

ISKCON AND INTERFAITH



ISKCON IN RELATION TO PEOPLE OF FAITH IN GOD

‘ISKCON in Relation to People of Faith in God’ has been developed by the ISKCON Interfaith Commission and authorised by ISKCON’s GBC (Governing Body Commission) Executive Committee.

The process of development included broad consultation with many respected Vaiṣṇavas, eminent scholars, and religious representatives.

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ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) belongs to the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* (denomination or tradition), a monotheistic tradition within Vedic or Hindu culture. Hindu culture is vast, and the term ‘Hinduism’ encompasses numerous theologies, philosophies, religious traditions, and spiritual cultures. Thus, dialogue with Hindu traditions is often difficult. There are no official representatives of Hinduism, as the term Hinduism does not imply a single spiritual tradition. This statement therefore is representative of Hindu culture and religion as it is manifest in ISKCON, a Vedāntic, monotheistic, Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Part One

ISKCON's Interfaith Statement

ISKCON in Relation to People of Faith in God

In ISKCON we consider love of a Supreme personal God to be the highest form of religious expression, and we recognise and respect this expression in other theistic traditions. We respect the spiritual worth of paths of genuine self-realisation and search for the Absolute Truth in which the concept of a personal Deity is not explicit. Other communities and organisations advocating humanitarian, ethical, and moral standards are also valued as being beneficial to society.

ISKCON views dialogue between its members and people of other faiths as an opportunity to listen to others, to develop mutual understanding and mutual trust, and to share our commitment and faith with others, while respecting their commitment to their own faith.



ISKCON recognises that no one religion holds a monopoly on the truth, the revelation of God or our relationship with God.

ISKCON's members are encouraged to be respectful to people of faith from other traditions and to see the need for people of different faiths to work together for the benefit of society as a whole and for the glorification of God.

ISKCON affirms the responsibility of each individual to develop his or her relationship with the Supreme Lord.



Part Two

ISKCON's Mission

WHEN A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda (1896–1977), the founder and *ācārya* (spiritual preceptor) of ISKCON, first registered ISKCON as a legal entity in New York in 1966, he stated that his primary aim for the movement was: ‘To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all peoples in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.’¹

In pursuance of this aim, members of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement,

- value charity, non-violence, spiritual education, moral thought and action, devotion, and service to God.
- value qualities such as humility, tolerance, compassion, cleanliness, self-control, simplicity, steadiness, knowledge, honesty, and personal integrity.
- value and respect the right to life of all other living beings, be they human, animal, aquatic, or plant life. We value the environment and our natural resources as being God’s property, which we have a responsibility to respect and protect.
- recognise the institution of the family to be an essential element in maintaining social stability and promoting spiritual values.

We consider respect for parents, teachers, and government representatives important for maintaining a stable society. Respect and protection for elders, women, children, weak and dependent living beings, and persons dedicated to the welfare of others and to the service of God are also important elements in the development of a healthy and secure society.

We also understand that many spiritual, altruistic, and humanely inspired people share these principles and values. We respect and value any tradition or culture trying to promote, maintain, and develop such qualities and behaviour.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's mission is further elaborated in his *pranāma-mantra*², in which it is stated that he came to deliver the Western countries from godlessness. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (1838–1914), a revered Vaiṣṇava ācārya, explained that the enemy is not other religions, but atheism. (*Śrī-Caitanya-Śikṣāmṛtam*, p. 9) The mission of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the *sampradāya* (religious tradition) he represented, promotes morality and practices that support the development of individual and social spirituality, but it raises a challenge to atheistic and materialistic principles and values.

ISKCON: Dialogue and mission

Some may feel that, for a missionary movement, a dialogue with those who do not share the same spiritual or religious views is a contradiction in purpose. Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava teachings, however, support dialogue and co-operation with other religious traditions as a means of mutual enrichment, through discovery of the unique and universal virtues of the various theistic and ethical traditions.

**Can a missionary
movement engage in
dialogue with other
religions?**

Historically, members of our tradition have been in contact with members of other faith communities since at least the time of Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486–1534), although systematic attempts at dialogue with other faiths began only with Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura.

Relationships of trust can develop from sincere dialogue among people of faith. These relationships can inspire religious people from all traditions to work together to establish theistic conclusions that will lead to a God-conscious ethos in our modern world. Thus, dialogue and respectful working relationships with other faith communities are consistent with ISKCON's mission and are important for social harmony.

In the 1950s, Śrīla Prabhupāda confirmed this approach in an appeal to the leaders of the world's religions: 'Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and the members of the other sects that have convincing faith in the authority of God must not sit idly now and silently watch the rapid growth of a Godless civilisation. There is the supreme will of God, and no nation or society can live in peace and prosperity without acceptance of this vital truth.' (*Light of the Bhāgavata*, p. 20)

While cherishing our own spiritual culture and working to proclaim our faith in Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, we consider it inappropriate and unbecoming for a Vaiṣṇava to try and attract people to the worship of the Supreme by denigrating, misrepresenting, or humiliating members of other faith communities. In relation to this, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has written: 'But it is not proper to constantly propagate the controversial superiority of the teachers of one's own country over those of another country although one may, nay one should, cherish such a belief in order to acquire steadiness in a faith of your own. But no good can be affected to the world by such quarrels.' (*Sri-Caitanya-Siksamritam*, p. 7) Śrīla Prabhupāda also discusses this in his purports in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*: 'Another important point mentioned in this connection is *anindayā* [avoiding blasphemy] — we should not criticise others' methods of religion ... A devotee, instead of criticising such systems, will encourage the followers to stick to their principles.' (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.22.24, purport)

Vaiṣṇavas strive to inspire and enhance the relationship between the Lord and His devotees. In this attempt, devotees meet others whose approach to the Supreme is different in their flavour of worship, variegatedness in service, and expression of love. During a public lecture in 1969, Śrīla Prabhupāda stated, 'Everyone should follow the particular traditions or *sampradāya*, the regulative principles of your own religion. This is required as much as there are many different political parties, although everyone is meant to serve one country'. Thus, diversity is accepted, but not to the exclusion of unity. Religions do not have to become homogeneous or merge together, but they can develop respectful and practical relationships with one another. With this understanding, ISKCON does not have a mission to proselytise members of other faiths.

ISKCON does see it as its mission to accept with open arms any sincere soul who declares a need for spiritual shelter and guidance. There is a definite missionary spirit in Vaiṣṇavism and Hinduism, but its practice is not governed by an exclusivist conversion model. From a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava perspective, we work not at ‘conversion’ but spiritual development. Therefore ‘conversion’ is an individual experience, a personal spiritual journey, a journey that transcends religious institution and sectarian affiliation. Conversion models that depend on exclusivist demands of affiliation may often do so without considering the Lord’s supremacy and independence.

Through dialogue, people of different faiths and traditions can work together to share principles and areas of concern. Together they can then engage their individual spirituality in addressing such problems as war, violence, moral decline, crime, intoxication, poverty and hunger, social instability, and environmental degradation.

Through dialogue, theistic people and those engaged in the pursuit of the Absolute Truth can encourage one another to be more true to their own practice. Many traditions prescribe the disciplines of self-control, sacrifice, austerity and charity for developing spiritual enlightenment but we all need encouragement and inspiration in our endeavours. To fulfil the requests of our spiritual teachers and to provide good examples to society, we need to encourage one another to be faithful to the principles of our own traditions.³

**Theistic people
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another to be more
true to their own
practice**

Dialogue offers a challenge to the faith to devotees of every tradition. This challenge is a necessary and welcome part of spiritual life in a multi-faith world. Such dialogue can help strengthen the faith and character of individuals, the integrity and vision of institutions and the support and appreciation of those who expect enlightened spiritual leadership. Thus dialogue can lead to a profound realisation of mission, in the broadest sense of the term.

Part Three

ISKCON: A Theological Basis for Dialogue

Vaiṣṇava theology and the concept of religion

In common with many followers of Vedāntic tradition, devotees of Kṛṣṇa distinguish between Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or pure love of God⁴ (*sanātana-dharma*), and what is commonly understood as religion (*dharma*). In his introduction to *Bhagavad-gītā*, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains:

Sanātana-dharma does not refer to any sectarian process of religion. It is the eternal function of the eternal living entities in relationship with the eternal Supreme Lord. ... The English word religion is a little different from *sanātana-dharma*. Religion conveys the idea of faith, and faith may change. One may have faith in a particular process, and he may change this faith and adopt another, but *sanātana-dharma* refers to that activity which cannot be changed. (*Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, p. 18)

Vaiṣṇavas regard Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or *sanātana-dharma*, as non-sectarian, although those practising *sanātana-dharma* may individually attach themselves to specific religious traditions. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, ‘We do not advocate any sectarian religion. We are concerned to invoke our dormant love for God. Any method that helps us in reaching such a platform is welcome.’⁵ In his commentary on Rūpa Gosvāmī’s *Upadeśāmṛta*, Śrīla Prabhupāda further elaborates: ‘In all parts of the world, however downtrodden human society may be, there is some system of religion ... When a religious system develops and turns into love of God, it is successful.’ (*Nectar of Instruction*, p. 44)⁶

Vaiṣṇavism therefore recognises the inherent spirituality of all living beings and their individual relationship with the Supreme Lord, known by many names. Vaiṣṇavism maintains that each individual’s satisfaction is to be found in service to the Supreme, and ‘such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self’ (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.2.6). Without such service, we seek enjoyment elsewhere and worship demigods, great persons, natural phenomena, or idols, according to taste and circumstance.

The Lord consistently recognises and maintains His relationship with the individual soul and recognises our attempts to know and understand Him, even though imperfectly or improperly performed. Kṛṣṇa asks the individual soul, ‘Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear’ (*Bhagavad-gītā* 18.66). Therefore, He emphasises that a personal exchange between Himself and the individual soul is superior to any institutional or sectarian claim to His favour.

Vaiṣṇava theology and a basis for dialogue

Caitanya Mahāprabhu left only eight written verses, called *Śrī Śrī Śikṣāṣṭaka*. The third of these verses reads: ‘One who thinks himself lower than the grass, who is more tolerant than a tree, and who does not expect personal honour but is always prepared to give all respect to others, can very easily always chant the holy name of the Lord.’ (*Songs of the Vaiṣṇava Ācāryas*, p. 22–5)

This verse leaves no doubt about the standard of humility, respect, and devotion expected from a Vaiṣṇava who is surrendering to Lord Kṛṣṇa with a pure heart. The term ‘offering all respect to everyone’ can, of course, apply directly to people of other faiths. It is incumbent on devotees of the Lord to offer all respect especially to people sincerely trying to love and serve God. Such respect, tolerance, and humility form the basis of proper Vaiṣṇava relationships.

The Eleventh Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* describes three progressive stages in the development of spiritual relationships: neophyte (*kaniṣṭha*), mature (*madhyama*) and advanced (*uttama*). The *Bhāgavatam* presents these developments as a universal phenomenon to be seen among devotees of every religious tradition. The neophyte usually expresses the sentiments

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relationship with God**

of fanaticism and exclusivism. The neophyte does not know how to behave in the assembly of devotees. He or she cannot correctly distinguish between a devotee and a non-devotee (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.2.47, purport) and cannot be effective in dialogue, regardless of the tradition to which he or she belongs. Śrīla Prabhupāda warns, ‘but if someone is a dogmatic and a blind follower then avoid to discuss [sic] with him.’⁷

The mature devotee, very much concerned with proper relationships, (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 11.2.46, purport) can recognise devotees of God by their qualities and sentiment; he does not judge them by religious affiliation.⁸ Where devotion is manifest, he or she recognises a devotee. The mature devotee will recognise devotion to God by the presence of any of the nine devotional processes outlined by the Vaiṣṇava authority Prahāda Mahārāja.⁹ Śrīla Prabhupāda has stated that although two of these nine processes, namely hearing spiritual sound (*śravaṇam*) and chanting the name of God (*kīrtanam*), are specifically recommended as the most effective methods of spiritual practice for this age, each of the nine remains effective in every age. When mature, a devotee develops the mature vision necessary for sincere and trusting relationships with members of other faith communities.

The advanced stage of faith, the *uttama* platform, brings transcendental realisation. The advanced devotee sees all living beings as eternal servants of Kṛṣṇa and treats them as such. He or she will have no interest in sectarian designations of race, caste, sex, or religion and will renounce all worldly and materialistic association, in favour of associating with those dedicated to pure devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Vaiṣṇavism recognises that spiritual or religious life essentially pertains to a personal and individual relationship between an eternal individual soul and the eternal Supreme Soul. Though a devotee performs various services that may please the Lord, the Supreme Lord grants spiritual realisation and pure devotional love by His own sweet will. Thus, adherents of Vaiṣṇavism reject the idea that any one religion or organisation can hold a monopoly on the truth or a relationship that is governed solely by the Lord. Vaiṣṇavas accept that Kṛṣṇa, God, is free to enter into loving exchanges with whomsoever He wishes, without considering colour, caste or creed.

Part Four

Principles and Guidelines for Approaching People with Faith in God

Principles

The following principles will help members of ISKCON in approaching members of other faith communities. The principles are given here in a condensed form and require careful consideration.

- (1) Humility. The Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition establishes that this is the key to building spiritual relationships.
- (2) The unlimited nature of Kṛṣṇa. The Absolute Truth is universal. No individual or organisation has a monopoly on the Lord. He reveals himself wherever, whenever, however, and to whomever He pleases.
- (3) Honesty. Always be honest and truthful. This is the basis for trust in successful relationships.
- (4) Respect. Always remain respectful, even if you do not receive the same respect in return. Lord Caitanya has said, ‘*amāninā mānadena*’: one should be ready to offer all respects to others, without expecting any respect for oneself.
- (5) Tolerance. When you interact with people who are disrespectful or insensitive toward our tradition and culture, perhaps because they have made uninformed assumptions about us, you will have to be tolerant, explain yourself politely, and forgive their misunderstandings.
- (6) Consideration of time, place, and circumstance. Use your common sense and discretion to develop relationships. Be sensitive to your partner in

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organisation has a
monopoly on
the Lord**

dialogue or your audience.

- (7) Mutual understanding. Be prepared to listen to others, to understand their language, assumptions, culture, and values. Therefore, do not judge others' practice by your ideals.
- (8) Personal realisation. We must sincerely cultivate our own spiritual realisations in Kṛṣṇa consciousness if we are to effectively represent the *saṅkīrtana* movement.¹⁰ Try to speak from personal example and realisation. Sharing will be more effective if it comes from personal realisation.
- (9) Personal relationships. The Vaiṣṇava tradition rests on sincere personal relationships. We can live without the philosophy, the ritual, and the institution, but we cannot live without our loving and serving relationship with Kṛṣṇa and His devotees.
- (10) Good behaviour. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, 'A devotee's behaviour establishes the true purpose of religious principles'. (*Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Madhya-līlā, 17.195)

Guidelines

- The main aim is to form genuine friendly relationships that promote understanding and respect.
- Listen to and value presentations by members of other faiths with respect.
- Give members of other faiths the opportunity to freely express their sincerely held beliefs and convictions.
- Allow members of other faiths to define themselves in their own language and own culture without imposing definitions upon them, thus avoiding comparing their practice with your ideals.
- Respect the diet, dress, rituals, and etiquette of others.
- Recognise that we can all fall short of the ideals of our respective traditions.
- Do not misrepresent or disparage the beliefs or religious practices of others. If you want to understand their beliefs, enquire politely and humbly.

- Respect that others have a commitment to their chosen faith.
- Be honest and straightforward about your intentions. This will be appreciated by those you meet and help develop trust in the relationship.
- Be sensitive and courteous to all you meet, even if you do not get a chance to interact on a deeper level.
- Respect the right of others to disagree and their desire to be left alone.
- There is never a need to compromise your philosophy or values.
- When in dialogue with religious people, you do not have to feel the need to convert them.
- You will meet fundamentalist religionists and atheistic scholars. Offer them due respect and move on. Sincere dialogue on spiritual matters will probably not be possible with them.
- Do not be afraid to answer a question with 'I don't know'. Honesty is better than speculation.

**Allow members of
other faiths to define
themselves in their
own language
and culture**

Part Five

Responses

ISKCON's interfaith statement is one sentence in an ongoing discussion, one that invites response. As **Michael Ipgrave**, Adviser on Interfaith Relations to the Archbishops Council (Church of England), mentions in his response, it 'has the potential to function very much as a living text'. Although most of the responses received were positive in their analysis, they were also often frank in their discussion of its shortcomings and this of course is also part of the dialogue.

This little booklet can only outline some of the main themes developed in the responses. The full responses can be found at www.iskcon.com/icj/responses.htm.

One natural reaction when viewing another faith tradition grappling with this lively topic is to examine one's own faith's approach. **Monsignor Machado**, the under-secretary at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and a scholar in bhakti traditions (of which ISKCON is one), drew much from Vatican documents, including the landmark *Nostra Aetate*. He gives a careful, point-by-point review of the statement, at the same time outlining the Catholic Church's understanding of interfaith dialogue. In it he reminds the reader that, 'dialogue begins, grows authentically and bears fruits, despite difficulties, when it stands on the solid foundation of mutual trust between partners'.

The personal nature of interfaith dialogue occupied much of the original statement and subsequent responses. **Brian Pearce**, Director of the UK's Interfaith Network, reminds us that 'in dialogue we are meeting people — and people come from a particular part of their tradition and speak out of their personal experience of it. We do not dialogue with conceptual categories or concepts.' Or, as **John Borelli**, US National Conference of Catholic Bishops, puts it 'Religions do not dialogue; people dialogue.'

In ISKCON's interfaith statement much is made of the need for respect.

This met with some interesting challenges. **Gavin D’Costa**, Department of Theology at the University of Bristol (UK), asks how it can be that ISKCON values non-theistic ‘communities and organisations advocating humanitarian, ethical and moral standards’ when Vaiṣṇavism teaches that ‘God consciousness is the proper prerequisite to ethics and right action.’ He suggests that ‘the document seems to overturn this element in the tradition, and this requires more careful justification than is given.’

Hans Ucko, World Council of Churches, addresses the common fear that interfaith dialogue is an attempt at building a ‘super-religion of universal love, global friendliness and cosmic consciousness modelled for the 21st century, ... similar to a blend of ice cream and jelly: easy to swallow, but of no substance.’ The strongest challenge to such perceptions is to define the theological basis for interfaith dialogue. This theological basis drew some of the liveliest response.

**As we open ourselves
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another, we also open
ourselves to God**

Michael Ipgrave characterised the statement as grounding the ‘orthopraxis [right action] in a serious orthodoxy, right belief’. Felix Machado, in his response, provides a comparative Catholic theological basis for dialogue, quoting the present Pope: ‘as we open ourselves in dialogue to one another, we also open ourselves to God.’ Gavin D’Costa took the theological basis of the statement as ‘the most important section by which to judge the coherence and integrity of the rest of the document’ and followed an intra-systematic approach analysing the document by its own internal logic.

ISKCON’s statement asserts that ‘no one religion holds a monopoly on the truth’. German protestant theologian, **Ulrich Dehn**, believes this is ‘an insight that could well be written into the diary of some Christians.’ However, reflecting previous unhappy encounters, he also challenges ISKCON to match the theory of its interfaith statement with practice.

Gavin D’Costa found that the Vaiṣṇava distinction between ‘pure love

of God and what is commonly understood as religion’, ‘allows for a fundamental unity of persons in their devotion to a personal deity, be they Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Muslim.’

Anglican vicar and Joint-President of the World Congress of Faiths, **Marcus Braybrooke**, took an interest in the three levels of devotee described in the statement: (1) the immature devotee who expresses ‘fanaticism and exclusivism’; (2) the mature devotee, who ‘recognises other devotees by the quality of their lives’ rather than their religious affiliation; and (3) the advanced devotee who only sees others as servants of God. Interestingly, he notes that ‘although some great religious leaders recognise this advanced [third] stage, religions as such — and indeed many interfaith organisations — operate at the second stage.’ He adds: ‘Most of us need a faith community by which we are nourished and to which we contribute. Yet we also need to be disturbed by the advanced devotees who remind us that God is free to enter into loving exchanges with whomsoever He wishes.’

A potential flashpoint in interfaith dialogue is the issue of conversion. On this count, **Rabbi Jacqueline Tabick** advises that ‘the early activities of the Hare Krishna movement have led to a great deal of suspicion in the Jewish community.’ She adds that ‘True dialogue can only take place among those who have no conversionary agenda, and those who are secure in their own faiths.’

Alan Unterman, from an orthodox Jewish perspective, raises a more robust challenge to ISKCON on this subject. He describes a contradiction in the ISKCON interfaith statement between ‘a series of statements indicating a negative attitude to missionary activity’ and ISKCON’s Seven Purposes, which he believes ‘make mission and conversion a central feature of ISKCON’s outlook.’ In brief, he finds that ‘the ISKCON document may be regarded as expressing a typically sectarian position.’

Kenneth Cracknell, in his landmark paper, also addresses ISKCON’s often poor reputation, quoting one ISKCON member saying that the Society had developed a reputation as a ‘type of fundamentalist organisation, always on the lookout for converts and self-advancement’. The same person went on to say that he ‘came to Kṛṣṇa consciousness because it embodied the uni-

versal principle of Love of God in a way that embraced, not excluded, other religions’.

It was mentioned above that ISKCON’s interfaith statement is not the final word in the dialogue; Cracknell reminds us that it is also not the first word by charting a history of ISKCON and interfaith and finds that the guidelines in the statement ‘reflect ISKCON’s energetic and wholehearted engagement in this field’. He examines the scope for Vaiṣṇava-Christian dialogue, both on a theological level and from deep personal experience. ‘Could it be,’ he asks, ‘that our best partners in Christian-Hindu dialogue are those of the bhakti traditions? Could we not, from our Christian point of view, deem it as providential that Śrīla Prabhupāda so brilliantly preached among Westerners? Might we not say that God has, through this man’s teaching, raised up a new generation of interpreters of bhakti devotionalism? Could this not even be a new kairōs, or turning point, in the long and chequered history of Christian-Hindu relations?’

**God is free to enter
into loving exchanges
with whomsoever
He wishes**

Appendix One

The Seven Purposes of ISKCON

- (1) To systematically propagate spiritual knowledge to society at large and to educate all people in the techniques of spiritual life in order to check the imbalance of values in life and to achieve real unity and peace in the world.
- (2) To propagate a consciousness of Kṛṣṇa (God), as it is revealed in the great scriptures of India, *Bhagavad-gītā*, and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.
- (3) To bring the members of the Society together with each other and nearer to Kṛṣṇa, the prime entity, thus developing the idea within the members and humanity at large, that each soul is part and parcel of the quality of Godhead (Kṛṣṇa).
- (4) To teach and encourage the *saṅkīrtana* movement (congregational chanting of the holy name of God), as revealed in the teachings of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.
- (5) To erect for the members and for society at large a holy place of transcendental pastimes dedicated to the personality of Kṛṣṇa.
- (6) To bring the members closer together for the purpose of teaching a simpler, more natural way of life.
- (7) With a view towards achieving the aforementioned purposes, to publish and distribute periodicals, magazines, books, and other writings.

Appendix Two

Resources

Articles from the ISKCON Communications Journal:

ICJ 1.1, June 1993

‘Contemporary Theological Trends in the Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement: A Theology of Religions’ by Dr Kim Knott

ICJ 1.2, December 1993

‘New Religious Movements and Interfaith Dialogue’ by Dr Gordon Melton

‘A League of Devotees: My Search for Universal Religion’ by Ranchor Dāsa

ICJ 2.1, June 1994

‘ISKCON at the Crossroads?’ by Dr. Julius J. Lipner

ICJ 2.2, December 1994

‘Looking for the Dearest Friend’ by Ranchor Dāsa

ICJ 3.2, December 1995

‘Christian and Jewish Responses to ISKCON: Dialogue or Diatribe?’ by John A. Saliba SJ

ICJ 4.1, June 1996

‘The Four Principles of Interfaith Dialogue and the Future of Religion’ by Kenneth Cracknell

‘Hinduism In Interreligious Dialogue’ by Daniel Acharuparambil, OCD

‘The Nature of the Self, A Vaiṣṇava-Christian Conference’ Conference reports by Kenneth Cracknell, Keith Ward, and Ravindra Svarūpa Dasa

ICJ 4.2, December 1996

‘The Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement: An Illustration of the Interaction between NRM, Traditional Religion and Social Institutions’ by Aravind Sharma

‘Has ISKCON Anything to Offer Christianity Theologically?’ by Kenneth Rose

‘Dialogue with ISKCON: A Roman Catholic Perspective’ by John A. Saliba, SJ

‘The Destiny of the Soul, A Vaiṣṇava-Christian Conference’ Conference reports by Francis X. Clooney, SJ, Klaus Klostermaier, and Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami

ICJ 6.1, June 1998

‘Religion, Community and Conflict’ Conference report by Maurice Ryan

‘The Everlasting Soul, A Vaiṣṇava-Christian Conference’ Conference report by Judson Trapnell

ICJ 7.1, June 1999

‘ISKCON in Relation to People of Faith in God’ by Śaunaka Ṛṣi Dāsa

ICJ 7.2, December 1999

‘Responses to ISKCON in Relation to People of Faith in God’ by John Borelli, Marcus Braybrooke, Gavin D’Costa, Michael Ipgrave, Felix Machado, Brian Pearce, Jacqueline Tabick, and Alan Unterman

ICJ 8.1, June 2000

‘Responses to ISKCON in Relation to People of Faith in God’ by John Borelli, Marcus Braybrooke, and Gavin D’Costa
‘ISKCON and Interfaith Dialogue’ by Kenneth Cracknell

ICJ 8.2, March 2001

‘A Comparative Look at the Issue of Authority’ by Thomas J. Hopkins

ICJ 9.1, September 2001

‘Fourth Annual Vaiṣṇava-Christian Conference’ Conference report by Gerald T. Carney

Other useful publications:

Cracknell, K. *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846-1914*. London: Epworth Press, 1995.

Cracknell, K. *Towards a New Relationship: Christians and People of Other Faiths*. Westminster: Epworth Press, 1986.

Devanandan, Paul D. *Preparation for Dialogue*. Bangalore: CISRS, 1964.

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Notes

Since the publication of ‘ISKCON in Relation to People of Faith in God’, the Society has incorporated interfaith dialogue, in principle and practice, as a key unit in its theological college in Radhadesh, Belgium.

- ^{1.} The seven purposes of ISKCON, as penned by Śrīla Prabhupāda, are reproduced in full in the Appendix.
- ^{2.} A *praṇāma-mantra* is a *mantra* (or prayer) of respect and glorification. It is traditional for disciples of a spiritual teacher or holy person to chant a *praṇāma-mantra* specifically composed for their glorification.
- ^{3.} In this connection Śrīla Prabhupāda has written, ‘It doesn’t matter which set of religious principles one follows: the only injunction is that one must follow them strictly. Whether one is a Hindu, a Mohammedan or a Christian, one should follow one’s own religious principles.’ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 5.26.15, purport.
- ^{4.} Love of God is defined for Vaiṣṇava devotees in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.2.6: ‘The supreme and eternal occupation for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.’ and *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* 1.1.11: ‘When first-class devotional service develops, one must be devoid of all material desires, knowledge obtained by monistic philosophy, and fruitive action. The devotee must constantly serve Kṛṣṇa favorably, as Kṛṣṇa desires.’
- ^{5.} Śrīla Prabhupāda letter to Rupānūga Dāsa, 3 June 1968.
- ^{6.} To understand this development of religion, both individually and collectively, one may study Vaiṣṇava philosophy in terms of the *karma*, *jñāna* and *bhakti* paradigm. The fundamentals of this perspective are well presented by Ravindra Svarūpa Dāsa, in his article ‘Religion and Religions,’ *ISKCON Communications Journal*, Vol. 1, 1993.
- ^{7.} Śrīla Prabhupāda letter to Toṣaṇa Kṛṣṇa Dāsa, 23 June 1970.
- ^{8.} To illustrate this point Śrīla Prabhupāda has observed that, ‘There is no difference between a pure Christian and a sincere devotee of Kṛṣṇa.’ Room Conversation, Bombay, 5 April 1977.
- ^{9.} In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.5.23–4, the nine processes are listed as: (1) Hearing and (2) chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, (3) remembering them, (4) serving the lotus feet of the Lord, (5) offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, (6) offering prayers to the Lord, (7) becoming His servant, (8) considering the Lord one’s best friend, and (9) surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words).
- ^{10.} Śrīla Prabhupāda has explained what is meant by realisation. ‘Personal realisation does not mean that one should, out of vanity, attempt to show one’s own learn-

ing by trying to surpass the previous *ācārya*. He must have full confidence in the previous *ācāryas* and at the same time he must realise the subject matter so nicely that he can present the matter for the particular circumstance in a suitable manner.’ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.4.1 purport.

Śrīla Prabhupāda has also outlined the basic knowledge a preacher must have to convey his message. One must understand that the Lord is ‘the Supreme enjoyer, that He is the proprietor of everything, and that He is the best well-wisher and friend to everyone.’ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.6.24 purport.

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THIS DOCUMENT is the first official statement by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) concerning the Society's relationship with other people of faith in God.

It represents an important step in ISKCON's social integration and maturation. As ISKCON grows it is broadening its membership base and its influence, and therefore it must also accept a broader responsibility. ISKCON is the first global Vaisnava movement and, as such, it has a need and a responsibility to address its relationship with other faith communities.

This statement serves as a declaration of purpose and a significant basis for relationship with ISKCON's dialogue partners. For ISKCON's members it provides clear principles, guidelines, and perspectives for relationships with members of other faiths.