From the editors: Due to the termination by URANTIA Foundation of our license to use the words "URANTIA" and "URANTIAN" and the Concentric Circles symbol in our organizational activities and literature, we are publishing *The JOURNAL* in this modified design. Inasmuch as this is a name change only and our publishing activities are ongoing, we will continue on with the Volume, Number, and Seasonal designations as before to insure that your subscription is uninterrupted. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause you. Thank you.

Beyond Nondispute

In the eighteenth century, the British philosopher Hume felt that dialogues between reasonable people would become more fruitful if one could cut through the obstacles of different terminological systems. "Provided we agree about the thing," he said, "it is needless to dispute about the terms." Such nondispute is no longer a sufficient basis, if it ever was, for a positive dialogue capable of eliminating the deep-seated misunderstandings that draw many of us into disputes and violence. Especially in the case of interreligious discourse, which is turning out to be a crucial item on the modern world's agenda, we must make serious efforts to identify "the thing," so that we not only cease "to dispute about the terms" but even begin to evolve a generally accepted mode of speaking and thinking of what "we agree about."

Without holding a brief for my own religion, I do find it necessary to point out that the moves made by the inclusive Hinduism of Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo towards a rational interreligious conversation have gone unanswered from the side of organized Christianity, despite the verbal commitment of many Christians to the principles of open and rational discussion. This nonresponse may be due to the fact, pointed out in *The URANTIA Book*, that "The institutionalized church...in the past" tended to "glorify...the established political and economic orders" (*1087) of the Euro-American nations and thus compromised the integrity of what might in principle have become a world religion. Christianity has instead become a nonuniversal, Euro-American religion, and is so ossified that we outsiders cannot reasonably expect official Christian thinking to change in the near future. It is a welcome development that *The URANTIA Book*, which offers this diagnosis of what is wrong—and prescribes that the church "...must speedily cease such action if it is to survive," adding that "...its only proper attitude consists in the teaching of nonviolence, the doctrine of peaceful evolution in the place of violent revolution—peace on earth and good will among all men" (*1087-8) —has become the major revelatory document for many Christians, who, in accepting this revelation's authority and trying to base their lives on it, are now open to dialogues of a new sort with non-Christians.

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The present response to *The URANTIA Book* tries to set forth some premises for one direction such a dialogue can take. This direction involves articulate contemporary Hindu thought (as exemplified, say, in Ramchandra Gandhi's *I am thou*, which I reviewed in 1985 [*The URANTIAN Journal of URANTIA Brotherhood*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1-3]) and certain elements from *The URANTIA Book*. Our starting point is the common challenge we all face: "The religious challenge of this age is to those farseeing and forward-looking men and women of spiritual insight who will dare to construct a new and appealing philosophy of living out of the enlarged and exquisitely integrated modern concepts of cosmic truth, universe beauty, and divine goodness." (*43) In formu-

lating a human answer to this divine challenge, civilizations will have to converge on common answers, through uncoerced dialogue.

A suitable way to begin is to notice existing points of contact. Any Hindu, or any spiritual person who has followed Henry David Thoreau or Ralph Waldo Emerson's path to the Bhagavadgita and the Upanishads will find it easy to accept this characterization of God in *The URANTIA Book*: "He is the within and the without of all things and beings, moving and quiescent. Unrecognizable in his mystery, though distant, yet is he near." (*1287-8) Also resonant with the Hindu religious style are passages like "Man goes forth searching for a friend while that very friend lives within his own heart" (*45) and "What a mistake to dream of God far off in the skies when the spirit of the Universal Father lives within your own mind!" (*64) This willingness to find and contact God in one's own silent depths leads to a rediscovery of one's true self.

And yet the Hindu style, like that of *The URANTIA Book*, also reaches out to span great distances and to bring different styles together in a new synthesis. This is in keeping with what emerges as "the evolutionary purpose which is unfolding in Orvonton," the superuniverse we inhabit: "...in this supercreation we feel that the six unique purposes of cosmic evolution as manifested in the six associated supercreations are here being interassociated into a meaning-of-the-whole; and it is for this reason that we have sometimes conjectured that the evolved and finished personalization of God the Supreme will in the remote future and from Uversa rule the perfected seven superuniverses in all the experiential majesty of his then attained almighty sovereign power." (*182) The depth of the Self seeks also an external validity, then, in the breadth of the Cosmos.

The theme of crossing stylistic distances and looking for shareable meanings reminds us of our initial reference to Hume. Our task must in part involve some systematic thinking about the different styles and languages that people use and about what these modes of discourse share. Considerations of language appear to be a prerequisite for serious steps towards peace.

Here it becomes relevant that I speak not just as a Hindu but also as a linguist—a practitioner of the science of linguistics. My view is that linguistics will make as crucial a contribution, if only as a model for the kind of theories and methods required, to a durable and well-founded peace conducive to human growth in light and life as physics did to the materialistic achievements of the generations that single-mindedly pursued military and economic victories and various social orders based on "might makes right." Today's cultural-scientific inquiries which we hope will lead us to peace are going to have to be as rigorous as yesterday's natural-scientific investigations (which led to such effective techniques of war that we are now trying to discover how to make violence obsolete).

Some elementary points will help us to understand the terms of the problem.

Linguistics defines a language (say, Swahili or Japanese or Dutch) as a mapping between concrete sound and abstract meaning. We know that there are many languages and that they are very different from each other. What elements do they share? Well, babies vocalize identically all over the world, and children develop roughly the same sounds in roughly the same order. Thus, languages start out with a stock of *life-initial concrete sounds*—sounds available at the outset of a person's life—which has a clearly universal common core, though it fans out with respect to some features which distinguish languages from each other. At the other end of the spectrum, old people everywhere tend to take similar synoptic views of life and of its continuity across time and space. Their attitudes reflect the same meaningful relatedness to the great shared fact of

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Inasmuch as there is no official interpretation of the teachings of *The URANTIA Book*, the views expressed herein are based wholly upon each author's understanding and personal religious experience.

human mortality. There is thus, at the end of language, a stock of *life-final abstract meanings*. Much of this, again, is universal.

Most of the variation among languages, then, lies in the diversity of mappings between shared initial sounds and shared final meanings. Different speech communities have very different words, and make different sentences and texts out of them. Languages come in different shapes, forms, sizes, textures. Their geographies are different. But all communities can work together towards a common history, towards a shared future defined by joint efforts.

We know that there are many languages and that they are very different from each other. What elements do they share?

Realizing this, today's linguistics has been moving towards what one could call an "intermapping." The task is to find a systematic alignment that puts together the sound-to-meaning mappings we call languages. Contemporary linguistics, as it strives to discover the outlines of this "intermapping," educates us towards a multidimensional vision which will be able to see the many types of human language as strands in a rich fabric of universally significant concepts.

Now, the cognitive effort of Hindu thought has always been towards a very similar goal. Hindu philosophy has been trying, throughout its history, to envisage and articulate an "interreligion." The basic assumption, as in the case of language, is that people start with the same initial concrete innocence of being born in a particular mortal family and grow, through experience, towards the same final abstract second-innocence of being reborn into the universal immortal family. Again, there is a great variety of mappings between similar childish beginnings and similar mature conclusions, a variety of what we call religions. And the theoretical task is again that of formulating an intermapping, with the corresponding experiential goal of educating people towards a vision that can see all these apparently different systems as mutually supportive aspects of a harmonious and meaningful total form.

The basis of the Hindu interreligious effort is the old Vedic insight "Ekam sad; viprāh bahudhā vadanti" ("Being is one; wise men present Being in various ways"). This insight leads to the conclusion that God accepts all forms of worship. See chapters 14 and 17 of the Bhagavadgita for the further conclusion that some forms of worship are, nevertheless, more mixed-up than others, which means some worshipers have a particularly long way to go (not a frightening prospect in the Hindu universe which gives you lots of time, in fact all eternity, to complete your spiritual education). The method of religious progress in Hinduism, through the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita, the medieval reformations, and the twentieth century rebirth of systematic Hindu thought, has been to reinterpret the old and restricted forms into new and more comprehensive meanings. The legitimacy of this maneuver rests on the assumption that God accepts all forms of worship.

Clearly, readers of *The URANTIA Book* will find all these moves familiar. Everybody's worship is welcome and reaches the Universal Father. "The ability of mortal parents to procreate is not predicated on their educational...status. ...A [normal] human mind..., in union with a divine Adjuster, is all that is required...to initiate...the production of his immortal soul." (*70) "However Urantia mortals may differ in their intellectual, social, economic, and even moral opportunities and endowments, forget not that their spiritual endowment is uniform and unique." (*63) "We further believe that such registry of the homage of an Adjuster-indwelt creature is facilitated by the Father's spirit presence. There exists a tremendous amount of evidence to substantiate such a belief, and I know that all orders of Father fragments are empowered to register the bona fide adoration of their subjects acceptable in the presence of the Universal Father." (*65)

The method of religious progress in Hinduism...has been to reinterpret the old and restricted forms into new and more comprehensive meanings.

It follows that religious progress must take the form of continual re-revelations of the true presence of God on the basis of the cultural evolution on the ground: "...revelation always keep[s] in touch with evolution. Always must the religion of revelation be limited by man's capacity of receptivity." (*1007) "The spirit of religion is eternal, but the form of its expression must be restated every time the dictionary of human language is revised." (*1087)

Divine agencies see no point in intervening more forcefully than that, because even they cannot make you

want what you do not, at your stage of development, really want (cf. p. 1739). In fact, you must insist that your common sense should retain the initiative, for Jesus himself has said: "Nathaniel, never forget, the Father does not limit the revelation of truth to any one generation or to any one people. ... But the greatest error of the teaching about the Scriptures is the doctrine of their being sealed books of mystery and wisdom which only the wise minds of the nation dare to interpret. ... A false fear of sacredness has prevented religion from being safeguarded by common sense." (*1768)

Thus, it seems reasonable to expect the Hindu proposals and those emanating from *The URANTIA Book* to converge, with some help from others interested, on an unhurried but serious method of interreligious dialogue. Linguists today recognize that you cannot do the linguistics of any one language all by itself. Some day, it will become an equally obvious truism that you cannot study, cultivate, or adequately formulate any religion in isolation.

After such a long preamble, can I really introduce a theme that will contribute substantively, rather than only formally, to the dialogue we are talking about? Well, let me try.

The URANTIA Book, as I read it, stresses the family model of access to the nature of God and to the interpenetration of his divinity with your humanity. You learn about father-mother-child relations by playing the relevant roles in that personality-crucible which we call the family, and then you can imagine how the divine personalities ('parents') indwell you as you grow.

Needless to say, the Hindu tradition also attaches central importance to the image of God as our parent, as in the Vedic *pitā no 'si* "You are our Father" prayer which Rabindranath Tagore inherited from his father (who founded the Adi Brahmo Samaj, a major Upanishadic movement). But Tagore, who has always been, for me, the most inspiring and powerful Hindu voice, enables us to draw energy from *other* personality-crucibles as well.

Going beyond, but not ignoring, the family circle as such a crucible, Tagore lights up the daily work-sleep cycle as an alternative personality-crucible. Consider, for instance, his song "Āmi jālbo nā mor bātāyone prodipkhāni, / Āmi shunbo boshe āndhār-bharā gobhir bāni" ("I won't light the lamp by my window, / I'll sit and listen to the deeper message of the night").

Surely those who choose to follow up on *The URANTIA Book's* emphasis on truth as distinct from fact—"Even now you should learn to water the garden of your heart as well as to seek for the dry sands of knowledge" (*554-5)—will respond to this song by Rabindranath Tagore, and perhaps also to its scriptural basis in the Mandukya Upanishad, which presents the waking / dreaming / deep sleep / trance cycle as a crucial matrix for the perpetual constitution and reconstitution of what we understand as our "self."

"I won't light the lamp by my window, I'll sit and listen to the deeper message of the night."

Our day is the child of our night, a child that thinks, "I am a whiz kid and I get all my math problems done on time." Only if we learn to listen to the night can we, in our waking and sleeping, spiritually participate in what *The URANTIA Book* suggests is the struggle of modern science to free itself from mathematical slavery, materialistic mechanism and philosophical abstraction.

I venture to suggest that this is a fit theme for meditation in the context of a mutually enriching dialogue between religious articulations.

—Dr. Probal Dasgupta,
Hyderabad, India

"True religion is an insight into reality, the faith-child of the moral consciousness, and not a mere intellectual assent to any body of dogmatic doctrines. True religion consists in the experience that 'the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.'" (*1107:4)