

Sixty Years of ISKCON in the United States of America

New York, 31st July 2026

Archbishop Felix Machado,

Distinguished dignitary, Ms Hema Malini, Member of Parliament of the Republic of India and the Chief Guest of this evening's program at this Sixty Years of ISKCON Celebration, dear friend Anuttamadasa and Mrs Rukhminidasi who invited me to this celebration and dear Members and friends of ISKCON, *Namaskaram!*

I stand before you as a representative of the Catholic Church and bring felicitations to ISKCON on sixty years of their Foundation in the United States of America. I learnt that penniless Venerable A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada arrived in New York in 1965 from India and “reminded the West that our highly activist and one-sided culture is faced with a crisis that may end in self-destruction because it lacks the inner depth of an authentic metaphysical consciousness. Without such depth, our moral and political protestations are just so much verbiage” (Thomas Merton (1915-1968). This was an important year also for the Catholic Church for the Declaration, *Nostra Aetate* (NA, the Catholic Church's resolve to dialogue with the world's Religions, first among which was Hindu dharma). I believe that this was no mere coincidence or by chance. The Second Vatican Council in Rome (1962-65) was a spiritually transformative experience for the Catholic Church in the modern world, and an event that was certainly inspired by the Holy Spirit (God). The declaration, NA) mentions Hinduism first and it was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 28 November 1965, the same year A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada arrived in New York. The Declaration NA called the Catholic faithful to describe the factors that emerge and bind the Church to examine what people have in common and what makes them live together their common destiny. It tells Christians that they “should recognize, preserve, and foster the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural

values found among the followers of other religions...(A)lready from ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of the mysterious power abiding in the course of nature and in the happening of human life...at times some indeed have come to the recognition of Supreme Being” (n, 2).

I strongly believe that one religion may be different from another, but they have preserved tenaciously and are in search of Absolute mystery. Nor should we forget that despite all the fundamental differences in doctrine and worship they have much more in common with Christians. Dialogue needs to be the ‘work in progress’.

The Catholic scholars of religions have emphasized that Hindu dharma comes the closest to the Catholic faith. Among these scholars, the name of a prominent scholar, R.C. Zaehner, who stands out. He succeeded the Spalding Chair in Oxford University Dr Sarvapalli Radhakrishna; he had been member of the Vatican dicastery for interreligious dialogue and was an authority on Hindu dharma. R.C. Zaehner, in Gifford Public Lectures, suggests that: “the instinct of the ‘Catholic principle’ must always be to include and absorb whatever is not directly opposed to the teaching of Christ as interpreted by the Catholic tradition. The Catholic principle can be summed up in Christ’s words, namely, ‘Anyone who is not against me, is with me’. The (Hindu myths), as affirmed by the Second Vatican Council’s *Nostra Aetate*, “contains at its very center the belief in an incarnate God. Surely this is, for a Christian, a matter of the deepest significance, for where else in the history of religion do we find a belief in God made man except in Christianity itself? To the Jews the very idea was intolerable, and Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God was, for the Jews of his time, utter blasphemy, and Caiphas only symbolized the general feeling by rending his clothes. No Hindu of the time of Christ would have dreamt of doing so and the difficulty with which Christian missionaries have all along been faced has been not so much that their assertion that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, was considered blasphemous or even incredible as that they should be so naïve

as to suppose that he was the only incarnation of God. To the Hindus this looked rather like a narrow provincialism. Yet in their acceptance of the possibility of divine incarnation, they should stand much nearer to Christianity than the Old Testament ever did or than Islam was to do.”

And finally, I want to make an important appeal: Both the ISKCON tradition of Gaudian (Vaishnava) Hindu bhakti way and followers of the Roman Catholic tradition, each according to the main precepts of the respective religion, should tell the world of today that the Love of God is the most effective and sure medicine for the symptoms of dreaded disease, namely, materialism, consumerism, mundanity all around, indulgence in war, etc. First and foremost, that will save the planet earth and life will be better and fit to inhabit and moral principles will renew the human hearts. Once again, thank you for this great gathering in the name of the love of God for all.