Beyond Hinduism

Even a casual observer of animals can see that we, human beings, share a lot in common with them. Like animals, we too eat, sleep, mate, seek shelter and security. However, we can also see that humans are distinctly different from animals. If so, what makes us ‘special’? A logical observer will note that technological advances in the human society, from space exploration to genetic modification, are only aggrandizements of the four basic necessities that animals achieve regularly without ‘great’ endeavor... The wise ones of our planet, across the span of history, have thus concluded that it is the ability of humans to ponder upon the effective ‘Truth’ which governs the world we live in, that separates us from the rest of our fellow Earthlings... This search for Truth is ‘religion’ – the process of re-connecting with God, forming a relationship with the Ultimate Cause of all Causes.

Religion, by any name, is the process of connecting back to God, to whom we all belong, and are beneficially obliged to. So, unless a human being endeavors in the path of self-realization by means of an authorized religion, he is non-different from an animal. Religion is not mere sentiment generated by biochemical interactions; it is a practicable science, which even a child can practice. The experiments of this science result in the increase of one’s love for God, and knowledge of one’s eternal loving relationship with God. This science may be taught by several prophets/professors, at several places, in several languages, to several audiences, but it forms the core purpose of human life – the eternal occupation of every soul, “Sanātana-Dharma” - the original Sanskrit word for what is commonly referred to as ‘Hinduism’ today.

Srila Prabhupād, the Founder Acārya of ISKCON, further elucidates ‘Sanātana-Dharma’ in the Introduction to ‘Bhagavad Gita – As It Is’, “Therefore, 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. Sanātana-dharma refers, as stated previously, to the eternal occupation of the living entity...” The actual supremacy of human beings is also explained in the Vedic scriptures - this form of life offers one the chance for Self-realization. Asserting this supremacy, the Shrimad Bhagavatam, which is the ripened fruit of the giant tree that is Vedic literature, has put the “Interfaith” discussion to the test several millennia before, and its conclusion is expounded in Shrimad Bhagavatam Canto 1, Chapter 2, Text 6:

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\text{sa vai puṁsāṁ paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokṣaje}
\text{ahaituky apratihatā yayātāṃ suprasīdati}
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“The supreme occupation [dharma] for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent All-Attractive Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.”

Interfaith discussion begins when we realize that there is really only one faith – faith in the Supreme Personality of God. As we study the different religions, our understanding of God only increases. Once we get past the extraneous differences, we can see that although the traditions, practices, and other minor details of each religion are different, they all propound that God is one! Each religion points toward God but may provide a different view of His character, personality and traits. However, religion means to surrender to God; and one who is fully surrendered to God is a religiousist. The Vedic literatures have established that one who endeavors to serve the Lord purely is bestowed with all good qualities naturally. One who accepts similar propositions of wisdom in any religious tradition will thus realize that service to God is the ultimate goal of life. Having thus surrendered to God, one develops love and compassion towards all entities in creation, knowing that they are part of the infinite energies of the Lord. It is only natural that a self-realized person of any religion treats even animals and plants with great respect, what to speak of fellow human beings who endeavor on the path towards God!