

## Interfaith Dialogue Encouraged

**By Fr. Ovey Mohammed**

Taken from a *Scarboro Missions* interview with Fr. Ovey Mohammed. Fr. Mohammed teaches at Regis College at the Toronto School of Theology and specializes in interfaith dialogue. February 1998.

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The Church's attitude to interreligious dialogue is very positive. The documents of Vatican II that addressed religious pluralism made it clear that all religions can be instruments of salvation.

The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity affirmed that there is truth and grace in the religions "as a sort of secret presence of God." In speaking of all non-Christian religions, the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions explicitly stated that the Church "rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions, that in fact she looks with sincere respect among their ways of conduct, life and teachings which, while differing in many respects from what she holds, nevertheless often reflect the brightness of the Truth which enlightens" all men and women.

The declaration went as far as to exhort Christians "through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of the other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found in their society and culture." Through statements such as these, the Church has acknowledged that it does not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit.

In 1964 Pope Paul VI established the Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions, noting that its purpose was "to search for methods and ways of opening a suitable dialogue with non-Christians in order that non-Christians come to be known honestly and justly by Christians, and that in turn non-Christians can know Christian doctrine and life."

Following the lead of Vatican II and Paul VI, John Paul II, in his encyclical *Redemptoris Hominis*, stated that the many religions are the "many reflections of the one truth, 'seeds of the Word' attesting that though the routes taken may be different, there is but a single goal... a quest for God and... the full meaning of human life." For him dialogue is not a betrayal of commitment, but often a call to faith; thus he says, "The firm belief of the followers of non-Christian religions—a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit operating outside the confines of the Mystical Body—can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by God."

The positive attitude of Vatican II and subsequent Popes to non-Christian religions exhorts Catholics to explore the riches of religious pluralism through dialogue to arrive at a better understanding of the truth we all possess.