TRAVERSALS (I): HINDU-CHRISTIAN

1. The Bangalore Conference
In India the great questions of civilization were not the exclusive preserve of intellectuals, theologians, and institutionally appointed religious leaders. These matters concerned everybody and continue to concern everybody, even if in the past the upper castes had unfair advantages in discursive matters. Despite the grave atrocities related to caste, communalism, and patriarchy, India has partially succeeded in re-inventing itself along pluralistic lines, even if this process has been accompanied by social turmoil. Present day conflicts related to religion, gender, caste, and social class go to show that the process of cultural renewal is alive and kicking. Hopefully the direction of renewal will tilt decisively towards perspectives that are pluralistic and compassionate.

Perhaps nowhere else in the world has the quest for meaning taken on so many different hues and forms and produced such a variety of perspectives on the goals of human existence. So much so that it is not difficult to argue that the original connotation of the word “Hindu” would include all the perspectives and experiences of those who lived on the eastern side of the river Indus. These perspectives and experiences spanned the length and breadth of what is today known as India, and well beyond its present boundaries. They were modified, extended and re-invented over the centuries. This is not unlike open-source software that allows users to study, modify, and improve the software, and to redistribute it in existing or new forms. Thus Hinduism, in its best sense, may also be considered open source. In open-source Hinduism the fluidity of the interactive process allows the old and the new to constantly inform each other, mingling and creating new hybrids. Even if the communalists are doing their best to destroy much that is good in our heritage, open-source Hinduism remains a formidable foil.

When one lives in India the good and the ugly sides of religions are quickly apparent. On the one hand there are millions of ordinary people who go about their lives inspired by the humane values of their