

SANYASA
JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

Vol. VI, No. 2

July - December 2011

**RELIGIOUS HARMONY AND CONSECRATED LIFE:
The Role of Consecrated Persons in Promoting
Inter-Religious Harmony**

SANYASA
Institute of Consecrated Life
Carmelaram Post, Bangalore – 560 035, Karnataka, India

SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

A biannual published by Sanyasa Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore

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SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

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*Published by Sanyasa Institute of Consecrated Life, Bangalore
in collaboration with Claretian Publications, Bangalore, India*

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EDITORIAL

Religions as faith traditions are fundamental to human life and formation and, therefore, to the harmonious and peaceful existence of humanity as a whole and to its co-existence with other forms of life. As means to mediate the mystery of God and form the human spirit, religions essentially are varied ways to regain consonance within oneself, with God, others and creation; they are indeed pathways to help us get connected with the Mystery of God who is the source of all being and, thereby, to build up unity and communion. Unfortunately, often, this is not the way it happens. Though God unites, it is the human who divides when one uses his faith or religion for selfish needs and goals. Today, our world is marred by religious fundamentalism and all its extremist consequences, bringing division, disunity, suspicion, mistrust and hatred. More than ever, today, we recognize the need for inter-religious harmony and collaboration. Besides, in a globalized world, there is no way for us to survive other than that of building bridges of dialogue, collaboration and peace. Whether one believes in God or not, anyone who is seriously committed to the growth and well-being of humanity, can ever escape from this important task of bringing down walls of prejudices, mistrust and hatred of each other and, instead, open up new ways of reconciliation, collaboration and communion.

Though the burden of this responsibility falls on everyone, it is essential to the mission of those who have consecrated their lives to God, whatever may be the religious faith tradition that they belong to. Inherent in the consecration is the quest for God and God alone. Genuine and serious seekers in all religions, therefore, have the potential to search for the Ultimate Truth manifested in different ways. Centuries ago, Nicholas of Cusa, mystic and spiritual writer, wrote with a farsighted vision: “It happened after some days, perhaps as the fruit of an intense and sustained meditation that a vision appeared to this ardently devoted man. In this vision, it was manifested that by means of a few sages versed in the variety of religions that exist throughout the world, it could be possible to reach a certain peaceful concord. And it is through this concord that a lasting peace in religion may be attained and established by convenient and truthful means.”

Reaching this peaceful concord among the sages in our religions is an urgent task of our times. It is in this context that the *Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life*, in its annual Consecrated Life Week Seminar, conducted on February 03-05, 2011, chose the theme, ***Religious Harmony and Consecrated Life: The Role of Consecrated Persons in Promoting Inter-Religious Harmony***. The Seminar brought together a panel of men and women, who are serious seekers in their own respective religious traditions, but committed to living their religious life inter-religiously and harmoniously. They have presented their reflections, initiated sharing and conducted discussion. This issue of the

Journal brings to the readers the papers presented at the Seminar by these seekers as they explore into the ascetical-mystical lines within their own faith traditions. Though some of the papers are not written in a scholarly fashion, they are to be seen and read from an experiential point of view. We regret our inability to bring to you the paper from the perspective of Islam due to the time constraints of the resource person.

Jose Kuttianimattathil, SDB explores, in a scholarly manner, the “often ambivalent, if not seemingly contradictory” attitude of the Bible towards other faith traditions. He examines both the positive and negative attitude manifested in the Bible towards other religions and situates them in the proper context, thereby helping the readers understand both the attitudes with their own contextualized reasons. Interpreting the Biblical data and drawing on contemporary theological reflection, he argues that there is sufficient basis in the Bible to conclude that the “different religions belong to the salvific plan of God and that God reaches out to people through their religions.” He goes on to draw very relevant theological perspectives that can broaden the horizons of those who seek to live their Christian faith in harmony with those of other religious traditions. These perspectives can certainly help the Christian seekers to let down the defensive walls and build bridges of dialogue and co-operation with all the people of good will.

Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, CMF, sets the proper context by inviting the religious men and women to reflect on the “violence of the sacred,” the violence that happen in the name of religion, using the theory of Rene Girard. Speaking of the need to develop the “global ecology of our planet,” he challenges the religious to become inter-religious mediators with *mission inter-gentes* and presents the Holy Spirit as someone who opens the horizons and helps us recognize the seeds of the word present in all religions and cultures. He explains also the fundamental virtues needed for inter-faith dialogue, a creation-centered of spirituality that will animate it and an inter-religious formation that would prepare those in formation for a meaningful and fruitful dialogue with other religions.

Swami Paramasukhananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Ashram, begins with the description of the predicament of the human longing for happiness and the dilemma involved. Basing the root cause of this problem in the false identifications that happen because of ignorance, Swami helps us search for answers in the ancient Vedas and embodies them in Hindu monasticism and in its concrete expression in *Sanyasa*. He explains *Sanyasa* as the only means prescribed for gaining self-knowledge, which, in turn, leads to freedom and enlightenment. Drawing on the *Sanyasa* ideal as creatively developed and lived by Swami Vivekananda in dialogue with our modern times, he states that India’s greatest men who interpreted the ancient Hindu Scriptures so as to bring out all social and religious revolutions were all *Sanyasins*. He goes on to show the inclusiveness of Hinduism in its inherent perceptiveness of unity in diversity, which opens the path for inter-faith dialogue and collaboration. The last section deals with some specific but effective ways to live

inter-religiously and harmoniously, along with the challenges to be faced, the obstacles to be overcome and the futuristic scope.

Sudhakar Rao presents Buddhism as a way of life rather than a religion. Briefly introducing us to the life and teachings of Buddha with regard to suffering, its causes and cessation of suffering, he uncovers in a very practical way the process of purifying the mind from all its defilements—a process consisting of morality, meditative concentration and wisdom resulting in detachment. He envisions this practice of the *middle path* as the means of liberation from the cycle of conditioned existence. *Sudhakar* shows that the message of Buddha has a universal appeal as it is not tied in with any image of a creator God or any dogmatic system, but with very fundamental ethical and moral principles, vital to humanity and its peaceful co-existence with all other living forms in the world. The message of Buddha, therefore, is a system of education for the whole of mankind without any distinction of caste, creed or gender and as such is an effective means to overcome prejudices and attain inter-religious harmony.

Dealing with the theme of Jainism and inter-religious harmony, *Ashumalin D. Shah* introduces the concept of *Jaina* in a very comprehensive way. As the *Jaina* path depends solely on self analysis, control and assessment, it becomes clear that one becomes *Jaina* only by choice and full understanding; neither any compulsion in this following, nor any drafting into a faith. The author brings to light the monastic tradition of Jainism both in its mendicant and stationary forms and the vivifying relationship that exist between the monks and the lay people from all walks of life and from all faiths. With regard to the forgotten Jain influence on world history, *Shah* comments on the chastening effect of the Jain monks on King Alexander and on Mahatma Gandhi in his path of non-violence. Because of its recognition of the interdependence of all forms of life and the capacity to reach for the ultimate truth while accepting multiple facets of truth, Jainism takes a very harmonious view of all faiths and explores the scope for peace in their co-existence, as manifested by varied individual and collective efforts, made by *Jains* towards inter-faith harmony and peace throughout history.

No one can doubt about the unique contribution that Mahatma Gandhi made to inter-religious harmony in India. *A. Pushparajan* presents Gandhi as that Great Soul who had assimilated the foundational wisdom of all religions and redirected it to bring unity in the midst of the diversity of India. The author shows that Gandhi's comparative study of religions and the inter-religious action form the base for the theoretical framework which helped him make that unique contribution. His critical and creative approach to all the religions, including his own, led him to discover and live the essence of all religions. The implications for inter-religious living that the author draws from Gandhian thought and life are very timely and immensely relevant for modern India.

Mary John Kattikkat, FMM, listening to the call of the Spirit to move beyond narrow boundaries of religions and traditions, takes us through her own personal journey that led to the foundation of *Ishalaya*, a Franciscan Christian Ashram. Drawing inspiration from the Documents of the Church and the Franciscan charism of her Congregation, she narrates the pioneering steps and the efforts taken at various levels towards such an Ashram life. *Ishalaya* embodies the vision of Cosmic Fraternity as lived and witnessed by St. Francis of Assisi. The open and welcoming atmosphere and its various activities manifest a very concrete example of living inter-religious dialogue, communion and collaboration within the ambience of consecrated life. The impact perceived and the lessons learnt from such an Ashram way of life are remarkable. This is certainly a challenging effort towards living consecrated life inter-religiously and harmoniously.

Having gone through these papers, we can say that being committed to one's own adhered to path and still being open to others is an attitude to be cultivated by all genuine seekers. Religion is not simply a set of dogmas, doctrines and rituals that are to be blindly adhered to, rather they are pathways to journey on towards an Ultimate Mystery. A journey through faith that seeks harmony must embody and articulate the following foundational principles of spiritual formation.

There is only one God (One Transcendent Mystery) who illumines all and embraces all. The goal of life is to strive for union with God, understood as salvation, *mukti*, *nirvana*, liberation, enlightenment or, union. Every human person is endowed with the spiritual capacity, a capacity for the Transcendent Mystery, however you may understand this Mystery. There are different pathways to attain this union with the Mystery. These pathways are called: Religions or Faith and Form traditions. Every religious faith and form tradition offers to the human spirit a particular image, explanations and interpretations of this Transcendent Mystery and appeals to it to be formed in that tradition. Every religious faith and form tradition is also co-formed by the ideological faith traditions prevalent in the socio-historical dimension of human life. Everyone may choose or be given one path, but the challenge is to remain committed to it. Such a commitment implies fidelity to one's own adhered to path and the commitment to keep walking in it with open mind and remain committed to its depth, seeking, searching and knocking in all humility. It also includes an openness to give and receive from the faith and form traditions of the people who live around us. "The wind blows where it pleases and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (Jn 3:8).

The closer you come to God experienced through your own faith tradition, you will discover that the other pathways converge and come closer. This is called an experience of the "cave of the heart" lived by mystics from different pathways. The closer you come to God, the more will be the resonance in your hearts with a spiritual wisdom drawn

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from all religions but you may express them in the words of your own faith tradition. The farther you are from God, the ways also diverge: So those who fight in the name of religions and practice violence are those who are far from God. The mystics of all faith traditions converge whereas the fanatics diverge, while there are many who get stuck in the path and fail to move on. The more you come close to God, the more you will discover the beauty so much so that you cannot but proclaim, share, and invite others to what you experience in your heart. This is the mission of a seeker. But there is no imposition or condescension of other pathways. Conversion or change of pathways is always possible, but this is a work of God in the soul of the seeker.

There are also two book reviews, each prepared by Joseph Kasimir, SJC and Assuntha Lobo, EF, the students of Sanyasa: Institute of Consecrated Life.

May this issue of the Journal on Inter-Religious Harmony by consecrated persons help us reach that *peaceful concord*, envisioned by Nicholas of Cusa.

Xavier E. Manavath, CMF
(Chief Editor)

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Jose Kuttianimattathil, SDB

1. INTRODUCTION

Christian life is fed and nourished by the word of God. Therefore it is only natural that we look at the word of God to see what it has to say about other religious traditions in the context of our desire to enter into dialogue with them and promote religious harmony. In this paper we shall first examine both the negative and positive attitudes found in the Bible towards other religions. Then, based on our findings we shall make some theological considerations that will give us a basis for engaging in dialogue and promoting religious harmony.

2. BIBLICAL ATTITUDE TO OTHER RELIGIONS

The Bible is a collection of 73 books (Catholics 73, Protestants 66) of different literary genres, written by different authors, at different places over a period of many

centuries. The first books of the Bible were written about 800 or 700 years before the birth of Jesus although some of the traditions contained in them were composed hundreds of years earlier. The last book of the New Testament was written at the beginning of the second Century after Jesus. Hence, it can be said that the Bible was composed over a period of a thousand years. Over this long period of time the biblical authors would have been facing different problems and would represent different stages of theological reflection. The individual authors would not have had a picture of the whole and whatever he wrote would have been shaped by what would be of help to his contemporaries.¹ Hence, it is quite natural that on any given topic, including religions, we will find various views expressed in the Bible. Thus the Biblical attitude to other religions is “often ambivalent, if not

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seemingly contradictory.”² In the Bible we find both a positive and a negative attitude to other religions. The negative attitude is more vividly and forcefully expressed and so is more dominant. The Christians highlighted this attitude till recently. So, we shall begin with the negative attitude and then see what is said in the Bible positively of other religions.

2.1. Negative Appraisal of Other Gods and their Religions

2.1.1. Old Testament

There are many texts in the Old Testament which manifest a strongly condemnatory, predominantly negative and intolerant attitude to other religions and their gods.

When the Israelites were about to conquer the Hittites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, Yahweh commanded them: “Do not intermarry with them . . . for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. . . . But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire” (Dt 7:3-5).

It is with supreme contempt that some of the prophets speak of the gods of other religions (Bar.6:4-17, 18-72; Jer.2:11, 26-28; Is.2:8; 40:18-20; 44:9-18; 46:6-7). Baruch tells the Israelites that the gods of the Babylonians which are made of gold and silver and wood “cannot save

themselves from rust and corrosion,” and are therefore “not gods,” and “so do not fear them” (Bar 6:10-16).

The psalmists ridicule the gods of other religions saying: “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. . . .” (Ps 115:4-7). “Those who make such idols and those who venerate them will become like those idols, dumb, blind, deaf, lame and lifeless” (Ps 115:8).

When King Solomon built altars to the gods of his foreign wives, Yahweh was angry with him. “The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel” (I Kgs 11:9).

2.1.2. New Testament

A superficial reading of the New Testament would give us the impression that Jesus is rather hostile to the Samaritans and the Gentiles. This is because in the early days of his ministry, Jesus was inclined to limit his mission and message to Israel (Mt 15:24; Mk 7:27). He forbade his disciples to preach during his lifetime to the Gentiles and the Samaritans (Mt. 10:5-6).

There are some passages in the New Testament that seem to strike a very exclusive note. Jesus says: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses

to reveal him” (Mt. 11:27). And in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus says: “I am the way and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn. 14:6).

These passages seem to suggest that only those who openly profess faith in Jesus can have a real and saving knowledge of God. In other words, a true and saving knowledge of God is possible only among Christians, with the result that others and the religions they belong to are outside the pale of salvation.

Paul, in some of his writings, rejects the wisdom of the Greeks as doomed to destruction and he condemns the religions of the Gentiles for their immorality, senseless idolatry and demoniacal character (Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 1:18-25, 6:9, 8:4, 10:20, 12:2; Gal. 4:8-11; Eph. 2:2-3, 12, 4:17-18, 5:8; Col. 1:21, 2:13; 1 Thess. 4:5).

Paul’s negative attitude to other religions is summed up in what he says in the first chapter of his Letter to the Romans, which has always been a classic text in the discussion of the Christian attitude to other religions. Here, the religions of the Gentiles are branded as idolatry and the worship of the creature, and the Gentiles are said to commit every crime possible under the sun; they are described as degenerate and full of every kind of wickedness and evil (Rom 1:22-31).

From the few texts we have cited among the many found in the Bible, it would seem that “the overarching tone of

both Testaments of our Christian Bible is rather negative in their pronouncements about other faiths and strong in the urge to foster authentic, monotheistic, exclusivistic religion.”³ And these are the texts that have been used by Christians through the centuries to guide us in our attitude to and approach to other religions.

2.1.3. *Understanding the Negative Texts in Context*

There seems to be many factors in the history of Israel that contributed to a negative attitude to other religions and their gods.

1) *Monotheistic Reform:* In the beginning the Israelites were not strict monotheists. They were open to worshipping other gods. Monotheism took root only gradually among the Israelites. It became well established through the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah after the Babylonian exile, although most scholars would hold that after the sixth century BCE, the Israelites were monotheists.⁴ In the effort to establish monotheism it would only be natural that anything that would be detrimental to it or that would challenge it (e.g., other religions and other gods) would be presented negatively. In fact, the Book of Nehemiah ends with these words: “Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign. . . . Remember me, O my God, for good” (Neh 13:30-31).

2) *Awareness of Being the Chosen People:* Closely connected with this

monotheistic awareness is the idea that Israel is God's chosen people. The notion that God had chosen Israel out of all the peoples of the earth (Deut.7:6), made Israel believe that the others were not chosen and so were to be excluded. This idea of election is omnipresent in the Old Testament and takes on different forms; it is at the root of Israel's exclusivism and intolerance of other religions.

3) *Minority Complex*: Israel was a small and culturally unimpressive nation in the midst of the great and dominating cultures of Egypt, Assyria and Babylon. As is the case with all minority groups, their instinct for cultural self-preservation and survival, as well as their need for identity made the Israelites intolerant of their great gentile neighbours and their religions. One strategy used by minority groups to protect their identity as well as to strengthen the unity among their members is to present other groups and their practices negatively.

4) *Gods at War*: In the Ancient Near East, each nation and people had its own god, whose jurisdiction was limited to the boundaries of the nation in question. "Thus Israel was aware that Astarte was the goddess of the Sidonians, Kemosh, the god of the Moabites, Milcom, the god of the Ammonites (cf. 1 Kings 11:33), and that Beelzebul was the god of Ekron in Philistine territory (2 Kings 1.2)."⁵ The God of the Israelites was Yahweh. As Israel fought with other nations it was believed that the God of Israel fought on

their side against other nations and their gods (Ex 12:12). In this context it is understandable that once the enemies were conquered the gods who fought on their side had to be destroyed.

5) *Degeneration of Religions*: The many Canaanite, Ugaritic, Moabite, Hittite, Philistine and Phoenician religions were guilty of all kinds of perverse acts such as human sacrifice, sacred prostitution, and occult acts (Judg 11:29-40; 1 Kings 16:34; Mic 6:7; Deut 18). Some of the strong condemnatory statements that we find in the Old Testament may be directed against these perversions rather than against religions as such.⁶ In fact, we find similar condemnations by prophets of Israelite practices (Amos 5:21-25; Hos 6:6). Yahweh says: "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies" (Amos 5:21). These statements are not against the Israelite religion as such but against the inhuman and unholy practices in the Israelite religion. So also the condemnations found against other religions are not against those religions as such but against the evil practices in those religions.

6) *Mission to the Gentiles through the Jews after the Resurrection*: It is true that Jesus limited his ministry primarily to the Jews. This does not mean that he was not concerned about the gentiles. He limited his ministry precisely out of concern for them. He probably acted according to the Jewish belief that as God's chosen

people salvation should come first to the Jews and then through the Jews to the gentiles.⁷ Further, as Joachim Jeremias has pointed out, Jesus must have limited his ministry to the Jews as it was held that the salvation of the Gentiles was to take place at the eschatological time which would begin definitely only at his resurrection.⁸ At the same time it is to be noted that the eschatological gathering of all into the Reign of God began already during the ministry of Jesus as is clear from parables such as that of ‘great banquet’ (Lk 14:15-24; Mt 22:1-14) where outcasts and foreigners are invited to the feast. So it is clear that Jesus was not limiting himself only to the Jews.⁹

7) *Paul Condemns not Religions as Such but Evil and Evil-Doers*: Paul condemns very strongly the pagans who have not lived according to the revelation given to them through the cosmos (Rom 1:18-32). But it is to be noted that he condemns the Jews even more strongly (Rom 2:1-11). So the purpose of Paul here is not to condemn one religion or the other. His purpose is to invite people to live a life doing good as anyone who did not do so would be subject to divine judgement “the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality” (Rom 2:9-11). God shows no partiality, that is, all those who do good are acceptable to God.

In this section, we have pointed out the reasons why some of the statements in the

Bible about other religions are negative. When we understand the reasons we realize that the statements are not necessarily against religions and other gods as such but against the evil practices in religions. This gives us some ground for looking at the religions and their gods more positively.

In the Bible, we also find indications for a positive appraisal of religions and their gods. We shall examine this in the next section:

2.2. Positive Appraisal of Religions and their Gods

2.2.1. Old Testament

1) *Israel Shows Openness to Other Gods*: In the beginning, the Israelites were open to other gods. Abraham is presented as being present (Gen 14) at the worship of a Canaanite deity, and it is highly probable that he took part in its worship.¹⁰ Abraham received blessings from the non-Israelite priest Melchizedek and offered him tithes in return (Gen 14:18-20). The patriarchs worshipped at traditional Canaanite shrines like Shechem (Gen 12:6), Bethel (Gen 12:8), Hebron (Gen 13:18), and Beersheba (Gen 21:33). In their earlier days “Israelites (who worshipped Yahweh) and Canaanites (who worshipped Baal) lived together in Shechem side by side.”¹¹ There are indications that the goddess Ashera was venerated in the temple of Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:6) and other sanctuaries together with Yahweh.¹² After the conquest of the

promised land, Joshua addresses these words to the people: "... put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the river in Egypt, and serve YHWH. Now if you are unwilling to serve YHWH, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the regions beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve YHWH" (Jos 24:14-15).¹³

This text shows that the ancestors of the Israelites were polytheists. Further, Joshua gives people the option to worship other gods. As for Joshua and his household, they would worship Yahweh. At this time of their history the Israelites practiced henotheism. This term designates "the exclusive cult of one deity, with the admission of the existence of other deities, or at least without any explicit denial of the existence of other deities."¹⁴ Texts which proclaim the greatness of Yahweh like Ex 15:11, and Ps 113:5 stress the uniqueness of Yahweh in comparison to other gods. These gods "are neither negated nor de-divinised."¹⁵ Even the first commandment of the Decalogue does not seem to deny ontological reality to other gods. It only demands that they be kept out of the sanctuary of Yahweh.¹⁶

What we have tried to point out here is that for a long time in their history there was openness among the Israelites towards other gods. This would change with the post-exilic reforms. And some

texts in the Bible deny any ontological reality to other gods (Is 45: 6, 14, 21).

2) *Israel Borrows from Other Religious Traditions*: It is well known that the biblical authors borrowed much from their neighbours. The creation story owes much to the Enuma Elish epic, which is a Babylonian Creation story, the covenant theology goes back to the Hittites, and the ten commandments could have been influenced by the Hammurabi Law Code of the Babylonians. Some of the ancient prayers of Israel are adapted from Canaanite (e.g. Ps 29) or Akkadian expressions (e.g. Ps 25:1; 86:4; 143:8). Speaking of the biblical heritage, Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller remark that "many of its deepest insights and most powerful symbols were adapted from and shared with supposedly 'pagan' peoples."¹⁷ This shows that there are many good elements in other religious traditions which are of use to all.

3) *Openness to Individuals*: The bible acknowledges the goodness of individuals who belong to other religions. The bible holds in high esteem a host of non-Israelites such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Daniel the Phoenician and Job the Edomite (Ezek. 14:12-20). Melchizedek, the king of Salem and the Priest of God Most High (Gen.14:18-20), Lot the nephew of Abraham and the father of the Moabites (Gen.19), the queen of Sheba (1 Kgs. 10:1-13; Mt.12:42; Lk.11:31), Jethro the priest of Midian and the father-in-law of

Moses (Ex.18), Ruth the Moabite (Ruth), the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs. 17; Lk.4:25-26) and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kgs. 5; Lk.4:27) were all non-Israelites. Cyrus, who is called the shepherd of Yahweh (Is 44:28), and even a messiah, (Is 45:1) was a Persian King. We have a long list of religious heroes mentioned in Sir 44:1-50:21 and Heb 11:1-39 who are not Israelites. This shows that the personal faith of people is recognized and approved by the bible although they belong to other religions.

4) *Universalism*: (a) *Universal Covenants*: The Bible begins neither with the history of Israel nor with the call of Abraham, but with the creation of humans in the image of God, and throughout the Old Testament it is affirmed that all humans have been created by God. Then there are the pre-Mosaic covenants with Adam and Noah (Gen.1:26-29; 2-3; 8:21-9:17). These are universal covenants which God makes with the whole of humankind.

(b) *All Nations as Coming From Noah's Sons*: In the tenth chapter of Genesis the universalistic trend is emphasized in the positive evaluation of the plurality of nations. All the nations on earth are shown to be taking their origin from Noah's sons (Gen 10:1). The enumeration of all the nations of the earth immediately after giving the account of the covenant with Noah implies that the people of these nations are born in fulfillment of the promise given in the covenant with

Noah (Gen.9:1). The fact that the number of nations mentioned is seventy is important, for seventy as we know from the New Testament, is a symbol for universality. So the whole of humankind appears here, in terms of its common origin, as one family.

(c) *Abraham's Call is for the Good of All*: The vocation of Abraham too shows the universalistic trend in the Bible. His vocation affects the whole of humanity as by him not only the Israelites but all the families of this earth are to be blessed (Gen.12:1-3).

(d) *The Wisdom of God and the Lordship of God*: The Psalms and the Wisdom Literature contain universalistic themes. God's covenant with the whole of creation seems to be the main concern of these books. The Proverbs makes it clear that the Gentiles too have a share in the wisdom of God which is revealed in creation, and so is available to all peoples (Prov.8). Many of the psalms stress the universal lordship of God over the cosmos. The universality of God's saving design is mentioned in Psalm 98. The Babylonians, Philistines, Tyrians and Ethiopians - all claim the eschatological temple or city of Zion as their birthplace (Ps.87:4-6).

(e) *Non-Israelites are Acceptable to God and May Continue in Their Religions*: The Books of Ruth and Jonah also bring out the universalistic trend in the Old Testament. The point of the Book of Ruth

is that a Moabite is not only perfectly acceptable to God and to Israel but can be worthy enough to become an ancestor of King David, Israel's greatest hero and the founder of Judah's great dynasty. The Book of Ruth subtly challenges the exclusivism of Ezra who ordered the expulsion of foreign wives (Ezr 9:1—10:44).¹⁸

Similarly, the Book of Jonah is hardly composed to tell the story of a ship-wreck and a whale, or of a Jew who refuses to be God's spokesman to the people of Nineveh. The primary purpose of the book is to demonstrate that the entire world, humans and beasts, are God's creation and concern.

In fact, the Book of Jonah is not so much a prophecy as a parable of the universal salvific will of God. As the tendency towards exclusivism was growing among the Jews this book highlights God's relation to the whole of creation, and brings out how God effectively wills the salvation of all humans. The book not only shows that God's love and concern extend even to non-Israelites, but seems to imply that they can find salvation in their own religions. For the Ninevites are asked only to give up their evil ways and be converted to God. They are not asked to give up their religion and become Jews (Jon.3:1-5).¹⁹ The point of the book is that God's concern for God's creatures is impartial and universal and that it matters not that the repentant Ninevites remain as Gentiles. "This 'foreign' city and people are as much the

concern of God as Jerusalem and Israel; their prayer and repentance are as acceptable to God as anyone else's!"²⁰

Pathrapankal considers it "astonishing" that the Jewish Council which met in Jamnia around 100 CE did not have any hesitation to include these two books into their canon. "It is a lesson for theological pluralism which is something very important in our times but hardly recognized."²¹

(f) The 'Exodus Experience' of Other Nations: The Book of Amos brings out God's absolute impartiality in meeting out justice to all peoples; the same principles of justice are applied to the peoples of Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah and Israel (Am.1:3-2:8). Israel, of course, considers the Exodus to be a unique experience of hers. But Amos boldly calls this in question, for he says that other peoples in bondage have equally been the objects of God's concern and care: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel?", says the Lord. 'Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?' (Am.9:7). In a similar passage in the Book of Isaiah, Yahweh says: "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage" (Is 19:25).

(g) Non-Israelite Worship is Acceptable to God: Prophet Micah is tolerant of the worship of other nations. It is quite legitimate that they worship their

gods just as Israel worships her God: “For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever” (Mic 4:5).

This open and positive attitude to the Gentiles and their religions which appears in the Old Testament finds its consummate expression in the Book of Malachi. Yahweh says that he has had enough of the polluted offerings of the priests of Israel (Mal 1:7-10). It is the other nations that bring pure offerings to Yahweh and honour him: “For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts” (Mal.1:11)²².

2.3. New Testament

2.3.1. *The Attitude of Jesus*

In the case of the Roman Centurion who comes to ask for a cure for his servant who is sick Jesus admires his faith and says: “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith” (Rom 8: 10). And because of the Centurion’s faith, Jesus works a miracle for him.

In the case of the Canaanite or Syrophoenician woman who asks for a cure for her daughter, Jesus at first shows reluctance to work a miracle for one who is not a Jew (Mt 15:21-29; Mk 7:24-30). However, the response of the woman makes Jesus change his position and do

what he is asked. Here Jesus shows himself as someone who allows his own perspectives to be changed, or even corrected by someone from a different religious tradition.²³

In the case of these miracles, it is the faith of the beneficiaries in Jesus that is commended, not necessarily their religious or cultural background. At the same time these incidents indicate that a genuine faith is possible anywhere in this world. Anyone, not necessarily one who belongs to the community of Jesus, can have faith in God’s saving power.²⁴

2.3.2. *The New Testament Borrows from Judaism and Other Religious Traditions*

It is to be kept in mind that Jesus, Mary, the Apostles, etc., were Jews and continued to remain Jews (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). In the years immediately after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christians continued to frequent the synagogue and worship according to the Jewish tradition. The Christians have inherited the entire Old Testament, many prayers and customs from the Jews. St. Paul, in order to drive home the point that God is close to every people, quotes the Greek prophet Ephimenedes and the Greek poet Arato (Acts 17:27). Christianity owes so much to Judaism that Pope John Paul II called the Jews “our elder brothers.” Pope Benedict XVI goes a step further and calls them our “fathers in the faith.”²⁵ This shows that there is much that we can learn

and use from other religions for our own spiritual nourishment and relationship to God.

2.3.3. *The Reign of God is Open to All*

The focus of Jesus' life and mission was the establishment of the Reign of God. Jesus is not only a prophet who announced the Reign of God but is the one in whom it arrives.

The parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25), the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37) and the healing of the Samaritan leper (Lk 17:11-19), who returned to give thanks, show that entry into the Reign of God is based not on belonging to any particular culture or religion but on faith in God and loving behavior towards others. The parable of the great banquet (Lk 14:15-24; Mt 22:1-14), the Sermon on the Mount, etc., show that the Reign of God is intended for all and not only for a select group of people. In the parable of the great banquet, finally "everyone" whom the servants found, "both good and bad" (Mt 22: 9-10) participated in the banquet.

The Sermon on the Mount, and especially the beatitudes, is the charter of the Reign of God. The "crowd" (Mt 5:1) which listened to the Sermon on the Mount included not only Jews but "a great multitude of people from Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon" (Lk 6:17). Tyre and Sidon were gentile cities. The values which the beatitudes propose

can be lived by any person of goodwill. The fact that people of various places and religions were present at the Sermon of the Mount indicates that they all could become members of the Reign of God provided they lived according to the values proposed by Jesus.²⁶

Jesus, in many places in the New Testament, explicitly promises the Gentiles a share in salvation. According to him, the judgment will be the same for the non-Jews as for the Jews; both will be judged not according to their origin or religion, but according to their love and concern for the neighbor (Mt.25:31-46). And the Gentiles are likely to come out of this better than the Jews, for some of the Gentiles will rise up to condemn the Jews (Mt.10:15; 11:20-24; 12:41-42). Considering a common rabbinical opinion that the Gentiles would not rise from the dead, this is indeed striking. The redemptive activity of Jesus is universal and so includes the Gentiles.

2.3.4. *Paul's Attitude: God's Revelation is Available to All in Different Ways*

In his speech to the Gentiles at Lystra, Paul shows that there is a revelation given by God to all humans and that this revelation consists in the regular cycle of the seasons. Through the essential stability and benignity of the phenomena of nature, God has always been appealing to humans for recognition of God's love and offer of salvation (Acts 14:15-17). Addressing the Athenians from the Areopagus, Paul

affirms again that by giving life, breath and everything to every creature, and thereby revealing and communicating himself to all, God makes it possible for all to find salvation, or to feel after him and find him (Acts 17:25-28). And this is obviously a question of God's salvific providence embracing humankind as a whole.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul asserts unambiguously that what can be known about God is plain to humans because of God's revelation through creation and conscience (Rom 1:19-20; 2:9-16). Paul does not even hesitate to put the Gentiles on a par with the Jews when salvation and judgment are at issue. Jews and Gentiles are equally in need of salvation. Every one will be judged, says Paul, according to the revelation he/she has received (Rom 2:9-16).

Paul, thus, makes it clear that God is no respecter of persons and shows no partiality (Rom 2:11). By revealing and communicating himself to all, God makes supernatural life possible for all. Each person will be judged according to the revelation he receives or the covenant to which he belongs; the Jew will be judged according to the law, the Gentile according to his conscience. And the unfaithful Jew will be condemned, while the faithful Gentile will be saved.

Paul holds that although the Gentiles do not have the law, "what the law requires is written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15). This recalls the promise of the new covenant in

Jeremiah where it is said that "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jer 31:33). Commenting on this text, Odasso explains: "Even the Gentiles, who do not have the Torah, if they act according to their deep yearning, in other words, if they lead a life fundamentally inspired by authentic mutual love, show that they have been reached by the divine promise of the new covenant, which has been fulfilled in Jesus, ..." ²⁷ Therefore, the law "written on their hearts" is not to be understood in the sense of 'natural law' or some sort of instinctive sensitivity. "They are reached by the new covenant, by the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ, and hence internally vivified in some fashion by the Spirit of God." ²⁸ Hence the religious life of the Gentiles cannot be reduced to some 'natural religion.' They attain saving faith. ²⁹

In his speech at Athens, Paul says that he is proclaiming to them the God whom they worship as unknown (Acts 17:23). This means that their search for God is genuine. Dupuis points out that the 'search' for God is already a gift of God. Therefore, it connotes an experience of faith. Now, religious experience is lived within a religion from which it cannot be separated. Hence it can be held that it is the religions that mediate this experience. Therefore, their religions mediate saving faith to the Gentiles, even if this faith is incomplete as it does not yet know the risen Christ. ³⁰

2.3.5. Peter's Realization About the Gentiles

In the episode of the encounter between Cornelius and Peter, Cornelius, even before his conversion, is presented as a "devout man who feared God ... gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:2). In this episode, Peter comes to the following realization: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). This is a principle that is already found in Deut 10:17 and affirmed also by Paul (Rom 2:11).

Reflecting on this episode Witherup makes the following observation: "What can we conclude from this story that might impact on inter-faith dialogue? At least five points come to mind. "God's grace moves where it wills and is not limited by our faith perspective. Every individual (even the Christian!) needs to be open to the grace of 'conversion' in his or her life; even a leader like Peter needed to have his perspective changed by God's broader view. God wills that what is good and true in another's religious experience, even if it is not the fullness of the truth, should be affirmed. Religious dialogue is all about people encountering people and sharing honestly from their religious experience. God's universal plan of salvation is mysteriously able to declare 'clean' and acceptable what our limited

experience may tell us is "unclean" and off limits."³¹

2.3.6. Presence of the Holy Spirit

The Bible presents us with ample evidence for the presence of the Spirit everywhere. According to the Old Testament, the Spirit is at the source of all being and life (Gen 1:2; 2:7; Ps 33:6; 104:30; Job 33:4). All, not just one tribe or nation, are touched by the Creator Spirit. This Spirit is present everywhere that one cannot hide from the Spirit (Ps 130:7, 9). The Spirit is also the source of wisdom which is found among all people (Wis 1:5-7; Job 32:8). The Spirit spoke not only through the prophets of Israel but also through Balaam (Num 24:2), a seer of Pethor, a North Syrian city and also through the Persian King Cyrus (Isaiah 42:1; Ezra 1:1).³²

In the New Testament, Jesus compares the Spirit to the wind which is not restricted to any place or person but blows freely where it wills (Jn 3:8). The New Testament presents people as receiving the Spirit at baptism and the laying on of hands (Acts 8:15-17; 19:5-6). Yet there are also instances of people receiving the Spirit before they are baptized (Acts 10:44-11:18), showing that the Spirit is free and not restricted to any particular gesture, action or sacrament.

Some of the Fathers of the Church also make allusion to the universal presence of the Spirit. According to Pope Leo the Great, "When the Holy Spirit filled the

Lord's disciples on the day of Pentecost, this was not the first exercise of his role but an extension of his bounty, because the patriarchs, prophets, priests and all the holy men of the previous ages were nourished by the same sanctifying Spirit ... although the measure of the gifts was not the same."³³

2.4. Conclusions Regarding the Biblical Data

1) The Bible presents both positive and negative evaluations of other religions. The points made by the negative statements have to be given their importance and value. Anything that goes counter to the well-being of the human being and is damaging to the idea of God presented by Jesus Christ cannot be accepted. At the same time, it would seem that there is sufficient basis in the Bible to conclude that the different religions belong to the salvific plan of God and that God reaches out to people through their religions. At the end of his research into the biblical foundations for a theology of religions, Odasso concludes: "That the religions are so many expressions of God's design is by now established, indeed because as can be seen from the perspective disclosed by the texts of the Old and New Testament, they are on earth a gift of God to all peoples, and therefore, a sign of the salvifically operative presence of Wisdom. Hence, the religions, as expressions of the divine design, are necessarily related to the resurrection of Christ, precisely because

the resurrection represents the ultimate fulfillment of God's saving design."³⁴

2) In the past, we highlighted the negative appraisal of the Bible on other religions. This appraisal was often based on interpretations that were biased, one-sided and done out of context. In our context today, when people are pursuing mutual understanding, it would be more proper that we highlight the positive elements presented in the Bible.

3) The Bible is universalistic in its outlook. It presents God as the God of all, and as one who is interested in everyone's welfare. In the words of Ariarajah: "It is this biblical faith that drives us into dialogue. If my Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim neighbour is as much a child of God as I am, and if nothing that either of us do to reach or know God can fall outside the mercy and the providence of God, then we are indeed brothers and sisters. We are pilgrims, not strangers. We have much to learn from each other. We belong together to God our common creator."³⁵

3. SOME THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES BASED ON THE BIBLICAL DATA

In the previous section, we analyzed what the Bible has to say about other religions. In this section, we shall draw some conclusions from the biblical data that could help us to work for harmony among religions.

1) *God is the God of All Humans and Has Made Covenants with All:* God made four great covenants: with Noah (Gen 9:9-17), Abraham (Gen 17:1-7), Moses (Ex 24:3-11), and in Jesus (Heb Chs 7-10). These covenants are all marked by the ritual celebration of sacrifices (Gen 8:20-21; Gen 15 and 22; Ex 24; Heb 10), showing that they have a legal binding power. The earlier covenants are not abolished but fulfilled in Christ. For the adherents of other religions, the earlier covenants are valid till they perceive the truth of the covenant in Jesus Christ.³⁶

2) *Basic Unity of All Humans:* There is a basic unity among all humans. Our origin is from God. So too God is our destiny, the goal of our existence (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 1).³⁷ Inter-religious harmony is a way of acknowledging, expressing and celebrating this unity.

3) *The Universal Presence of the Spirit of God:* The Spirit is at work in all people and their religions. We accept that the Spirit of God is active in all authentic religions because the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) are found in these religions (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 28). It is not we, but the Spirit who is praying in us (Rom 8:26-27). Pope John Paul II says that “every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person.”³⁸ If it is the Spirit who calls forth the prayer in us and in our brothers and sisters of other faiths, we may join with them to venerate God.

4) *Religions are God’s Gift to Humans:* Traditional Christian thought has been reluctant to accept religions as God’s gifts and as ways of salvation. However, recent Church documents are open to such an outlook. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* says that “concretely, it will be in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions and by following the dictates of their conscience that the members of other religions respond positively to God’s invitation and receive salvation in Jesus Christ, even while they do not recognize or acknowledge him as their saviour (cf. *Ad gentes*, 3, 9, 11).”³⁹ The CBCI *Guidelines for inter-religious Dialogue* states: “The plurality of religions is a consequence of the richness of creation itself and of the manifold grace of God. Though all have come from the same source, people have perceived the universe and articulated their awareness of the Divine Mystery in manifold ways and God has surely been present in these historical undertakings of his children. Such pluralism, therefore, is in no way to be deplored but rather acknowledged as itself a divine gift.”⁴⁰ Inter-religious harmony would be a way of acknowledging and thanking God for the many gifts God has given and keeps giving to humanity all through history.

5) *Partners in the Reign of God:* The Reign of God is a symbol of the Lordship of God over all things. The Church and the Reign of God are related but different. Vatican II tends to identify the Reign of

God and the Church (LG 3, 5). However, the postconciliar documents like *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) by Pope John Paul II make a distinction between the two. The Pope states that “the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live ‘Gospel values’ and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8)” (RM 20). He describes the Reign of God in the following terms: “The Kingdom’s nature, therefore, is one of communion among all human beings with one another and with God” (RM 15). He specifies that the Kingdom is the concern of all and that “building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms” (RM 15). It “grows gradually, as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another” (RM 15). The Church is “at the service of the Kingdom” (RM 20).

This means that the adherents of all religions belong to the Reign to the extent that they live its values and help to spread it in the world.⁴¹ If Christians and adherents of other religions belong to the Reign it is our duty to build it together. We must build together both its dimensions: the horizontal and the vertical. Christians and others build together the Reign of God whenever they commit themselves by common accord to the cause of human rights, and whenever they work for the integral liberation of each and every human person, but especially of the poor and the

oppressed. They also build the Reign of God by promoting religious and spiritual values.⁴² The Reign of God achieves its fullness only beyond history, at the eschatological times. But that perfect communion of all, which will be achieved only later, can be anticipated and celebrated through interreligious dialogue and harmony. Thus dialogue is both an anticipation of the Reign of God and a means for building the Reign.

6) *Understanding the Uniqueness Claims:* Openness to other religions need not deny or play down the claim that Jesus is the universal Saviour of humankind. However, it must be interpreted correctly. The NT says that Jesus is the “way” (Jn 14:6), the ‘one mediator’ (1 Tim 2:5) and the ‘only name’ (Acts 4:12) in whom human beings find salvation. These texts are not to be understood in a way that leads to an exclusivist theology. They are to be integrated into the entirety of biblical message and understood in context.

The context, for example, of Acts 4:12 is inter-Judaic or intra-Judaic. Here it is one Jew (Peter) addressing other Jews. Peter is giving an answer to the question that he was asked: ‘By what power or by what name did you perform the miracle’? And Peter’s answer to the Jewish religious leaders is, “that ‘there is no other name under heaven given’ to us *Jews*, in which it is established that we can be saved” (Acts 4:12).⁴³ This is not a context of Peter making a pronouncement on other

religions. To take this passage out of context and apply it to non-Jewish settings would be to violate the meaning and intent of the text.

1 Tim 2:5 speaks of Jesus as being the “one mediator between God and humankind,” and John 14:6 speaks of Jesus as being the “Way” to the Father. However, these texts do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that there are no saving values and seeds “of truth and grace” (*Ad gentes* 9), and ‘rays of truth’ (*Nostra Aetate* 2) in other religious traditions, and even possibly “participated meditations” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 5) of different degrees connected to the mediation of Jesus. In other words, when a biblical text affirms something about Jesus that statement should not be taken as excluding every other possibility even of a subordinate order. A statement made affirmatively should not be taken exclusively.⁴⁴ When it is said that Everest is the highest peak, while it means that there are no other peaks as high as Everest, it does not imply that there are no other peaks or no other peaks which are high.⁴⁵

The missionary commission entrusted to the Church by Jesus after the resurrection also should not be understood in an exclusive sense. The various texts (Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-18; Lk 24:47-49; Jn 20:21-23; Acts 1:8) emphasize different aspects of the mission. When we look at Mt 28:19-20 in the light of Mk

16:15-18 we realize that the texts do not say that there is no salvation without baptism but that there is no salvation without faith.⁴⁶

We have made only brief comments on these texts. They have to be analyzed and studied more in depth. However, our brief comments point to a possible way in which we can affirm the uniqueness of Jesus Christ while attributing salvific significance to other religions and their founders. The constitutive uniqueness of Jesus does not “nullify anything that is affirmed positively in the New Testament, with regard to the Jesus of history and the apostolic church, about the religious life and the religious traditions of others.... Indeed it explains that the effectiveness of salvation already operative within them, is due to the universal and effective presence of the risen Christ, become ‘transhistoric’ through the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection.”⁴⁷

4. CONCLUSION

In *Verbum Domini* Pope Benedict XVI points out that “encounter, dialogue and cooperation with all people of good will,” is an “essential part of the proclamation of the word” (no. 117). We have seen that the word of God, which all of us have a duty to bear witness to, presents an open attitude to other religious traditions. Faithfulness to the word demands that we work towards harmony among all religions so that ‘justice, peace

and joy' (Rom 14:17) may become a reality for all.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 839.
- ¹⁷ Senior and Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, p. 346, see also p. 17.
- ¹⁸ Joseph Pathrapankal, "Bible and World Religions: Salient Perspectives in a Pluralistic World," in Antony Kalliath, ed., *Pilgrims in Dialogue: A New Configuration of Religions for Millennium Community* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2000), p. 106.
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- ²⁷ Odasso, *Bibbia e Religioni*, p. 322
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DREAMING AN INTER-RELIGIOUS LIFE PNEUMATOLOGY AND INTER-FAITH

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1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this article may appear strange and provocative. Why is it not enough to affirm that religious life must be simply “religious”? Why do we have to become “inter-religious”? Some people will find this proposal dangerous or ambiguous to say the least. To be “inter-religious” implies to renounce the traditional traits of religious life and to enter into a new form without a clear identity.

That this title is provocative is confirmed by the concerns and the suspicions that the theology of inter-religious dialogue raises in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church¹. Let us call to mind the declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith *Dominus Jesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (2000). The purpose of that declaration was to avoid in the Church any sort of inter-religious relativism². That

is why we must ask ourselves again: Why do we dream of an inter-religious life? What is the main reason for such a dream?

Dreams come out in times of chaos and crisis. They have creative powers and are able to raise new visions and anticipate a new future. When dreams become true, perhaps, it is not yet the clear light of the day, but really the dawn is coming.

This article will be divided in three parts: 1) The situation: the need of an inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue; 2) theological discernment about that kind of dialogue; 3) Perspectives for religious life.

2. THE SITUATION: THE NEED OF AN INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

2.1. Starting point: the violence of the sacred

There are many reasons forcing us to enter into a new stage in the history of

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humanity, of the Church and of the Religious Life. This stage can be called inter-religious one.

The main reason is simply this: our planet needs peace and care, and unfortunately our history has been and it is still a history of wars, violence and destruction. Religions with their holy books, moral teachings and rites, have not been able to bring about peace; rather, they have contributed too much to this state of violence. The theory of “the Clash of Civilizations”, proposed by the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, states that people’s cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world.³ We can discuss about that theory; nevertheless, the real thing is that peace on earth is threatened and many times broken by the clash between religions. Facts of religious violence happen every day along the whole planet, but especially in some areas. There is an important amount of articles and books written, referring how this violence is evolving but never stopping⁴.

Among the different reasons for the collusion of religions, there is one that the thinker and theologian René Girard has studied and explained with success but also with controversy: “the violence and the sacred.”⁵ Girard proposes that much of human behavior is based on the desire of acquisition and appropriation of the object of imitation or mimetic behavior. When two individuals desire the same object and attempt to obtain it, their behavior

becomes conflictual and violence is generated. Violence prepares men’s bodies for battle. Through their subconscious impulses to destroy each other, they refocus their conflict outward: the scapegoat, a victim that is vulnerable and close at hand.⁶ They consider that the victim is the cause of all their problems; for that the victim has to be murdered. When this victim is murdered, the violence in the community seems to “magically” cease; but the peace achieved by the scapegoating process is not lasting. The process itself only lays the seeds for future violence. Girard claims that *the origin of religion is rooted in violence*. The violent practices in many religious traditions (sacrifice, inquisitions, crusades, self-mutilation) are self-evident. This violence of the sacred was revealed and unmasked by God, through the death of Jesus, that it wasn’t a sacrificial atonement, with no sacredness about it: it was a simple murder. The death of Jesus reveals to us the roots of human violence and the ultimate failure of all of our violent methods. That means, that while mimesis has become the root of violence, Jesus calls us to “mimese” (to imitate) Him.⁷ Rather than imitating our neighbors and falling into the trap of desiring what they desire, we should imitate Christ who imitates God.⁸

The response of Jesus to religious violence of the first century was often ignored, but it was never forgotten. Even during those centuries when the church herself persecuted Christian heretics, Jews,

and Muslims, some Christians still struggled to bear witness to the peace mandate of their Lord.⁹

Religious violence and violence against religions has brought destructions to people, places, and animals.¹⁰ To identify religion with violence is not right. The perspective of Girard is certainly controversial, but it is a serious warning against all kinds of fundamentalism and violence in religion. It helps us to re-interpret religion from the perspective of the victims.

We are aware in this time, better than never, that the religious experience has not to be connected with violence. The “spirit of Assisi” has manifested how the religious leaders of the main religions are absolutely interested in peace and inter-religious dialogue and how they defend the religious freedom in all the countries of the earth.

2.2. The four expansions of consciousness

Human consciousness has travelled a long evolutionary itinerary that we can call the “four expansions of consciousness.” The *first expansion* took place when individuals got together with other individuals to form a tribe and from here came the tribal identity. The *second expansion* was when individuals got together with other groups of individuals in a *nation-state*; thus creating a national identity. The *third expansion* was when very different nations got together, thus

creating a trans-national, international identity. The *fourth expansion* will come when our consciousness will become planetary.

We are then in the process of moving towards the fourth expansion of consciousness: a new vision into which are integrated human beings, animals and the environment, that is to say, *the global ecology of our planet*.

This fourth expansion of consciousness becomes possible, thanks to new virtues such as *hospitality* towards all human beings, *compassion* towards all manifestations of life, *humanness* against all forms of slavery, *equality* in face of all kinds of despotism, *shared prosperity* and *reciprocal respect* for the dignity of the person and life.

It reveals to us that there is no reason for a human being to be the enemy of another human being. We have given ourselves an artificial identity which is not real.¹¹ Our identity is not only “national” beings with frontiers, defending it with wars and weapons. Our identity is planetary and global. We are world citizens. We are led to exclude from the planet weapons and their manufacture, to put an end to a world bank at the service of greediness of the individuals and nations and set up another one truly responding to the basic need of all.

It advocates the integration of all and not a homogenisation. The planetary model

tries to articulate the difference and build a humanity which is in solidarity and balanced in a dynamic way.¹² Against the single uniform thought, it proposes the alternative of a single *integrating thought*. This planetary view calls us to learn to integrate diversity in a critical way. It is only in this way that we will be able to put an end to violence. A horizon of hope opens up here for humanity. If we respond in an adequate way, “another world is possible”.

This is the context in which we are dreaming an inter-religious life. We are called to abolish all kind of violence, to be at the side of the victims, to imitate the non-violence of Jesus. We are called, on the other hand, to become mediators of peace, or inter-religious peacemakers. This happens by means of a dialogue of heart, of feelings, and of life.

2.3. Challenged to become inter-religious mediators

We, religious, are especially equipped for this inter-religious dialogue. The memory of our monastic roots, our asceticism, our permanent reference to the Holy Mystery, makes us people fitted for the dialogue of life with other religious traditions and confessions. Beyond a dialogue at the theoretical level of beliefs, dogmas and ideas, we can commit ourselves to a dialogue of faith, of religious and mystical experiences, of compassion and charity.

The inter-religious dialogue is indispensable to reach peace in the world.

Following Hans Küng affirmation “no peace among the nations without peace among religions”, we can add “no peace among religions without the mediation of women and men religious” in an inter-faith dialogue. Inter-faith dialogue becomes an essential element of mission.

3. THE THEOLOGICAL DISCERNMENT: INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE

3.1. Changes in terminology: inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue, *missio inter gentes*

There has been a recent change in terminology from “inter-religious” to “inter-faith” dialogue. And advantage of the new terminology is that the emphasis is placed on “faith” rather than “belief.”¹³ There is a second moment of dialogue: it is like an intra-faith soliloquy, in which we internalize what we have learned and experienced from dialogue of life, of faith. The result will be an expanded human and religious consciousness.

So we are also in a new expansion of religious consciousness. We do not renounce our own faith but we open our minds and hearts to new horizons; we try to respect others in their own otherness. Dialogue, understood in such a way, as inter-faith dialogue, is one of the main issues in our times. The Catholic Church is aware of that and she is asking us to practice dialogue at four levels: dialogue of life, dialogue of action, theological dialogue and dialogue between religious and mystical experiences.¹⁴

The expansion of the religious consciousness is a factor of peace, of understanding among all the human beings. Religions, like peoples and cultures, are in an ongoing growth. Religions change and grow, when they establish interfaith encounters of partnership, and enter in contact with other religions or forms of faith.

From this perspective, mission is understood as *missio inter gentes*. In the perspective of violence, mission was understood as *missio contra gentes*, which is the concept of mission of the fundamentalists.

Without a radical rethinking of *what* mission is for, *how* it is to be carried out, *with whose* participation as partners, and *what goals* it seeks to achieve, it would be impossible to resolve the tension between dialogue and mission. The world has never been in greater need of both mission and dialogue as today. But the nature of that mission and the kind of dialogue that we need to carry this forward has yet to be discovered.¹⁵

We, religious women and men, are called to be involved in the inter-faith dialogue. But this does not happen automatically. We have to take care of the deepening of our life of faith. Our mission is not just to admire the other faith, but to share with them our experience of faith. Our hospitality of mind will allow us to be enriched with other experiences of faith. Then, our responsibility will lead us to internalize in an intra-dialogue what we

have received. So our religious consciousness will be expanded and prepared for a new understanding.

3.2. Dream and hope

Why do we have to dream an inter-religious life? It is because dreaming belongs to our experience of hope. A fundamental question of hope is: Where are we going? What do we hope for? Who hopes in us?¹⁶

The Marxist philosopher Bloch wrote a wonderful work in three volumes entitled, "*The Principle of Hope*". Bloch looks at the human being overwhelmed by *fear* and anxiety. Fear narrows down vital space. Hope gives breadth. The human being needs to learn the art of hope. Hope emerges in our *dreams*. There is no human being who does not dream. There are *night* dreams and *day-dreaming*. Night dreams send us back into the past. Day-dreaming opens to us the path of hope. It becomes necessary to intensify day-dreaming.¹⁷ The day-dreaming invades us from all sides. Life is criss-crossed by all these dreams of a better life. Dissatisfaction is a part of hope. There are many utopias in the day-dreaming of humanity: one is a society in inter-faith dialogue.

The presence of the Kingdom of God in the midst of us is the source inspiring all our dreams and our creativity. The vision of a happy, just, free or redeemed world gives energy to the present and gives significance to the struggle and the way.

Dreamers like Joaquim of Fiore envisioned a Church of total communion between all the different states of life. Dreamers, like some theologians of the inter-religious dialogue, are dreaming a trans-religious world in which all are in communion under the active presence of the Spirit. Our question now is: Is it the will of the Holy Spirit that this dream becomes true?

3.3. Pneumatology: the dreams of the Spirit

Theology of dialogue is Spirit-centered theology. She is the principal agent of the whole mission of the Church (RM, 21).

The Holy Spirit is not clearly the monopoly of the Christian churches; the Spirit is present in people of other faiths. Moltmann particularly points out that Yahweh's *ruah* is present in everything. A similar understanding of the Spirit as breath and life-giver can be found in the Asian concept of Chi.¹⁸

The Spirit is the very presence, the real presence of God, God-with-us, of the Risen Lord, Jesus-with-us.¹⁹ Although the Spirit in Christianity is not equated with an immanent and impersonal force, Jesus does say, "the wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but we do not know where it comes from and where it is going" (John 3:8).

It is important to recognize the similarities between the Holy Spirit and the other of her manifestations. With this

acceptance, it is then crucial to accept and welcome the Other who have different forms of expressing the same reality. The power of the Spirit can help build bridges that have been torn down by ignorance and dominance. The destructive powers of separation can be overcome through the Spirit. If God the Father and Jesus the Lord dwell within us through the Holy Spirit, it makes a difference in how we live, treat others and nature.

We live in a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural world. In this context, it is important to recognize the differences between people and the similarities among cultures and religions. This world is filled by the Spirit and the Spirit needs to be recognized by people of various cultures. As we examine the religions found in different parts of the world, we do not find many spirits; but find various names for the Spirit.²⁰ This pneumatology, in a certain sense, is ratified by *Dominus Jesus*, n.12, which states: "The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions... The Risen Christ is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit... Again, it is the Spirit who sows the 'seeds of the word' present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ".

The Spirit aids our perception, sharpens our self-awareness, and reminds us of others who need our love and service. It is a spirit that bonds and pulls humanity

closer with all other living creatures. It will sustain us and keep us aware of our interconnectedness and inter-reliance.

A global understanding of the Spirit will work towards eliminating injustice and racism within society, open doors for inter-religious dialogue, and make the world a better place for all those who inhabit it.

4. PERSPECTIVES: THE PRAXIS FOR AN INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-FAITH RELIGIOUS LIFE

4.1. The virtues of an inter-religious life

Catherine Cornille first presumes that we are all for dialogue. Then she lays out the fundamental virtues engaging in dialogue. There are five: humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality. The practice of these will lead one to confront and to revise the theological issues.²¹

Humility flows from the recognition that the truths we know are part of a Truth that we can never fully know. So humility makes space for the necessity of learning from the other. Without *commitment* to one's own tradition, dialogue becomes either New Age syncretism or inter-religious tourism. If dialogue is a genuine exchange, one must have some goods to exchange. Commitment must not just allow, but facilitate openness. Amid the splendid diversity of religions, there is something that *interconnects* them. But the theological-philosophical question is: How

do we understand this ground of interconnection? How do we describe it without imposing it?

Our approach to other religions also requires *empathy*. We cannot look at them simply from the outside; we have to somehow step into them. Catherine calls *hospitality* "the sole sufficient condition for dialogue," and understands it as "an attitude of openness and receptivity to . . . the possible truth" in the religious other. Dialogue can happen only between friends. And friends do not rank each other as superior or inferior; among friends there is mutual learning and mutual challenging. The virtue of hospitality focuses the theological problem that hovers over all the other virtues; what friends avoid, religions have traditionally proclaimed, namely, assertions of finality or superiority.

4.2. The spirituality of religious inter-faith dialogue: a "creation-centered spirituality"

Our tradition in Christianity and Judaism honors the sacredness of creation, esteems women and feminine values, embraces the arts, prizes love, wisdom, prophesy and mysticism, and seeks to bring about gender, social and ecological justice. It affirms the presence of divinity in all things, ensuring that the world and human beings are basically good and holy.

This is a very good starting point for an inter-spirituality of dialogue. How do we deepen this understanding of creation

spirituality in the world's religions and to begin a cultural translation of it?

Inspired by Meister Eckhart's mystical vision, the theologian Matthew Fox identifies four major ways connecting people to divinity in and beyond the world.²² The first path, *via positiva*, is encountering divinity through experiences of awe and delight in the cosmos. The second path, *via negativa*, is encountering divinity through experiences of loss, suffering, darkness, and the emptying out of the self. The third path, *via creativa*, is meeting divinity through creative activity, especially through contemplative approaches to the arts. The fourth path, *via transformativa*, is becoming an agent of divinity by using one's creative energy to transform self and society through acts of compassion and justice. The four paths are interconnected; they are more like facets of a single prism or aspects of a complex symphony.

We need the courage of an inter-faith and ecumenical vision, for the sake of a greater spiritual vision and practice of diversity- in-unity. An inclusive inter-faith vision requires some degree of acceptance and reconciliation with persons, peoples and groups who held radically different views.

We have to continually challenge us to become mystics, prophets and creative agents of change in our own way of life. This means getting in touch with the sacred

calling at the heart of our call and mission and reinventing our mission so that it serves that calling.

4.3. The new paradigm of inter-religious formation

We have to re-vision our formation and education to serve our pluralistic world. We have to learn how to perform inter-faith ministries. Inspired by Didier Pollefeyt, I would like to finish my reflection with some words about the inter-religious formation.²³

The growth of secularization, pluralism and globalization has placed our traditional mono-religious formation and education under pressure. We have to try to give an answer to this question of multi-religiosity by developing a multi-religious concept of religious formation. This approach distinguishes itself from mono-religious formation. Religious formation thus becomes a place of encounter and dialogue between different religious convictions. Inter-religious formation distinguishes itself from the multi-religious model of formation. In the inter-religious model of formation, religious are not only informed, but are introduced to the cognitive and value commitments underlying the different religions, giving them the opportunity to enrich and develop their own personal religious identity.

The inter-religious model aims to a formation that invites religious to hold a proper religious identity while having

openness to the religious other. Besides, an authentic religiosity is able to welcome the other in his/her vulnerability and strength as a witness to God. This is a new paradigm for religious formation and education that we need to rediscover.

5. CONCLUSION

We have not to be afraid of an inter-religious life. There no risk of losing our identity traits. Our vocation comes from the Holy Spirit. She opens our hearts, minds and lives to a friendly dialogue with sisters and brothers of other religions and faiths.

We are challenged to deepen our experience of faith, even to enter into the mystical stage of our spirituality. Every path of spirituality ends in the same point: in the new Jerusalem, the city of all, the city in which everybody is called to feel at home, in covenant with God, the Abbá, Jesus the Lord, the Holy Spirit, all the creation and with all human beings.

We need to learn more and more the art of “inter-religiosity,” inter-faith and inter-formation.

The Christian apocalyptic looks on the present world with hope in the success of the Covenant of God with humanity and nature. It judges the present from the point of view of redemption. This point of view allows us to see the present, its dissatisfactions and its frustrations, as “groanings while waiting its full realisation” and not as a fateful misfortune. The

profane order tends towards pessimism. The messianic order revolutionises, not as a passive expectation of something big which will happen, but as a present demand of something which will be given to us.

We, the religious, experience that we have to renew our Covenant with God, with all peoples and with the earth in this time. The way is to become inter-religious and to welcome in us a new and a deeper identity.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001); John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions, The rainbow of faiths* (Westminster: John Knox Press, Kentucky 1995).
- ² The stated purpose was to “recall to Bishops, theologians, and all the Catholic faithful, certain indispensable elements of Christian doctrine.” There was a perception that the “The Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories” and by a “mentality of indifferentism.” Ratzinger said that some principles of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) are being “manipulated” and “wrongfully surpassed.”
- ³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

- ⁴ Among the many books and articles written on this topic, I present here some of them, in which is presented violence in different religions and areas of the globe: Al-Rasheed, Madawi, and Marat Shterin, eds. *Dying for Faith: Religiously Motivated Violence in the Contemporary World* (London: I .B. Tauris, 2009); Cavanaugh, William T., *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ*, (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998); Id., *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Cooper, Terry D., *Dimensions of Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Crockett, Clayton, ed., *Religion and Violence in a Secular World: Toward a New Political Theology* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006); Eagleton, Terry, *Holy Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Ellens, J. Harold, ed. *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 4 vols. (Westport: Praeger, 2004); Fernandes, Edna, *Holy Warriors: A Journey into the Heart of Indian Fundamentalism* (New Delhi: Viking, 2006); Ganiel, Gladys, *Evangelicalism and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Gray, John, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 2007); Hall, John R., Philip Daniel Schuyler, and Sylvaine Trinh, *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements, and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan* (London: New York, 2000); Hinnells, John, and Richard King, eds. *Religion and Violence in South Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Isherwood, Lisa, and Rose mary Radford Ruether, eds. *Weep Not for Your Children: Essays on Religion and Violence* (London: Equinox, 2008); Jefferis, Jennifer L., *Religion and Political Violence: Sacred Protest in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2010); Maguire, Daniel C., and Sa' diyya Shaikh, eds. *Violence Against Women in Contemporary World Religions: Roots and Cures* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2007); Nussbaum, Martha, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007); Pahl, Jon., *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Palmer-Fernandez, Gabriel, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Religion and War* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Selengut, Charles, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*, 2nded. Lanham (MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Timmerman, Christiane, ed., *Faith-based Radicalism: Christianity, Islam and Judaism Between Constructive Activism and Destructive Fanaticism* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2007); Wicker, Brian, ed., *Witnesses to Faith?: Martyrdom in Christianity and Islam* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006);

- ⁵ Girard, René, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001); Id, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Id. *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Followers of Girard: cf. Alison, James, *Raising Abel: The Recovery of Eschatological Imagination* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1996); Bailie, Gil. *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995); Bartlett, Anthony W. *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001); Bellinger, Charles K. *The Genealogy of Violence: Reflections on Creation, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Fraser, Giles, *Christianity and Violence: Girard, Nietzsche, Anselm and Tutu* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001); Marr, Andrew, *Tools for Peace: The Spiritual Craft of St. Benedict and René Girard* (Lincoln, NE: Universe, 2007); Reineke, Martha Jane, *Sacrificed Lives: Kristeva on Women and Violence* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); Swartley, Willard M., ed., *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies, and Peacemaking*, Telford, PA: Pandora Press, 2000; Yves Michaud, *La violence* (Paris: Universitaires de France, 1998);
- ⁶ In the list of possible victims, Girard enumerates the following: children, old people, those with physical abnormalities, women, members of ethnic or racial minorities, the poor, and those whose natural endowments (beauty, intelligence, charm) or status (wealth, position) mark them as exceptional.
- ⁷ Willard M. Swartley (ed), *Violence renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies and peacemaking* (Telford Pandora, 2000), pp. 218-245.
- ⁸ Several world religions point to diverting our normal human desires to supernatural spheres, rather than on material things. Another application of mimesis that rather than following an acquisitive mimesis, theorists have proposed that we capitalize on the Social Learning Theories and try to divert mimesis to positive ends, like consciously modeling constructive and reconciliatory behaviors: cf. Swartley, ed. *Violence Renounced: René Girard, Biblical Studies and Peacemaking*, 2000.
- ⁹ In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas wrote a theology to help his Dominican brothers persuade Cathar Christians to return to their Catholic faith peacefully. Ramon Lull, a Christian student of Arabic and the Qur'an, sought to help his fellow Christians recognize the elements of belief they shared in common with the Muslims in their midst. In the fifteenth century, Nicholas of Cusa, a Church Cardinal and theologian, expanded Lull's project to include the newly discovered religions of Asia. All these theologians reclaimed the peace mandate of Jesus in their

- response to the religious violence of their own eras: cf. Roger A. Johnson, *Peacemaking and Religious Violence: From Thomas Aquinas to Thomas Jefferson* (Pickwick Publications, 2009).
- ¹⁰ René Girard, *La violence et le sacré*, ed. Bernard Grasset, Paris 1972; R.E.S. Tanner, *Violence and Religion: Cross-cultural Opinions and Consequences* (New Delhi: Mittal, 2007) It is an excellent description of inter-religious violence in this time.
- ¹¹ Those who have organised the world have done so for their own growth, to feed their greed, their ambition and their profit. These powerful people have become insensitive to the cries of the earth and of the human beings dwelling on it. The emperors, drunk with power, play their harps while the world falls into ruin: cf. Eudald Carbonell, *Elnacimiento de una nueva conciencia* (Ara Libres, Badalona, 2007), pp. 70-72.
- ¹² E. Carbonell, *o.c.*, pp. 70.71.
- ¹³ Gerard Hall, *Interfaith Dialogue: Theology, Practice and Promise*, in Hans-Georg Ziebertz and Friedrich Schweitzer (eds), *Dreaming the Land: Theologies of Resistance and Hope*, International Academy of practical Theology (Brisbane 2005, Lit Verlag, Berlin 2007), pp. 94-116.
- ¹⁴ See two excellent pontifical documents of the pontifical Council for inter-religious dialogue: “Dialogue and Mission” (1984) and “Dialogue and Proclamation” (1991).
- ¹⁵ Wesley Ariarajah, “Inter-religious Dialogue and Missión in the protestant Theology,” in *Modern Believing* (July 1 2010), p.46.
- ¹⁶ Ernst Bloch, *Elprincipio Esperanza*, 3vol., Biblioteca Filosófica (Madrid: Aguilar, 1977), Voll, p.XI.
- ¹⁷ He speaks of *night dreams* –thus translated by Freud also!-born from the past. On the contrary, *day dreams*, with open eyes, look to the future. There are open-eyed dreams that are pure evasion and which avoid the confrontation with reality. But there are others where the imagination is the instrument of the thought and the projects.
- ¹⁸ Paul S. Chung, “The Mystery of God and Tao in Jewish-Christian-Taoist Context” p. 243-266 in *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, edited by Paul S. Chung, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, and Kim Kyoung-Jae (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2007); Admiel Kosman, “Breath, Kiss and Speech as the Source of the Animation of Life: Ancient Foundations of Rabbinic Homilies on the Giving of the Torah as the Kiss of God”, in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience*, edited by A.I. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, G. G. Stroumsa (LeidenBrill, 1998). Nevertheless, the Vatican document *Dominus Jesus*, n. 12, advises about a danger: “There are also those who propose the hypothesis of an economy of the Holy Spirit with a more universal breadth than that of the Incarnate Word, crucified and risen.

This position also is contrary to the Catholic faith, which, on the contrary, considers the salvific incarnation of the Word as a Trinitarian event. In the New Testament, the mystery of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, constitutes the place of the Holy Spirit's presence as well as the principle of the Spirit's effusion on humanity, not only in messianic times (cf. *Acts* 2:32-36; *Jn* 7:39, 20:22; *1 Cor* 15:45), but also prior to his coming in history (cf. *1 Cor* 10:4; *1 Pet* 1:10-12).

¹⁹ Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son & Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology*, T & T Clark, London, 2003, 118; Rebecca Button Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist*

Perspective, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999), p. 17.

²⁰ Kiam, Grace Ji-Sun, *A Global Understanding of the Spirit*, in "Dialogue & Alliance", 21 (2007), pp.17-31. This is a study of the names of the Spirit in other religions.

²¹ Catherine Cornille, *The Impossibility of Inter-religious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008).

²² Mathew Fox, *Original Blessing: Creation Spirituality* (Santa Fe: M.N. Bear, 2000).

²³ Didier Pollefeyt, *Inter-religious Learning* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007).

HINDU MONASTICISM AND INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Swami Paramasukhananda

As a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, this theme has been very dear to the heart of the author. The attempt made in this article is to share some of the important aspects of the topic, which are drawn from the Hindu Scriptures and related literatures published by Ramakrishna Ashram. Let us begin with a brief exposition of Hindu Monasticism along with the unique contribution made to it by Swami Vivekananda. Next will be a statement on Hinduism and its inherent openness to other pathways, followed by a call for inter-religious harmony, its importance, obstacles and futuristic scope.

1. INTRODUCTION

What is the secret of happiness? This question has haunted humanity for centuries. On a realistic analysis of human life, we find that no one is satisfied in life. Every one desires a thing, thinking that,

that object will give him joy and happiness. But the moment he gets it, he feels it is not sufficient. He sees the emptiness of it, and wants something else. Thus he goes on, eternally dissatisfied, always unhappy, and ceaselessly struggling for something which he himself does not know.

In addition to this, there is a question in every mind, that “who can free me from the snares and dangers of this world?” This eternal dissatisfaction and fear indicates the desire that man wants infinite freedom, security and love. All the actions in human life are for gaining that infinite freedom, security and love which will be in the form of attaining everlasting fulfillment.

According to the *Vedas*, our identifications with the unreal, namely our body-mind complex, is the cause for all the pains and sufferings. The moment we know our true nature, our spiritual nature,

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we find ourselves already free. Therefore, self knowledge is the means of attaining the ever-existing freedom.

2. HINDU MONASTICISM: A PATH TO ATTAIN SELF-KNOWLEDGE

There is a daily prayer prescribed in the Veda, the ancient basic Hindu Scripture, for every Hindu. “O Lord, lead us from the unreal to the spiritual reality, lead us from ignorance to self-knowledge, lead us from the death to immortality. Om Peace! Peace! Peace! (*Brihadaranyaka Upanaishad*, 1.3.28). This prayer contains the ultimate goal of human life, the means of attaining that goal, and the benefit of attainment. Through this prayer, Veda describes that transformation from the false-identity to identifying ourselves with the spiritual reality as the goal of life. Identification with the spiritual reality will be in the form of knowledge of the spiritual reality. Therefore, self-knowledge becomes the means. Immortality, which is in the form of freedom from all types of limitations, while living, is the benefit of the attainment of the goal.

2.1. Four Divisions of Human life Span

The Vedic vision of life sets human life as a graded approach to attain this self-knowledge. For this purpose, it divides the life into four stages—*brahmacharya*, *grahasta vanaprastha* and *sanyāsa* — and calls each stage as *ashrama*. This word denotes a place wherein spiritual disciplines are practiced. The first and second stages mentioned above are called

pravriti mārga, the path of action, which constitutes religion, discussed in *karma kānda* as “pursuit of religion.” Third and fourth stages mentioned above are called *nivṛti mārga*, the path of withdrawal which constitutes spirituality, discussed in *jnāna kānda* as “pursuit of knowledge.”

Again there are a few rare people who find that their mind is already prepared and they want to devote themselves exclusively to the pursuit of self-knowledge. Such people are exempted from second and third stages and are allowed to take *sanyasa* (total renunciation) in their youth itself, but not allowed to come back to married life.

2.2. Sanyasa: the Pursuit of Self-Knowledge

According to Vedic vision, *sanyāsa* is the only means prescribed for gaining self-knowledge. The well-known mantra reads: “Neither by action nor by progeny nor by wealth but by total renunciation alone has one attained immortality or self-knowledge (*Mahanarayana Upanishad*, 13). The idea is that, one has to give up all the worldly desires and attachments in order to gain the freedom. *Sanyasa* leads to the pursuit of self-knowledge which, in turn, leads to freedom. Goal of human life is *jīvanmukti* (freedom while living and not after the death).

2.3. Inner Qualifications of a Sanyasin

A *Sanyasin* should manifest the following qualities. There has to be an

intense desire for self-knowledge (*mumukshutva*) and renunciation of all identifications based on physical relationships (*abhimānatyāga*). As a part of the *Sannyasa* ritual, a *Sanyasin* has to perform *śrāddha* (a ritual performed for the departed souls) to himself and to his parents even if they are alive. Thus he is dead to all the physical identifications and newly born in the world of Spirit. That is why he is given a new *sanyasa* name. The next quality is *abhaya-pradhānam* by which he or she assures the whole creation of non-violence and fearlessness declaring that “no danger to aught that lives,” and “I will not compete with any one in worldly attainments. I am complete and fulfilled and hence need nothing.” Besides there has to be also purity of body, speech and mind (*kāyika- vācika- mānasa śauca*). A *Sanyasin* lives in a spirit of detachment like flowing water, helping and teaching all spiritual seekers who approach him for guidance and knowledge.

2.4. Freedom Given to a Monk

To such a Sannyasin, who has been endowed with these inner qualifications, Vedic Society accords a certain freedom. A *Sanyasin* need not observe any external pujas and rituals. Study of Vedantic literatures (*jnāna yajna*) under the guidance of a spiritual teacher, is his mode of worship. He was not expected to practice priest craft as he should not perpetuate ritualism; instead he should teach spirituality and self-knowledge. He has the eligibility to question dogmatic

religious theologies as he is matured enough to know that true religion does not consist in believing in dogmas and doctrines, but in direct perception of the Truth.

2.5. Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to Sanyasa Tradition

India's greatest men, who brought about all social and religious revolutions, who infused new energy and strength in to the practices of Hindu religion, and who changed the concept of religion by their new interpretation of ancient Hindu Scriptures were all *Sanyasins*.¹ Among these, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have greatly changed the concept of Hindu Traditional Monasticism. The hoary tradition of *Sanyasa* received a fresh impetus in the nineteenth century through the lives and teachings of these great men. Through their example and precept, they placed the motto of *Sanyasa* ideal in a simple and profound way, suited to modern age. Swami Vivekananda expressed it as *ātmano moksārtham jagaddhitāya cha* which means “for one's liberation and for the good of others.”

Swami Vivekananda often spoke of the monks as those involved in service of the society, teaching the spiritual and secular knowledge to the masses. Without compromising the core values of *Sanyasa*, he strongly drew the attention of Hindu monastic communities to this new way of looking at *Sanyasa*. He brought a new awareness in their conscience. According

to him, *Sannyasa* means “the love of death.” Worldly people love life. The *Sanyasin* is to love death. We must die, that is certain; let us die then for a good cause. Let all our actions—eating, drinking, and everything that we do—tend towards the sacrifice of our self. A *Sanyasin* is born “for the good of many, for the happiness of many.”

He urged them to live within the social set-up and serve others. Service to others is service to God, because what we call as world is only a manifestation of the Lord. He wanted the *Sanyasins* to put in to practice the famous adage “*Jiva is Shiva*.” Entire life-time can be devoted to understand this fact. This adage tells us that worship of God need not be restricted to worship only in images, since; God is manifested more in human beings than in the images of stone and wood. Human being is the highest altar for worshipping the Lord. Serving human being is serving the Lord.

He derived scriptural sanction for his new interpretation of *Sannyasa* from the following Scriptural passages: “With hands and feet everywhere, with eyes, heads and mouths everywhere, with ears everywhere, He, the Lord, exists in the world, enveloping all” (*Bhagavat Gita 13.14*). “I am ever present in all living beings, as their inner Self. One who worships Me only through an idol, showing disrespect to the living beings, makes a travesty of worship” (*Bhagavatam III: 29.21*).

“Therefore, one should worship Me, who is abiding in all creatures as their very Self, through charitable gifts, with due respect, with friendly attitude, with the knowledge of Oneness” (*Bhagavatam III: 9.27*).

As mentioned earlier, *abhaya-pradhana* is one of the important vows of a *Sanyasin*. According to Swami Vivekananda, it does not mean a mere withdrawal from the competition, rather, it should lead to making the entire world happy by service and by helping them to live meaningful lives. Moreover, serving others gives one plenty of opportunities to get mature and wise. By closely witnessing worldly bondage and its sufferings, one can keep one’s dispassion burning. Through his encounters with the testing situations, a *Sanyasin* can assess his purity and dispassion.

2.6. Inter-Religious Harmony as the Goal of *Sannyasa*

Thus, sincere monastic life leads to self-knowledge which enables one to discover the infinite freedom. Natural consequence of self-knowledge is harmony with the entire world and, with the foundational wisdom of all religions. He has found out that “unity in diversity” is the scheme of the Universe. As the Veda says: “He who sees all beings in himself, and himself in all beings, feels no hatred. (*Ishavasya Upanishad - 6*). “For him, who has realized that the entire universe is Himself, what delusion and what sorrow can there be?” (*Ishavasya Upanishad: 7*).

Because of the guidance and teachings of great Spiritual Leaders who happened to be monks, Hinduism, as a whole, was never intolerant and never engaged itself in forceful conversion. It was ever ready to assimilate good and noble ideas from any religion and culture. *Rig Veda* says: *Ano bhadrāh kratavo yāntu viúvatah, which means* “let noble thoughts come to us from every side” (*Rig Veda*). Hinduism gave refuge to persecuted people from all religions, from all parts of the world. Till date, India has the unique distinction of having the most religiously pluralistic population. In no other nation in the world can one find people of varied religious faiths living together harmoniously for millennia.

3. HINDUISM AND ITS PERCEPTIVENESS OF UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Rig Veda declares: *ekam sat viprah bahudhā vadanti*. “Truth is One. Wise men describe it in many ways”. From the beginning of the human civilization itself, Vedic Rishis discovered the truth that “unity in diversity” as the scheme of the universe. They discovered that, variation is the law of nature, and no two persons are born equal in every respect. Obviously, one method cannot suit everyone. One dish cannot satisfy all the members of the family. Nor is it desirable. This difference and variation is what constitutes life. Death-like uniformity would be the cessation of all life. Therefore, no single faith or religion can serve as the faith of the whole humanity.

Vedic Rishis found out the truth that, behind the mass of apparent variations, shines the unity, which is nothing but Spiritual Oneness of mankind, transcending all limitations of time, space and causality. The difference is only one of form and not of substance. The *Shukla Yajur Veda* says: “It is the same pure Brahman, which is the absolute that is manifesting itself as the Fire, the Sun, the Moon, the planets, the Water and the God Prajāpati.” (*Shukla Veda*, 32. 1). Finding this Oneness, this search after the Lord, who is the common bond of kinship that binds man to man and man to all beings is the essence of true religion.

The worshipper should be gradually led to see in those forms, higher and higher aspects of reality, by gradual internal evolution, until he is able to see the highest transcendental Absolute in them. We, each one of us, approach reality with our own orientations. The more we empty ourselves of our selfishness, the more the reality fills up our heart; the more we cleanse our mind of the fleshy attachments and attractions, the more the effulgent light of the divine reality is reflected in it.

A good deal of hatred, bitterness, and suffering among the followers of different religions can be avoided if we approach religion bearing this truth in mind. The nearer we approach the reality, the clearer and broader becomes our perception of it.

One cannot jump out of his own nature and overnight become a changed man, at

somebody else's bidding. Spiritual growth is a slow process from within, and the person is to be slowly prepared for receiving higher ideals of religion. Krishna says in *Bhagavat Gita*: "Let no wise-man unsettle the minds of ignorant-people, who are attached to various modes of worships and duties. Wise-man should engage them in all duties, by living a model life performing all the duties himself" (*Bhagavat Gita*, 3.26).

4. CONTRIBUTION TO INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Being guided by the universal philosophy of Oneness and by the wise-men, who have realized the truth, Hinduism never believed in or professed a particular doctrine as the single faith, nor did it go out of its way to convert others to its own faith. Doctrines bordering on the lowest form of fetishism to the highest form of absolutism find an honorable place in Hinduism.

Harmony of religions does not mean uniformity, but unity in diversity. In the context of religion, harmony need not be attained, but its ever-existing presence has to be discovered by deepening our God-consciousness and understanding the teachings of all religions. To discover the ever-existing inter-religious harmony, must be the goal of every seeker in our times.

4.1. Need to Form a United Front Based on Universal Aspects

History of the world shows that, theological validity and emotional security,

which are indispensable for higher human goals and peaceful society, can't be provided merely by any atheistic or materialistic philosophy. Religions of the world alone have the required strength and stamina to fight all the social evils and restore ethical values in the society, and to guide the humanity towards higher goals of life.

To achieve this, all religions will have to forge a united front based on universal aspects of every faith. For good or bad, the religions of the world have been brought face to face with each other, and they cannot flee away and hide themselves in a cozy corner of their own shells. No faith can afford to be exclusive in these days of globalization. They have to find ways and means to come together. This is the challenge of the times thrown to all the religions of the world. Neither religions can afford to fight and destroy each other as in the past, nor will any attempt to bring together the people of all faiths under the banner of one religion be fruitful.

4.2. Challenge of Overcoming Exclusivism

Swami Vivekananda declared in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893: "If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness and charity are not the exclusive passions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. If anybody

dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance, 'help and not fight,' 'assimilation and not destruction,' 'harmony and peace and not dissension.'

We have to understand that, religion is not man-made. It is given by God and it is His will that there should be many religions to suit different types of people. Therefore, the so-called powerful religious leaders can't erase other faiths from the face of the globe, however much they may try. Religion is the outcome of man's inner urge for freedom, for the Infinite. Different religions represent different aspects of that struggle. The fact is, as Sri Ramakrishna says: *yato mat tato pat* (as many faiths so many paths). All faiths are true and valid.

Krishna says in *Bhagavat Gita*: "In whatever way men approach Me, even so do I reach them; All men are struggling through various paths which in the end lead to Me, the Transcendental Truth" (*Bhagavat Gita*: 4.11). There is nothing intrinsically wrong with a particular form of worship one is devoted to. For example, worship of Kali form, which was considered as demonic worship by those who didn't understand its spiritual significance, was recognized as the highest expression of divine reality by wise-men like Sri Ramakrishna and Ram Prasad.

Similarly Christian sacrament is recognized as most holy and expression of divine sacrifice by all Christian saints and devotees. But, non-believers, who don't understand its spiritual significance, may look at it as the expression of "lowest cannibalism". They may think that the killing of a noble man and the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood, to get the good qualities of that nobleman, even if it is offered by that noble man, is cannibalism.

4.3. Searching for the Universal and Foundational Principles

Much of the misunderstanding, dissension and quarrelling among the religionists is because they fail to recognize the distinction between true religion which is based on universal principles and religion as an institution, comprising particular forms, ceremonies and doctrines. The more the worshiper is elevated to higher spiritual levels, the more he understands the true significance of various forms of worship.

On the other hand, without understanding the spiritual significance of various forms of worship, he who exalts his own religion at the expense of other religions, is actually defaming his own religion. The very arguments that are directed against the other religions may equally well be applied against his own religion. Once, a western Christian missionary was arguing with Swami Vivekananda. The Missionary said:

“Christianity is the only true religion because all the Christian nations are powerful and rich”. Swami Vivekananda replied politely: “Hindus say, that is the reason why Christianity is not the true religion. True religion can’t perpetuate worldly and materialistic goals”.

Therefore, what we need is, not the change of form or ceremony but a real understanding of the principles behind them and the transformation of the character of the worshipper. The role of religion in human life should be understood clearly by all, especially by the religious leaders. It is meant to help humanity to develop noble character, to get inner maturity and to find solution for human sufferings through finding the Lord in his life. Every religion lays maximum emphasis on the concept of love, service to the humanity and other noble qualities.

Religion is not meant to protect and defend God himself as God does not need our defense and protection. Nor is it meant to protect the materialistic selfish interest of the religious institutions. There can be no place for selfishness in any form, in any true religion.

4.4. Obstacles for Inter-Religious Harmony

If we accept that helping humanity in finding the Lord is the purpose of religion, then we find that there are five obstacles in realizing that purpose, and to live in inter-faith harmony.

4.4.1. Ignorance of One’s own Religion

This is the main obstacle in attaining inter-religious harmony. In any religious community, the religious awareness varies greatly among its followers. There are three types of followers: Religious Materialists, Fanatics and Sincere Seekers.

Religious materialists: Vast majority of the any religion are materialists. They don’t know any thing about God or about the basics of their own religion. Religion is for them one of the means to gain more money, and comforts in this world. They are called “religious materialists.”

Fanatics: There is a sizable section, those who have some idea of their own religion, which is often incomplete and incorrect. They have strong notions about their faiths and consider those notions as the only correct ones. They are governed by dogmas and doctrines. They are called “fanatics.” These fanatics are a major obstacle in achieving inter-religious harmony, since they deliberately engage themselves in preaching their notions.

Sincere seekers: Only very few have a clear conception of basic philosophy and tenets, of the ultimate goal and unique deeper aspects of their religion. They try to realize these principles in their lives. They are called sincere seekers. They don’t have time and interest in quarrelling with others, since their mind is filled with the love of the Lord. They are the true

representatives of their religion. They have recognized universal presence of the Lord and therefore, strive for the inter-religious consonance.

4.4.2. Fear

Due to the ignorance of philosophy and basic teachings of one's own religion, there is a fear in the minds of majority of the followers, that if we study other religious scriptures, then we may have to acknowledge the truth and logic explained in those religions. Fear of losing one's identity, fear of one's faith being shaken, fear of having to acknowledge the truth in other faiths, makes these followers, not to venture into the study and understanding of other religious views.

4.4.3. Fanaticism

There is a strong notion in the mind of every fanatic, that his Almighty God is the only God, and the faith he has is the only correct one. Generally they lack in thinking ability. Their life is driven by strong emotions. Swami Vivekananda describes them as "frogs in the well." Fanatics are not available for any reconciliation and discussion. If one's religion is the only truth, then why should one preach it? Even without being preaching, truth will surely make its own way. No opposition will be able to stop its progress. If it is not the truth, then also, how can you succeed in forcing it? The universal law is: "Truth alone Triumphs." The fanatics look at people of other faiths as infidels, and, therefore, they hate them. They don't know the fact that

hatred and love can't co-exist in a same mind. Due to this hatred, they perpetuated violence. By these violent acts, they actually defame God and the Religion they represent. As long as this fanaticism is in the mind of a human being, as long as this "animal in man" is not brought under control, truly speaking, inter-religious harmony is a far cry.

The result of this fanaticism is that a great reaction has come in the minds of people against these converting religions, and they are not ready to welcome even those universal teachings which are found in that religion. Every religious sect was created as a protest against the inequities of the prevailing religious practices of a time, but, in course of time, becomes the victim of its own inequities.

4.4.4. Distorted Notion of Conversion

Real conversion means, a change of heart from a life of indulgence in sensory pleasures to a life of spiritual peace and wisdom culminating in perfection. No one objects to this type of conversion. Religious leaders should aim at this sort of conversion if they are true to their religious convictions. There will not be any need for any religious propaganda through questionable methods. Truth does not need any support of violence, money power and social customs to convert the people. The fact that the conversion depends on money and brutal power, shows the lack of intrinsic strength in that religion. The sad condition of certain

religious organizations is that in order to get the financial assistance from its followers, they show the success of their work in the form of number of converts. Numbers, however, don't make religion to grow. A hundred enlightened men like our Desert Fathers, can revolutionize the entire world with their love and spirituality. Even the most peaceful attempts in converting others, though successful from the point of view of numbers added to the fold, are a failure from the point of view of the acceptance of the faith. Conversion based on numbers is not the ways religions can grow. If a religion converts taking advantage of the ignorance and poverty of people, the problem is not going to be solved. Such a religion cannot hope to grow with unfaithful people, who are bought by showing few loaves of bread. Those who got converted for the sake of money and worldly inducements, can never be faithful to that religion.

4.4.5. Material Goals

Fanatics have materialistic goals more than preaching their Lord. They have an in-ordinate desire to rule the entire world. Fanatics make religion a trade, and misuse it to become rich and powerful. Jesus scolded Scribes and Pharisees who were using religion as a trade, "ye fools and blind; for which is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifies the gold?" You can wake up a person who is really sleeping, but not those who pretend to sleep with particular motive. Similarly, you can

educate any ignorant but not the intelligent with ulterior motives.

4.5. Futuristic Scope for Inter-Religious Harmony

We need to approach inter-religious dialogues with a broad mind. It is not meant to convert the other to any particular faith, nor for establishing its own prejudices. Prejudices undermine peace and harmony and keep millions of people from all over the world in darkness. An in-depth knowledge of one's own religion will be of much help in enabling one to develop an attitude of mutual respect. Every religion has its own theology and philosophy, norms, rituals and ceremonies. It is necessary that every religion re-examines its doctrines and practices from time to time, to separate the chaff from the grain, and set its house in order, which, in turn, creates a better climate and atmosphere to engage people of other faiths in a more fruitful way.

Since, truth can be expressed in a hundred different ways, there must be sincere attempts to redefine and reinterpret ancient texts of every religion. We must find out the modes of resolution and affirmation. The sincere seekers who are well-educated and intelligent should strive to convince the fanatics to understand their religion properly.

4.6. Universal Religion

Universal religion includes all stages of spiritual evolution, from the lowest image-

worship up to absolutism. A religion built around a particular personality may satisfy some, but certainly not all.

Swami Vivekananda defines universal religion as follows: “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details”.

Based on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, there are a few maxims that can be conducive to the growth of harmony of religions:

1. Do not destroy: Help if you can; if not, fold your hands and stand by as a witness. Any one can be devoted to any particular path and to any particular chosen ideal. But without being fanatical or bigoted, he should give liberty to others also to follow their own ways.
2. Take man from where he stands and from there give him a lift: Let every seeker have his own mythologies, rituals, and mysticism, which may be irrational, according to others, if he feels that they really help him on his journey in God.

3. Be Guided by the universal principles of every religion while judging others: To get rid of fanaticism, we must ourselves be better informed about other religious faith. Let us study the scriptures of other religions and understand their vital principles. Let us recognize the fact of unity in diversity as the scheme of universe.
4. Be a Sincere Seeker of Truth: The role of religion must be to help everyone, as Jesus Christ says, to “discover the Kingdom of God within.” Sincere seekers don’t indulge in petty quarrels and don’t make little sects.

5. CONCLUSION

This human life is so precious and we all have received the “call of the Lord” as monastics, in order to love Him and find the “Kingdom of heaven within us.” Let us stop being professional preachers of religions. First, let us become sincere seekers of the Lord. If we live with the Lord and if we feel the presence of the Lord at every moment of our life, then and then only, our mind will find everlasting peace and happiness. Losing the Lord, even if we gain everything in the world, we will be actually only losers. Seeing our spiritual life as a model life, if any one comes to us desiring to know our faith, we must share it with him. Instead of wasting resources in converting others to our beliefs, let us see the Lord even in

the form of our neighbors who may be disbelievers. Carrying our crosses, serving the humanity as the manifestation of the same Lord, let us lead a sincere, pure and dedicated monastic life and make this life fruitful and a blessing to the humanity. Let the following *upanishadic mantra* be a guiding force in our spiritual life. “Arise ! Awake and stop not till the goal is reached. The way to the Lord is like walking on the razor’s edge. Be

Alert. Thus the wise-men declare” (*Kathopanishad* , 4-14).

ENDNOTE

- ¹ Great examples of such *Sanyasins* are: Sri Shankaraacharya, Sri Rāmānujaacharya, Sri Madhvacharya, Goutama Buddha, Mahāvīra, Sri Chaitanya, Ramānanda Sarasvati, Madhusūdana Sarasvati, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekānanda and many others.

BUDDHISM AND ITS UNIVERSAL APPEAL FOR HARMONIOUS LIVING

Sudhakar Rao

Buddhism is aptly the *right way of life* rather than a religion. The Buddha means *the Supremely Enlightened One*, who consecrated Himself to the welfare of all living beings and worked incessantly for 45 years to elevate mankind, spreading the message of universal loving kindness, compassion, patience, peace and equanimity. He dedicated his physical body, all his sensual pleasures, all his accrued merits and bliss for the welfare of the living beings in the entire Universe. His teachings known as the *Dhamma*, in Pali language, gives the clear cut demarcation between good and evil (ethics), meritorious deeds required to be performed by a human being, right meditative concentration techniques and the methodology to purify one's mind from all defilements, thereby to attain everlasting ultimate peace, freedom, security and happiness.

The Buddha did not encourage blind faith, conversion from one religion to another, conflicts, unrest, and belief in a supernatural external agency called a "Creator God." He affirms the immense potential of the human being to achieve the goal of life based on self-effort and wisdom. He promoted free, rational, scientific and right thinking based on amity, universal harmony and wisdom. He pointed out that in this world hatred is not overcome with hatred, but only by universal loving. He was more concerned about the universal fact of life viz. the suffering encountered by all the living beings, cause of the same, cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The Buddha upheld right view in totality rather than partiality and preached that one should be at peace not only with oneself but also with others.

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In the annals of history, it is emperor Asoka and Mahatma Gandhi who adopted the message of non-violence, harmony and peace of The Buddha to render yeomen service to the mankind and hence even today their names shine like bright stars in the blue sky up above. Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela and many others followed Mahatma Gandhi in their social approach.

1. GOTAMA, THE BUDDHA

About 2,600 years ago, a prince was born to King Suddhodhana and Queen Maha Maya Devi, in the Sakya clan, at Lumbini Gardens near Kapilavasthu, which is at present in the border of India and Nepal, on a Vesakha full moon day. The Prince was named Siddhattha (means one whose wishes have been accomplished). Prince Siddhattha was brought up in all luxury by his father and step mother Mahapajapati Gotami, younger sister of Maha Maya Devi, who died on the seventh day of delivering the baby.

When Siddhattha was sixteen years old, he married a beautiful princess, Yasodhara of the same age and lived a happy married life for the next thirteen years. When he was twenty nine years old, he came across three incidences or scenes of an old man, a sick person and a dead body. On seeing these, he could not fully understand that the suffering is prevalent in this world. The fourth scene he saw was that of a mendicant with a shining countenance, depicting serenity and

calmness of mind. Prince Siddhattha, unlike other princes of his age, resolved to renounce his parents, wife, new born child, palaces, favorite horse, friends, relatives and the kingdom in order to live the life of an ascetic and thereby to find the solution to the problem of suffering in life and the escape route to liberation from the wheel of existence.

After struggling for six years in the Uruvela forest and adopting the “middle path” i.e. the noble eightfold path, he attained supreme enlightenment at the age of thirty five years, again on a Vesakha full moon day, while meditating under the Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, about 20 kms from Gaya, which is in Bihar State at present and became Gotama The Buddha, the *Samma Sambuddha*.

Thereafter for the next forty five years he traveled on feet to the nooks and corners of North India and preached his *Dhamma*. He preached only whatever he practiced and practiced only whatever he preached. Thousands and thousands of people from various sections of the society namely, kings, Brahmins, traders, businessmen, scholars, rich and poor, high and low, householders and so on became his disciples and were transformed in their lives. Many followed in his foot-steps and became monks, practiced his teachings and got liberated from this mundane life. Gotama, The Buddha died at the age of eighty years and attained *Maha parinibbana* at Kusinara (Kusinagar, in

U.P at present), which also happened on a Vesakha full moon day.

The Buddha, though he appears in the human form in this world, is the very personification of the universal laws which govern this universe of matter and energy flux continually arising and passing away (contraction and expansion). The arising of The Buddha is the rarest phenomenon and, in this universe which has no beginning and end, countless Buddhas arise and pass away in time, based on the law of *Dhamma*. Gotama The Buddha lived between the period of 623 B.C. to 543 B.C. and has enlisted the names of previous twenty seven Buddhas who had appeared in this world earlier. The Buddha is the goal model for all his followers who are intent upon liberation from the cycle of existence, as the goal of their life.

2. THE DHAMMA (THE TEACHINGS)

Gotama, The Buddha gave his teachings in Pali language as it was the commonly spoken language at that time. Let us explore some of his basic teachings.

2.1. Suffering and the Cessation of Suffering

Birth, sickness, old age and death are suffering; association with the disliked ones and separation from the liked ones are suffering; not getting what one desires is suffering. In short, clinging to the body and mind processes (formations) is suffering. Craving for sensual pleasures, craving for becoming and continuation and

craving for discontinuation (of life itself) are the causes of suffering. Cessation of suffering is possible (i.e. liberation from the cycle of conditioned existence, also known as *Nibbana*). The path for the cessation of suffering is the “noble eightfold path” consisting of *right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditative concentration*. There are four noble truths discovered by The Buddha. They are: suffering is to be fully understood; causes of suffering are to be abandoned; cessation of suffering is to be achieved; and the path leading to the cessation of suffering is to be developed.

2.2. Universe as Self-perpetuating and Governed by Universal Laws

According to The Buddha, the universe is a self-perpetuating mechanism and is governed by five universal laws. They are: a. the law of seasons and all the physical laws, b. the law of genetics, c. the law of psychology, d. the law of kamma (volitional actions) or the law of cause and effect, e. the law of *dhamma* (four noble truths). This universe is nothing but matter and energy flux continually arising and passing away and so also all the living beings therein. A living being is a combination of body (matter) and mind (*kammic* energy) phenomena taking place continually in any one of the 31 planes of existence, unabatedly ad infinitum. Only when a living being is born in the human plane of

existence, he or she can have the choice of escaping the cycle of existence of birth, sickness, old age, death and rebirth. Therefore the Buddha says, “Rare is birth as a human being, hard is the life of mortals, let not slip this opportunity.”

2.3. Understanding of God

Though the Buddha has denied the existence of a Creator God, he says that there are countless number of divine beings and superior beings (*Brahmas*) in different spheres of existence. There are three spheres of existence, such as: (a) Sense sphere consisting of eleven planes of existence- hell, animal, ghost, demons, human and six divine planes; (b) Realms of subtle forms or fine material sphere consisting of sixteen planes of existence for *Brahmas* and Non-Returners; (c) Formless Realms/immaterial sphere consisting of four planes of existence for *Brahmas* without forms. Thus, the living beings are scattered all over the universe in thirty one planes of existence.

2.4. Birth as the Result of Past Volitional Actions

A living being is born because of the results of his past volitional actions. He engages in volitional activities on account of ignorance i.e. the defilements/pollutants in his mind. Especially, as a normal human being, he is vested with six sensual bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) by birth itself and there are corresponding six sensual objects of color/form, sound, smell, taste, tangibles and mental objects.

When any one of these sensual objects impinges on the respective sensual base, and the mind being put on the two at that time, contact is established and the processes of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking happen one at a time. Because of the contact, feeling arises and if he is not mindful and pays unwise attention it gives rise to likes and dislikes for the sensual objects, as the mind is impure. These defilements impel the person to plunge in to volitional activities mentally, verbally and physically, mainly to derive sensual pleasures. These actions produce results in the form of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral experiences in his life, either in the immediate or distant future, depending on the ethical quality (wholesome, unwholesome or neutral) of the actions performed. If one reacts and craves for pleasant experience, develops aversion for unpleasant experience and ignores neutral experience, greed, hatred and delusion are generated again thereby adding to the defilements. Thus the cause and effect chain reaction is set to roll on, in a cyclic order, without a beginning and end. This mechanism ties down the living beings to the wheel of existence, which is nothing but endless suffering. This is the law of cause and effect or in other words, the law of dependent origination.

2.5. The Law of Dependent Origination

Everything in this universe which is caused, conditioned and formed, exhibits inherent characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. Life is nothing but

a series of experiences or formations which arise and pass away. Everything is constantly changing, everything finally ends in suffering and there is no core element or everlasting eternally abiding entity. Both good and evil co-exist as if they are the two sides of the same coin. Therefore life in this world is not satisfactory. Because of one's volitional actions and to reap the fruits thereof, one has to pass through the cycle of birth, sickness, old age, death and rebirth. If one is tired of this, can he escape this cycle of existence? The Buddha says it is possible and he has shown the *middle path* (i.e. by setting aside the two extremes of excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures and self-mortification) or the *noble eightfold path*, and as path triad, it is of morality, concentration and wisdom. By practicing this, one can remain detached to the world and its activities externally and to the five aggregates (of body, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness) internally and, thereby, can get liberation from the round of births, once for all.

2.6. Morality

In the dispensation of The Buddha, ethics and moral principles are not derived out of commandments or rules and regulations formulated by a supernatural agency but these are based on the natural principles and pointed out by the Buddha: avoidance of evil, cultivation of Good, and purification of mind. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas.

Any volitional action performed with the support of unwholesome psychological root causes of greed, hatred and delusion, in three modes of mental, verbal or physical is EVIL. Ten Evil courses of actions are not to be done, as they result in painful experiences and also rebirth in four lower realms. They are: three physical actions (killing, stealing and sexual misconduct); four verbal actions (telling lies, slandering, harsh and abusive speech and gossiping); and three mental actions (covetousness, ill-will and wrong view of fixed destiny).

Any volitional action performed with the support of wholesome psychological root causes of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, in three modes of mental, verbal or physical is GOOD. Ten wholesome courses of actions are to be practiced as they produce pleasant experiences in life and also rebirth in divine planes of existence. They are: three physical actions (no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct); four verbal actions (no falsehood, no slandering, no harsh and abusive speech and no gossiping) and three mental actions (non-covetousness, good will and right view).

Ten bases of meritorious deeds are to be performed which will help for a calm, peaceful, happy life and favorable rebirth in human plane or in divine planes of existence. They are: generosity, merit transfer, rejoicing in others' merit, virtue, service, reverence to elders and holy

people, meditation, preaching the doctrine, listening to the doctrine, and straightening one's right view. If one is aspiring for liberation from the wheel of conditioned existence and to achieve ultimate perfect peace, ten noble qualities are to be perfected; they are: charity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truth, determination, universal loving kindness and equanimity.

2.7. Concentration

Concentration means one-pointedness of mind, focusing or unification of the mind on a single object without distraction. The Buddha has prescribed forty subjects or objects of meditation (other than a sensual and worldly object) of which one at a time, depending on one's own temperament, can be taken up to attain concentration levels. There are totally twelve levels of concentration which can be achieved by intense practice. A mind is said to be powerful and sharp when it has calmed down completely, becomes concentrated and pure. For right meditative concentration, the other two ingredients required are right effort and right mindfulness and thereby achieve absorptions. This is called *Samatha* (tranquility). Meditation involved is of primarily focusing the mind on a meditation object or subject for development and culture of mind by removal of evil or unwholesome mental factors and bringing in and maintaining all good mental components. Five psychic factors, namely,

initial application, sustained application, rapture, joy and one-pointedness are activated to keep away the five hindrances of sense-desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, and skeptical doubt, which obstruct mental development and close the door to liberation.

2.8. Wisdom Resulting in Detachment

By the above process, a calm, well concentrated and directed mind is produced that can see by insight and wisdom the true nature of all phenomena as they really are: impermanence, suffering and non-self. Thus the mind remains detached to all the experiences in life. It is externally not distracted and internally not stuck up. This technique taught by The Buddha is known as *vipassana* (insight) meditation.

The methodology to purify one's mind from all defilements comprises of observance of morality, attainment of concentration and detachment through wisdom. This purification is done in seven stages, viz. purification of morality, mind, view, overcoming of doubt, purification of path and not-path, of the way by knowledge and vision and purification by insight and vision.

2.9. Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth

The Buddha has taught two truths; they are conventional truth and ultimate truth. Conventional truth is for the day to day activities of life with concepts, names and

symbols. For example, words like man, woman, democracy etc. are all mentally constructed and as such do not exist. On the other hand, the ultimate reality of a man or a woman is nothing but the five aggregates of matter, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. They are only mental and material phenomena, which actually exist on their own validity in a moment.

In the spiritual journey on the path shown by The Buddha, a world ling of blind faith first becomes a world ling of faith and confidence based on reasoning and understanding with clear cut direction and goal in life. He marches onward by putting the teachings of the Buddha in to practice, gaining experiential knowledge and wisdom, step by step and remaining fully detached, moment to moment to all the formations which continually arise and pass away. In this process, there could be a *stream enterer* (a maximum of seven lives thereafter to get liberated), a *sakadagami* (once returner), *anagami* (non- returner) and finally, an *arahant* (a fully enlightened or liberated one who will not be reborn again).

3. THE SANGHA, AS BUDDHIST MONASTICISM

The *Sangha* is the monastic order established by the Buddha consisting of the holy disciples who have entered the super mundane path. These noble saints are categorized as a *sotapanna*, *sakadagami*, *anagami* and an *arahant*,

depending on their attainment of the four super mundane stages of nibbanic realization. Thus *Sangha* is the group of disciples of the Buddha who have renounced the world and sensual objects and are putting the teachings of the Buddha into practice and do not stop until the goal of enlightenment is realized. To avoid the two extremes of indulgence in sensual pleasures and self-mortification, they devote their full time in practicing voluntarily the *middle path* of strict morality *samatha* and *vipassana* meditations and thereby purify their minds of all defilements, to reach the goal of Enlightenment and escape the wheel of conditioned existence.

In Buddhist monasticism, the order of monks and nuns and the laity (*upasakas and upasikas*) live a life of interdependence based on harmony, goodwill, compassion and purity. As the noble saints form the real field of merit, they are worthy of respect, salutation, hospitality and all offerings. Those who offer gifts, hospitality and respect to these holy ones, will gain lot of merit to improve their spiritual lives and thereby, to gain liberation.

4. BUDDHISM AS A PATH TO INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY

4.1. Universal Appeal of the Teachings

In so far as the teaching of the Buddha is concerned, it is universal because, in all interpersonal relationships, the ethical and moral principles to be followed are

nothing but universal loving kindness. It means no anger, no ill-will, no vengeance, no hatred but only good will and friendliness towards all living beings. It also means compassion (non-cruelty as an effort to help a living being to overcome suffering), appreciative joy (no jealousy towards those who are successful in life) and equanimity (no partiality, no likes and no dislikes, no attachment and no aversion, no elation and no depression, under any circumstances). Thus, it promotes only harmony and peace with oneself, with other human beings and, for that matter, with all the living beings in the entire universe. One can mark the words of The Buddha, when he thought of spreading the message of his *dhamma* for the first time: “Oh *Bhikkhus*, go ahead, for the good of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the entire world, for the good, welfare and happiness of divine beings and humanity. Oh *Bhikkhus*, teach the *dhamma* which is excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle and excellent in the end. Proclaim the holy life which is pure and perfect.”

4.2. Dignity of Every Human Being

The Buddha says: “Rare is birth as a human being; hard is the life of mortals; let not slip this opportunity to achieve the ultimate perfect peace. Rare is the opportunity to get the *dhamma*. Rarest is the phenomenon of the arising of the Buddhas.” Human beings have an edge

over all other living beings as they are vested with intelligence and the power of discrimination to uphold noble and ethical principles to lead a peaceful life. Only a human being, not even the *devas* and *brahmas*, can cultivate and develop his mind to the exalted level to attain Supreme Enlightenment. That is why a Buddha is born in the human plane of existence.

4.3. Humans as Capable of Liberation

All human beings have the sense of reasoning so as not to act impulsively and can exhibit kindness, sympathy and uprightness, whereas the other living beings are actuated upon by instincts for their existence, pleasure and security. It is the Buddha who first pointed out that women are in no way inferior to men either in intelligence, morality or spirituality and are equally capable of seeking liberation in this life itself. Even then, why there is so much unrest, disharmony, fighting, religious fundamentalism and terrorism? It is mainly because of greed, hatred and delusion which are nothing but evilness. What is the remedy? That is why all the Buddhas teach the avoidance of evil, the cultivation of good, and the purification of mind. This is the only way to live a happy, peaceful and harmonious life and finally to reach the goal of the everlasting, ultimate and perfect peace.

4.4. Mind as a Powerful Form of Energy

The Buddha says: “Mind is the chief; mind precedes every action; mind is the

forerunner of all actions; everything in this world, either good or bad, is mind made.” As you think, so you shall visualize; as you visualize, so you shall internalize; as you internalize, so you shall become.

Hence, if there is a clash between two religions, it is not the tenets, but the mindsets of the people that is responsible for the same. Knowing this, Buddhism does not have any conflict, dispute or contradiction with any other religion. More so, it allows full freedom and choice for each and everyone to think for oneself whether to accept or reject anything. If one is intent upon liberation from the cycle of conditioned existence itself, all that is required to be practiced are morality, concentration of mind and detachment from the world and sensual objects. There are no rituals, rites and ceremonies to be adhered to, nor any mediator or agent. One has only to rely on self-effort and wisdom for the practice of the *middle path* mentioned above. Hence, the teachings of The Buddha is a system of education for the whole of mankind without any distinction of caste, creed, gender, high or low, rich or poor and literate or illiterate.

4.5. Peaceful Co-existence of the Entire Humanity and All Living Beings

Man should understand that suffering has got a cause and so also happiness. When the mind is polluted by defilements such as greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, wrong views, skeptical doubt, sloth, restlessness, moral shamelessness and moral fearlessness, one indulges in evil volitional actions resulting in pain and suffering and loss of peace. When the same mind is being purified, first it engages in good actions and later transcending both good and bad and remaining detached moment to moment, it attains the everlasting ultimate perfect peace, freedom, security and happiness. This itself is the goal of human life, and enlightenment is this pure state of mind. This is the end of all in-fighting, quarreling, disputing, accusing, conflict, disharmony and unrest.

May all living beings be happy; may all living beings be free from any kind of danger; may all living beings be free from any kind of bodily or mental pain; may all living beings go through the life without any difficulties; may Happiness prevail always.

JAINISM AND ITS HARMONIOUS VIEW OF ALL FAITHS

Anshumalin D. Shah

The topic of inter-religious harmony is most relevant in today's disturbed world where one of the major contentious issues has always been the concept of 'religion'. How unfortunate, though, that a concept that is designed to bring peace to a society generates violence among people! Let our sustained efforts to work towards inter-faith harmony attain their objective.

In view of the fact that generally very little is known about the Jaina tradition, I propose to take this short paper through four parts, namely i) the *Jaina* Concept, ii) The Monastic Tradition and the Laity in Jainism iii) The *Jaina* Influence on World History and iv) the *Jaina* Contribution to Inter-faith Harmony and World Peace. Although, the last part of the paper happens to directly address today's topic, the other parts too, nevertheless will be relevant to it.

1. THE JAINA CONCEPT

1.1. A Brief Introduction to the *Jaina* Concept

The term *Jaina* is derived from the Sanskrit term *Jina*, which connotes a conqueror: a conqueror of five senses, the two basic emotions of *raga* and *dwesha*, and the life and death cycle through attainment of liberation. In this achievement, the *Jina* is looked upon as a pathfinder, a bridge-maker, a leader, a guide; those who follow the *Jina* on the path that he travelled in the course of his achievement are labelled as *Jainas*, the disciples or followers.

There is no compulsion in this following, no drafting into a faith, no baptism or any process that can get one the label of *Jaina*. One becomes a *Jaina* only through the strict adherence to a certain code of

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conduct, designed to take one on a pre-determined journey towards a defined goal of attaining liberation for one's soul from the birth and death cycle. In strict terms, it would be difficult to term Jainism as a religion. It is best defined as a way of life.

The concept is based on absolute logic and can very well be simply quantified in today's scientific and mathematical terms. Soul and its state of liberation are the two constants here. The variables include *karma*, rebirths for the soul in various species, the factor of time, birth as human with discerning ability, effort in terms of restraint, practice and penance on the *Jaina* path.

1.2. The Jain Tenets and Their Relevance

The *Jainas* draw their practices from treatises based on the latest revision and update provided by the 24th and the last Tirthankara Mahaveer, about 2,600 years ago. Most of the scriptural and canonical literature that we have is based on Mahaveer's teachings and his sermon.

We could attempt to summarise the entire *Jaina* concept into a few premises to broadly understand its approach to the objective, namely, *moksa* or liberation. (1) There is the statement that the universe is infinite and has no creator taking credit for its creation. It is a phenomenon in operation on its own and will remain so until infinity. (2) Soul exists as an entity with its ability as well as compulsion to be housed in innumerable life-forms or species for

certain spans of time, owing to an interaction with its surroundings and, particularly, matter. (3) This matter which tends to get coated on to the soul and forms a mass which has movement, is labelled as *karma*. Influx of *karma* is due to interaction of the soul with its surroundings and the material world. The concept of *karma* is a very elaborate and well-defined one and would need a long and deep analysis for understanding. Suffice to know presently that it is the presence of karmic matter on the soul which leads to its getting into the cycle of life and death, which continues until all *karma* is eliminated. (4) Since the objective of a soul is to ultimately attain the state of liberation, all effort is directed towards elimination of *karma* and plugging its further influx. In the human form, this effort happens most consciously, with a proper awareness, and on the path indicated by the *Jina*. (5) This path is well-defined and involves a way of life governed by restraint. A *Jaina* is expected to observe two sets of vows across a life-span, one on a wider and generalised canvas at the macro-level, which could be termed as major vows and the other with specifics on a micro-level which we could call as the minor vows. The major vows are *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth) *aparigraha* (limiting wants), *asthaya* (non-stealing) and *brahmacarya* (abstinence – celibacy). All these vows are observed to control the two base emotions of *raga* (attachment) and *dwesha*

(aversion) which are the means for a Soul to interact with the material world. Once these emotions are under control, the influx of *karma* can be monitored and regulated. With sustained effort also involving the aspect of penance, accumulated *karma* can be eliminated, thereby enabling the soul to progress towards liberation. (6) The minor vows or observances at the micro level are essentially means to successfully adhere to the major vows. These get reflected in the life-style and are so detailed that they can be related to every moment of the day.

Since this entire process is analytically presented and systematically laid out, it justifies being termed as 'a way of life'. For practical convenience, the same set of vows has been differently packaged for two different groups of believers: for those who are well advanced on this path, in renunciation, namely the monks and nuns, and for others who are at the elementary level namely the laity, the householder men and women.

The *Jaina* concept can be termed as a very self-centred or even selfish approach, in the literal sense. All effort is directed towards the alleviation of one's own self, the soul. There is no recourse to any outside help. A *Jaina* follower is required to follow and learn from either the elders or the monks and nuns whom he or she may come across. Only seekers get to learn the scriptures and make a progress into the depths of *Jaina* literature.

1.3. Peace, Harmony and Ecology in the *Jaina* Concept

We can summarise the Jain concept in the context of inner peace, ecological-awareness, geographical and inter-human harmony this way: all the issues or problems that our world is grappling today with, in terms of atmospheric degeneration, ecological imbalance, strife among nations, unrest among people, and absence of inner peace are adequately addressed in the five major vows. This is a very strong statement to make. Yet the formula or the solution that is naturally built into this approach cannot be overstated.

The damage to ecology and the violence between nations and peoples can be very well addressed if just two of the five major vows, namely *ahimsa* and *aparigraha* are adopted by all of us. A discussion on this would involve a very wide range of topics and hence is not attempted here.

1.4. *Paryushana Parva* – *Kshamapana*

In keeping with the continuous process of adhering to major and minor vows all through the day, every day of the year, a methodical process of heightening endurance and self-audit has been integrated into the *Jaina* path. It involves a self-analysis, as many as three times a day to ensure that the *Jaina* path is being properly adhered to. One day, twice every fortnight is earmarked for introspection enabled by fasting. Once a year, for eight or ten days at a stretch, a detailed

introspection is carried out to self-assess the level of perfection attained in adherence to the vows.

A very unique and interesting aspect of this annual observation is the process of reconciliation with all living beings around, by wiping out all grudges and extending forgiveness to all. This is also coupled with seeking forgiveness from all. Thus no unresolved issues are carried into the next year.

1.5. The Followers of Jainism

We will now take a brief look at the spread of the *Jaina* tradition in the world. Since the *Jaina* path depends solely on self-analysis, self-control and self-assessment and is more suggestive than compelling in its adherence or observance, it is difficult to find its followers in a large or overwhelming number today. A person could adhere to the *Jaina* tradition essentially by choice. Even if one is a *Jaina* by virtue of birth in a family following the *Jaina* tradition, it does not mean that one necessarily continues on the same path. Freedom to switch adherence of faith is always there. Moreover, there can never be an enforced or enticed conversion to the *Jaina* path. As we have noted before, it is only a way of life, which one enters by choice and full understanding.

Owing to this pattern, Jainism has a very limited following today and not more than 15 million people are said to be Jains today across the world. Today's Jains, who

reside in various parts of the world outside India, are mainly 1st, 2nd or 3rd generation migrants, who have made those countries their new home.

Historically, Jainism is known to have covered at one time a major part of what we know as the Indian Territory today, the climax being the 11th century C.E. After that there has been a gradual wane of the *Jaina* influence. Today, the unbroken *Jaina* tradition is followed mostly in pockets of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. Jains found in other parts of the country are there by migration from other centres, drawn by opportunities, and have settled there for generations together.

The monks and nuns were mostly instrumental in the spread of Jainism. Since they always walk and do not travel by any vehicle or automobile, their reach and the distance covered are limited. Moreover, their vows do not allow them to travel overseas. Thus, from prehistoric to historic times, the spread of Jainism beyond the borders of our country, as we know it today, has only been over a contiguous land mass. This explains the archaeological evidence of the concept of Jainism having travelled only up to Greece in Europe and Malaysia in the South East Asia.

1.6. Persecution and Humiliation

Sad to say, in spite of their strict practice of non-violence, *Jaina* monks, especially

the naked or *Digambara* monks have had to suffer persecution and humiliation at the hands of others, who do not have knowledge of the *Jaina* tradition; they have had to bear ill-treatment such as being stoned and smeared with dirt or being forced to wear clothes and so on. But always the *Jaina* monks have responded with stoic acceptance of such disturbance as '*upasarga*' attributing it to their *karma*. They have never retaliated or tried to protect themselves. This, in an extreme way, is acceptance of the presence of other faiths and their freedom of expression.

1.7. The Ultimate Vow of Non-Violence

There exists among the *Jaina* monks and nuns, and sometimes also among the lay persons, a tradition of inviting death with pre-meditation and after sufficient time spent in thoroughly learning the scriptures. This is called *Sallekhana* among the *Digambaras* and *Santhara* among the *Swetambaras*. This is the ultimate vow of non-violence, where over a period, which sometimes could stretch up to 12 years, one is avowed to relinquish one item of food after the other. This culminates in the gradual giving up of all solid food, liquid food and even water. The person under this vow ultimately relinquishes life in a yogic posture with controlled stoppage of breathing. This is in awareness of the fact that it is next to impossible to avoid violence in some form, intentional or unintentional, as long as one is attached to

this material world through this body. The soul, to embark upon its future journey in the process of alleviation, has to be allowed to free itself from the shackles of this body. The only way one can achieve this is through relinquishing this body. This process is very much a part of the *Jaina* tradition, not to be mixed up with a mundane definition as 'suicide'.

Jaina Scriptures have proved beyond doubt the logic involved in this practice. However, the severity of the practice and the procedure involved is beyond the understanding of someone not exposed to the *Jaina* concept. In recent times, over the last few decades the *Jaina* community has gone through the exercise of explaining this procedure and proving it in terms of the law. However, with every new generation of law-enforcers, and a new generation of people from other faiths, it is an exercise again. The *Jaina* community has been undergoing persecution and harassment at the hands of the police and the legal system, the pseudo-intellectuals and the 'so-called' social crusaders.

Disseminating proper knowledge about this practice of the *Jaina* monks, nuns and lay persons would certainly take inter-faith harmony to a higher level.

2. THE MONASTIC TRADITION AND THE LAITY IN JAINISM

Let us now analyse the role played by monks and nuns in the transmission of the *Jaina* concept to new generations and to

non-Jains and how the laity complement the process where the monks and nuns cannot reach.

2.1. The Monastic Tradition

Since adherence to the *Jaina* path involves in some cases the eventual graduation of the laity into becoming monks or nuns (transformation of *shravaka* into *shramana* or *samana*), the *Jaina* concept, which is today popularly referred to as Jainism, used to be actually called the *Sramana* tradition.

The *Jaina* concept has a systematically designed society structure much akin to the hierarchy in the Church. There is a head-monk (*acharya*), followed by disciple monks (*munis*), followed by novices and then avowed celibates (*brahmacharins*). This forms the ascetic / mendicant / homeless section of *Jainas*. Below these ranks is the group of house-holding men and womenfolk, the *shravaks* and *shravikas*. Among these there are those who are at the base level who are simply following the *Jaina* tradition, and others who are avowed at various levels of austerities.

The monks and nuns keep the laity, living in various parts of the country, exposed to the knowledge of the *Jaina* path and the scriptures. This learning process is undertaken as a concentrated effort during the rainy season (of four months) during which the monks and nuns are not expected to travel and are stationed or camped at one place. The laity takes

advantage of the situation and a heightened activity of discourses, preaching and learning takes place, where such a camp has been made. In the remaining 8 months of the year, they continue learning through interaction with the visiting monks and nuns who keep travelling from one place to another.

2.1.1. The Mendicant Monastic Traditions: Digambara and Svetambara

The present monastic tradition can be connected to Bhagawan Mahaveer, dating back about 2,500 years. Mahaveer was known to have a following in his *Sangha* of almost 12,000 monks and nuns. Eleven of them, chosen as senior monks, were termed *Ganadharas*, i.e. having their own groups. These monks carried the mantle of the *Jaina* tradition on their shoulders after the nirvana of Mahaveer. The knowledge of the *Jaina* path was carried on in an oral tradition for almost 200 years, spanning eight generations of disciples.

After this the knowledge was put to writing and we have today what is known as *agams*, a collection of several treatises covering practically every aspect of knowledge. Several learned monks have added their contributions to this collection over the centuries. Initially, only the tradition of naked monks, known as *Digambaras*, was prevalent.

About 2,300 years ago, it is noted that a severe famine that lasted for over 12 years forced many of the *Jaina* monks and laity to migrate southwards. They brought

with them the *Digambara* tradition to the south. This tradition was based on very severe observance of the major and minor vows. The followers of these monks came to be known as '*Digambara Jains*'.

Those who remained behind developed a less severe set of adaptation and continued their practice. The monks in this part adapted to wearing white robes, which were known as '*Swetambara*'. Thus the followers of these monks came to be known as '*Swetambara Jains*'.

In both the traditions there are more similarities in practice than dissimilarities. Scriptural texts followed are more or less the same. One aspect that binds both the traditions is that the monks and nuns are always on the move and never acquire any premises for themselves.

The limitations on travel placed on a monk or nun also had its impact eventually within the country and followers of the *Jaina* path in various regions gradually got disconnected with the mainstream. This problem was aggravated by aggression and rule by the invaders from the West and North. Pursuance of any faith depends largely on the factor of continuity. Occasional visits by monks and nuns contribute immensely to the survival or revival of a faith-following. This travel became almost impossible, for the *Digambara* monks in particular, during the various periods of rule in Indian history, due to strong rulers not favouring the presence of faiths other than those to which

they subscribed. This problem was also locally addressed then and it gave rise to the *Bhattaraka* tradition or what could be called the tradition of stationary monks.

2.1.2. The Jain Mutts: the Stationary Monastic (Bhattaraka) Tradition

The word *Bhattaraka* is equivalent of *Pattacharya*, which could mean the Head Monk of a particular centre of religion. In today's terms, it could be equated with the position of the Archbishop in the Church. This tradition is typical of the *Digambara* sect. *Bhattarakas* are duly consecrated Monks who wear saffron robes but largely follow the same set of rules that apply to other *Digambara* monks. In addition to their religious duties, they hold office where they receive people and address any issues involving practice, culture, upkeep of temples and so on.

There were numerous *Bhattaraka* peethas in a belt beginning from today's Gujarat and going up to Tamil Nadu through Maharashtra and Karnataka. The *Bhattarakas* had due recognition from the rulers and were accorded a royal status with due protocol and guard. Some of these Peethas have since become defunct owing to various reasons. Most active and prominent among the *Bhattaraka* Peethas today are *Shravanabelagola*, *Hombuja* and *Moodbidri* in Karnataka and *Kolhapur* in Maharashtra.

Introducing significant changes in their rule-books, these *Bhattarakas* travelled

abroad and have visited the *Jaina* followers who had migrated and settled in South-east Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. They have been instrumental in guiding the Jains in these regions, enabling them to properly follow the religious customs, establish *Jaina* Temples and study centres, and to follow the scriptures in the essence.

2.2. The Role of Laity in Jainism

The monks and nuns, by and large keep to themselves, unless the follower goes and seeks guidance. The laity has to organize discourses and invite the monks or nuns to come and deliver such discourses on various topics covering the *Jaina* path. This has always been the practice. Reaching out from the *Jaina* faith has been rare.

The *Jaina* followers, who settled in Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, various European countries, various African countries, the US and Canada, are mainly 1st, 2nd or 3rd generation migrants. The demands of religious practice on a *Jaina* follower include strict vegetarianism and in many cases a daily visit to the Temple; these have led to establishment of several *Jaina* temples and Community Centres in the places indicated. The laity in this *Jaina* Diaspora has taken it upon itself to disseminate knowledge about Jainism and its practice among young Jains as well as non-Jains with an interest in this faith. Their activities include a major effort on achieving inter-faith harmony which

has been largely successful, particularly in North America.

Impressed and inspired by the guidance of several *Jaina* saints from time to time, the *Jaina* laity has established several educational institutes across the country. Several charitable hospitals also have been established in various cities and towns. All these institutions are open to one and all without discrimination. Although this effort does not match the tremendous work of Christian missionaries, there is an interesting aspect to be noted. Such *Jaina* institutions in the field of education and health are all established and managed by the laity through their Trusts, unlike in the Church-run institutions. Jain monks and nuns do not ever get involved with the day-to-day management and operational aspects of such institutions.

3. THE JAINA INFLUENCE ON WORLD HISTORY

I would like to highlight two major points in the history of this land which were profoundly influenced by the *Jaina* monks or thinkers. These have been very significant milestone events, which I am sure, have never been seen in the light I wish to present them in. The first relates to a period about 300 years B.C.E. and the other just about 60 years ago.

3.1. The Invasion of Alexander and His Return from India

The great Alexander, who was on a mission to conquer the world in his youth,

supported by a fierce and brave army, met the strongest resistance on the borders of the wonder that was India. He fought and won a battle against the King Pururava or Porus. After this victory he had very little resistance and was able to march deep into the country.

However, after a short while, as history states, since his army developed illnesses, since the soldiers were home-sick, had lost their morale and wanted to return, Alexander decided to turn back. Lost somewhere in these lines of history is the fact that the soldiers and Alexander himself had had several encounters with naked monks in the northern region of India. These monks, who had no fear for their life, were indifferent to torture inflicted on their bodies, and never retaliated upon being attacked, spoke of a journey of the soul and were able to logically prove to him and his soldiers the futility of Alexander's crusade.

These were Jain monks who had guided Alexander to the ultimate truth; they had shown him the mirror which reflected an undeniable reality and forced him to surrender to the great weapon of non-violence. The monks did not deny Alexander *his* view point. Yet, they were able to prove *their* view point. It was a chastened Alexander who turned about and headed back. This was a major turning point in the history of India, remarkably influenced by Jain monks, in the spirit of harmony.

3.2. The British Rule and Their Return from India

The gradual take-over of the Indian Territory by the British through devious means led to a rule of oppression for almost two centuries. We secured our independence after a prolonged struggle, spanning ninety years. The British government used its might to ruthlessly suppress every uprising by our soldiers of independence. The only strategy they could not counter was non-violence as presented by Mahatma Gandhi.

This formidable weapon of non-violence with Gandhiji was a gift from his friend, guide and philosopher Srimad Rajachandraj, who was a *Jaina* seeker with remarkable spiritual enlightenment. He strongly influenced and introduced Gandhiji on the path of non-violence and the rest is history. Like Alexander, the British too had to turn back. This time around too, there was a *Jaina* monk involved.

These two lessons from history prove the strength of the *Jaina* concept, and the influence of *Jaina* monks on international harmony and understanding.

4. THE JAINA CONTRIBUTION TO INTER-FAITH HARMONY AND WORLD PEACE

Finally, let us look at the involvement of *Jaina* traditions in inter-faith harmony. We could summarise that from historic times to date the *Jaina* monks and nuns have maintained a very cordial and

peaceful relation with people from all other faiths. There has never been any incident of *Jaina* interference in the peaceful practice of their respective faiths by non-Jains. The universally accepted *Jaina* symbol that was introduced in 1974-75 carries a Sanskrit phrase at the bottom, which reads ‘*Parasparopagraho Jeevanaam*’ and implies that all life is interdependent. This is a *sutra* drawn from ‘*Tattvartha Sutra*’ also known as ‘*Moksa Shastra*’ which carries the essence of the *Jaina* path and is followed by all Jains as the prime treatise. Recognizing our interdependence is basic to any progress in inter-faith harmony, peace and co-existence.

Bhagawan Mahaveer, the last Tirthankara, is famously known for the simple but effective formula he suggested for eternal peace; “live and let live.” Here is an account of some individual and collective efforts made by Jains in the direction of inter-religious harmony and world peace.

4.1. Efforts of Jaina Monks and Nuns

In the last seven to eight decades, there has been a significant opening up, both from the side of the *Jaina* community and from the side of non-Jain communities. In smaller places, like towns and villages, through which the *Jaina* monks or nuns pass while they travel, the entire local population is known to attend, enjoy and assimilate the discourses arranged. People have appreciated the aspect of peace and

compassion that forms the mainstay of the *Jaina* path.

Among both the *Jaina* sects, there are and have been several monks and nuns who have made significant efforts in reaching out to other faiths.¹

4.2. Efforts of Bhattarakas

Historically, the Bhattaraka was in charge of a region called the Peetha or Patta and was responsible for the maintenance of all *Jaina* temples in that region and ensuring the safety of the people following the *Jaina* faith in the region. Maintaining harmonious relations with the rulers of that territory and maintaining a dialogue with religious heads of other faiths, being practiced in that territory, were among their other responsibilities. This tradition and the process continue even to this date and it deserves a special mention in the context of our topic. The contribution of the Bhattarakas to inter-faith dialogue is quite significant, owing to their being stationary and acquainted with other local communities in and around their head-quarters.

Many of these Bhattarakas have participated in several inter-faith harmony events and opened such dialogues abroad, which are now continued by the *Jaina* laity. A very interesting phenomenon related to these developments is the acquisition of old, abandoned Church structures in the UK and the US by affluent communities of Jains and their conversion into *Jaina*

temples after proper restoration. These structures continue to look like Churches from outside, but inside they are *Jaina* temples. Significant here is the fact that a place of faith has been retained for the same purpose and not allowed to be razed for want of followers. What better example can we cite for inter-faith harmony?

4.3. Efforts of other Institutions

Significant effort in terms of organizing and participating in Inter-faith Dialogues, also termed as *Sarva Dharma Sammelanas* or *Sarva Dharma Samanvaya Samitis*, has been undertaken frequently by the *Jaina* communities across the countries on several occasions. Invariably this event is tied up with the observance of the *kshamapana* day or the “forgiveness day” at the end of the *Jaina paryushana parva*, generally falling in the month of August or September. Among others, two institutions known to get directly involved in such organization are the following:

4.3.1. Dharmadhikari of Dharmasthala:

This temple town is unique in terms of a temple dedicated to a Hindu deity being managed by a *Jaina* family for past several centuries. The present head of this institution who carries the title *Dharmadhikari* is Sri Veerendra Heggade, a *Jaina* follower who manages the Dharmasthala Manjunatha temple, where lakhs of Hindu pilgrims visit every month; the pilgrims are fed free of cost and

provided subsidised shelter. Sri Heggade carries on a tradition, established by his father several decades ago, of organising a *sarva dharma sammelana* (inter-faith meeting), which brings together leaders of several faiths on the same dais and efforts are made to iron out any differences. This temple also funds every year a mass marriage of poor couples, irrespective of their caste or creed, and helps them settle in married life.

4.3.2. The Saman-Samani Tradition of Ladnun:

Acharya Tulasi of the Terapanthi sect among *Swetambara* Jains has made a remarkable effort in reaching out to non-Jains through *Jaina* literature translated into English and several other languages for their benefit. These books, among other aspects of metaphysics also relate to *Jaina* concept of Yoga, meditation, auto-healing, inner-peace and understanding and are of use to anybody irrespective of the faith one follows.

Interestingly, to overcome the limitation on the travel of *Jaina* monks and nuns as per traditional scriptures, *Acharya* Tulasi established a new rank and file called Saman and Samanis, who are novices trained in inter-faith dialogue and are allowed to take any mode of travel, surface, sea or air. This is a landmark development in the *Jaina* tradition and has seen mixed reactions equally from traditionalists and reformists.

4.4. Efforts by Laity

Because the *Jaina* monks have a known restriction on travel, there are very few visits by *Jaina* monks or nuns for representing their faith in inter-faith activities. Therefore the *Jaina* laity maintains direct involvement in inter-faith activities in a big way both in India and abroad. Such activity goes on record time and again and one gets to notice the contribution of Jains in Inter-faith dialogue, through various publications or collections of papers published at such events. Interestingly, this effort can be traced back to the late 19th century when a layman representative of the *Jaina* faith participated in the famous World Congress of Religions at Chicago in 1896.

4.4.1. Virchand Gandhi and the World Congress of Religions (Chicago, 1896):

Very little is spoken or written about Virchand Raghavji Gandhi who was a fellow traveller of Swami Vivekananda to this World Congress. While both had remarkable success at presenting the Indian schools of thought and philosophies at the event, it was only Swami Vivekananda whose contribution was duly presented to the world by the Ramakrishna Mission and the Vivekananda Ashram movement. In keeping with the *Jaina* tradition of low-profile activity, and in the absence of any institutional effort in promoting the visit of Virchand Gandhi to Chicago, the matter almost has gone out of sight.

Virchand Gandhi spent a substantial time in the US between 1896 and 1897. He also paid a subsequent visit a year later and toured the length and breadth of US, participating in various inter-faith groups, sharing the *Jaina* concept. There are books on record, which have compiled the various discourses delivered by Virchand Gandhi during his visits. His discourses are known to have had a tremendous impact on the American people and the News Press in those days; several articles appeared in the American Newspapers expressing their astonishment at a diametrically opposite lifestyle.

4.4.2. Centenary of the World Congress of Religions:

In the year 1996 four major international inter-faith organizations decided to commemorate the century of the 1896 Congress across the world; in India, Bangalore was chosen as the centre. Owing to his recognized presence in the inter-faith activities across the globe, the Bhattaraka of Shravanabelagola Mutt, Sri Charukeerti Swamiji was invited to lead the *Jaina* representation. I had the proud privilege to represent the Swamiji and coordinate the entire *Jaina* participation in the event, which had over 600 delegates visiting from all over the world. We were able to highlight the participation of Virchand Gandhi in 1896 and brought out a reprint of his compiled discourses from that visit. The delegates had a remarkable

and authentic exposure to the *Jaina* faith with interaction sessions with *Jaina* monks and nuns at various *Jaina* temples and centres in Bangalore.

4.5. Principles for World Peace

To conclude, I would like to highlight two *Jaina* principles that can help the modern world to take a step further in the direction of world peace and harmony.

4.5.1. Reaching for the Ultimate Truth:

Every religious tradition speaks of salvation, liberation, merger with the Supreme and seeking the ultimate truth. Each of these efforts is successful in its own way. However, each of these ways is different in its approach. Yet none can be discarded as a false or wrong path. Every approach is true and correct from a certain view point. The *Jaina* concept takes a pragmatic view of all these efforts and logically establishes the truth through a concept of *syadvada* and *naya*).² Because of its accommodative approach, Jain philosophy equips human thought with the essential spirit of reconciliation, mutual understanding, tolerance and brotherhood. It elevates the individual self to the realm of the universal self. *Syadvada* can be applied to each and every problem or situation of life, from politics to metaphysics and can help finally achieve the most coveted climate of peace. This explains why Jainism takes a very harmonious view of all faiths and explores the scope of peace in their coexistence.

4.5.2. Anekantavada: Gift of the Jaina Concept to the World:

This acceptance of the multiple facets of Truth is neatly presented in the theory of *Anekantavada*. This is a unique gift of the *Jaina* concept to the world. It is succinctly explained through the well-known parable of the six or seven blind men attempting to describe an elephant. Each one of them was true in his description of that facet of the elephant which he as a blind man was able to feel. All their descriptions put together actually described the elephant in reality.

That is how we look at the ultimate truth. All of us are on the path that leads us eventually to the ultimate truth. Our paths may be different, our approaches may be varied but we are bound to meet up at the same final destination. If we are all working towards the same goal, then why should there be disharmony and strife between us? This is the message the *Jaina* monks and of course, all Jains carry with them. They are fully in favour of inter-faith harmony.

Let us all be harmonious. Let us all live and let live.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Noted among them are: Acharya Shantisagar: He is known to have revived the tradition of *Digambara* monks after a gap of several centuries and helped non-Jains to get a proper understanding of the *Jaina* faith.

Acharya Kalpayashvijayji: He passed away at a ripe old age after years of saintly life in the service of all humanity. Acharya Sushilmuni: He had a tremendous acceptance among all faiths and is known to have advised and guided several Governments at the Centre, and mediated to find solutions in times of communal disharmony. Acharya Tulasi: He spent a life-time in organizing and disseminating *Jaina* literature that could be easily accepted among non-Jains from a centre at Ladnun, Rajasthan. Acharya Vidyanand: He has established a major centre of learning at Delhi and is widely recognized among all faiths for his message of harmony. Acharya

Tarunsagar: He lately toured across the country in an effort to spread the message of compassion and humanity to one and all.

- ² Jaina philosophy advocates acceptance of a multitude of viewpoints presented by other faiths on the ultimate reality. This accommodative approach of the Jaina philosophy is called *syadvada* where applying the doctrine of seven predications ('perhaps this or perhaps that') the truth of ultimate reality is established with pure logic (*naya*). It is also called *nayavada* or *sapt-abhangivada*.

GANDHI'S CONTRIBUTION TO INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY

Dr. A. Pushparajan

Given the theme of this issue of *Sanyasa Journal*, Gandhi may not seem to fit in with other papers. For, he was neither a consecrated person in the accepted sense of the term, nor a monk of an institutional type. However, it is a fact that Gandhi founded four kinds of ashrams at four phases of his life. The 'Eleven Vows' he prescribed for his *ashramites* were practiced by him so strictly and sternly that he became really a consecrated person. People of all religions, all over the world, recognized him as a 'great soul'.

Gandhi was also a deeply theological thinker. Particularly with regard to religious pluralism, Gandhi gained fascinating insights into solving it. He related himself candidly with the genuine followers of all religions. At the same time he differed from

them authentically, regarding the meanings of the key concepts of their religions and interpretation of their scriptural texts. He even vindicated that his interpretations were more correct. Thereby he enabled people to go far beyond the usual understandings of those concepts. Whereas they were often sectarian, divisive and exclusive, Gandhi's re-readings of scriptures were tolerant, unifying and inclusive, thus paving way for inter-religious harmony.

More than that, Gandhi had a unique experience of living with people of other religions, involving them in common action and inter-religious collaboration. Thus, his comparative study of religions on the one hand and his inter-religious action on the other formed the base upon which he eventually built a theoretical framework for

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inter-religious harmony. We will not be in a position to appreciate his framework, which is indeed his specific contribution to inter-religious harmony, unless we understand the two bases on which he built the framework.

So in the first part, we will consider the different ways in which he handled the different religions including his own, relating himself with the core of each and reviewing the periphery of each. Part two will try to delineate the different aspects of Gandhi's experience of the inter-religious harmony in action. In the light of both these parts, the third and final part will expound theoretical framework with a view to highlighting his specific contribution to promotion of inter-religious harmony.

1. GANDHI'S APPROACH TO RELIGIONS

1.1. Gandhi's Molding of Hinduism for Inter-Religious Harmony

Gandhi was professedly a Hindu. He was very much rooted in Hinduism. And he remained committed to his native faith all through his life. He also prized it highly.¹ However, he cannot be taken to represent Hindu religion formally. He did not start any particular *sampradaya* (tradition) in that faith. Neither did he claim to follow the lineage of a specific Guru or a great Acharya. Nor did he found a *Mutt* or a special school of thought to expound Hindu religion. Nevertheless he went on interpreting many concepts of the Hindu

faith in his own ways. Often his interpretations were much different from, and even opposed to the orthodox interpretations, given by Pundits and Shastris. Likewise his readings of the sacred texts were also quite different from the traditional ways of understandings. For example, the term 'sacrifice' in Gita for Gandhi did not mean the animal sacrifice but the sacrifice of one's ego. In the same way, 'prayer' for him meant not so much imploring to a being outside one's self, but as a way of establishing communion with oneself. As regards *varna dharma* too Gandhi had his own interpretation to give. He accepted the four *varnas* by way of division of society on the basis of profession with different functions and duties. But he emphatically asserted that none of the *varnas* is superior to the other. *Varna* does not connote superiority/inferiority.² Particularly with reference to untouchability, Gandhi was ruthless: "The idea of high and low have no room in Hinduism."³ "It is a blot on Hinduism," "a sin against God and man," an "abscess to be cut and thrown out," a "crime against God and man." It is due to the "selfish Bhramindom."⁴

Again, Gandhi applied the criterion of reason and morality to the scriptural texts in understanding the true meaning of the texts. If a particular text, however popular it may be among people, went blatantly against reason and morality, he questioned its authenticity. The Mahabharata war did not necessarily mean a historical war for

Gandhi; neither had he considered it a fiction.⁵ That was not the important question for him. Nonetheless, he considered it as one of utmost important for humanity as it exemplifies pre-eminently the duel that goes on in our heart between good and evil.⁶ In the same way, Krishna's call to 'violent war' in the beginning of the Gita is for Gandhi a call to nonviolent war which we need to engage ourselves persistently and determinately within our self in order to establish the supreme truth of human living.

Through such attempts at re-interpretations, Gandhi not only brought about renewal of Hinduism, but also the breaking of new grounds in the territory of his faith for inter-religious harmony. This process of giving new interpretations to the old concepts of his faith paved a way for promoting communal unity. The former literal or historical understandings of the texts were parochial in nature and setting a fundamentalist trend. As against them, the new meanings Gandhi propounded, gave a solid foundation for the doctrine of inter-religious harmony as the core of Hinduism.

It was inevitable that Gandhi was drawn into conflict with orthodox people. Especially the Hindus extremists clearly understood Gandhi's position was a major threat to their fundamentalist position. It was a chief hurdle to their fanatical goal of politicization of religion and a barrier to their frantic method of militarization of Hinduism. Gandhi's basic contention was

diametrically opposed to the Hindutva ideology of homogenization of culture. This was the real reason for the RSS men to target Gandhi. Nathuram Godse was a primary membership holder in RSS organization. Again it was V.D. Savarkar that was backing Godse through and through in the whole planning of the strategy of killing Gandhi as well as executing it.

1.2. Gandhi's Handling of Christianity for Inter-Religious Harmony

Not infrequently did Gandhi make a similar exercise with reference to the key concepts of Christianity. Obviously the most basic concept of Christianity is the divine son-ship of Jesus. However Gandhi contended the literal meaning of this concept. For, God cannot marry and beget children. "If God could have sons, all of us were his sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then, all men were like God and could be God Himself."⁷ By this Gandhi did not want to deny the Christian belief. Rather he recognized Jesus as the son of God in this that Jesus life expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God". If a man is spiritually miles ahead of us, we may say that he is in a special sense, the son of God, though we are all children of God. We repudiate the relationship in our life whereas his life is witness to that relationship.⁸ So for Gandhi the faith in Jesus as the begotten Son of the Father should impel the believer to strive after perfection as much as possible.

Another important concept of Christian faith is uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Here also Gandhi said: "There is no point in proving it by comparing it with that of other religious founders." Do we have criteria for gauging the divinity of the various founders and for ascribing more divinity to one and belittling the other? "To say that Jesus was 99 percent divine, and Mohammed 50 percent, and Krishna 10 percent, is to arrogate to oneself a function which really does not belong to me."⁹ Even if one was to try, then, Gandhi would say that such an attempt will only create more dissention among the different believers of religion. Quoting Christ's words, "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my heavenly Father wants them to do" (Mt. 7:21). Gandhi said: "With Him *deed* is everything; *belief* without deed is nothing. With Him, doing is believing."¹⁰ Hence, he exhorted the Missionaries: "Do not flatter yourselves with the belief that a mere recital of that celebrate verse in St. John makes a man a Christian.... Men who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ or have even rejected the official interpretation of Christianity, who will, probably, if Jesus came in our midst today in the flesh, be owned by him more than many of us."¹¹ So, he pleaded with them to go on serving people and asking them to serve in turn. If instead they quoted Jn. 3.16 and asked them to believe, they will not understand. So, instead of blindly asserting uniqueness

of Christianity, he asked them to approach the problem of religious pluralism with open-mindedness and humility.

It was inescapable for Gandhi not to come into conflict with those imperialistic missionaries. Most of them misunderstood Gandhi. His open praise for his ancient religion and ardent love for Gita etc., led them think that Gandhi was a Hindu fanatic. During his own time many foreign missionaries blamed Gandhi for having known the 'truth' (Christian faith) but not getting converted to Christianity. Some of them even considered Gandhi as hypocrite. However, there were many others who understood Gandhi in the right perspective. C. F. Andrews (1871 – 1940), an Anglican Missionary and a close friend and associate of Gandhi, identified him as a 'Saint' and even compared him with St. Francis of Assisi.¹² E. Stanley Jones (1884–1973), an American Methodist missionary acclaimed Gandhi as a true follower of Jesus Christ. "Though he never renounced Hinduism, he studied the gospels, and lived by them, carefully.... It is ironic but true that Gandhi may have been a more faithful follower of Christ than many Christians have been."¹³

1.3. Gandhi's Handling of Islam for Inter-Religious Harmony

Gandhi was bold enough to enter into disagreement with Muslims in interpreting the Holy Koran. On certain occasions Gandhi had to take certain stand against the usual interpretation given by *Mullas*

to certain texts of the Koran. Just to cite one example, Gandhi was invited by some readers of his weekly *Young India* to comment upon the incident of stoning of two members of the *Ahmadia* Sect to death in Afghanistan. Gandhi remarked: “Whatever may have been necessary or permissible during the Prophet’s lifetime and in that age, this particular form of penalty cannot be defended on the mere ground of its mention in the Koran. Every formula of every religion has in this age of reason, to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice, if it is to ask universal assent. Error can claim no exemption even if it can be supported by the scriptures of the world.”¹⁴

Some Muslims contended that Gandhi was dangerous to orthodox Islam. Some others dubbed him as a fanatic Hindu. In his nationalist movement also many Muslims misunderstood Gandhi. Nonetheless there were some well renowned Muslims like Maulana Zafar Ali Khan (1873-1956), a writer, poet, and journalist who played an important role in freedom movement and later in the Pakistan Movement. He once openly wrote to Gandhi: “I have always paid unstinted homage to your greatness and have all along looked upon you as one of the few men who are making modern history...”¹⁵ Another great figure from Islam, who forged a close, spiritual, and uninhibited friendship with Mahatma Gandhi was Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1890-1988). He was the pioneer of non-

violent mass civil disobedience in India. He had a deep admiration towards Gandhi and they both worked together closely till 1947. He was even nicknamed as “Frontier Gandhi.”

2. INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN ACTION

From the foregoing consideration it is obvious that Gandhi wielded such an *adhikara* (qualification, or the moral power or authority) that he could examine the key concepts of his own religion as well as those of other religions and direct the different religions to go beyond their traditional boundary so as to work for inter-religious harmony. At this point one would be inclined to ask: how did he achieve this *adhikara*? It is this question that is being attempted to answer in this Part.

2.1. An Intrapersonal Conflict and its Resolution

First and foremost Gandhi was deeply rooted in his native religion. Born in an orthodox Hindu family, Gandhi was influenced by his exceptionally devout parents. His mother was extremely a pious mother, putting into practice various types of ascetic practices, which had a lasting impact on the growing boy, Mohandas. His father was dutiful officer in the state administration, but fervent admirer of Bhagavad Gita and Ramayana.¹⁶

Along with his deep-rootedness in his native religion, Gandhi imbibed the spirit

of toleration for the other religions already in his early days. For Jain monks paid frequent visits to his house. His father had many Muslim and Parsi friends with whom he had a cordial dialogue on their faith. So he had a fairly a good knowledge of other faiths except Christianity to which he had initial dislike because of the preaching of some missionaries.¹⁷ However, he changed his opinion about Christianity in London where he met good Christian friends. At the instance of a friend, Gandhi read the whole of the Bible and appreciated the New Testament, but developed a special taste for the Sermon on the Mount because it echoed some of the basic maxims that he had learnt from his childhood.¹⁸ Later, when he went to South Africa, his acquaintance with Christianity was so well strengthened that he was almost at the point of conversion to Christianity. More or less at the same time, his close association with Muslim friends drew him also to Islam. Sincere Muslims too had influenced Gandhi to get converted to Islam.¹⁹ Gandhi had also chance to read Buddhism.²⁰

At this point in his life, Gandhi underwent a severe intrapersonal conflict arising out of the issue of his personal conversion. He was really confused to which religion he had to be converted. He appealed to a person in India, Raichand Bai, whom he considered as extraordinarily spiritual. He wrote to him about his predicament and asked for his advice. He in turn wrote to him exhorting

Gandhi to know first what his own religion offers. He also sent few books for his personal perusal. Gandhi read these and many other original sources. He mentions nearly 21 books in his *Autobiography*.²¹ Finally after such a thorough research and a prayerful search, Gandhi came out with certain findings: (1) The core of religion is indeed the substance of morality which is ultimately self-purification for service of society (2) A religion is religion only because it evolved out of the life of Attainment and so all religions help us with a method to go from the present state of imperfection to an expected state of perfection. (3) God, as the Perfection-personified, becomes the ideal towards which we need to pursue our path of perfection. (3) Religious plurality is a human necessity, arising out of the differences of human beings. (4) Every religion has the Truth as well as the imperfections. (5) Hence there is no superiority/inferiority between religions.²²

The bearing of these findings on his practical problem was clear: There was really no need for him to get converted to any other religion, unless his own religion proved to be an obstacle to attain perfection. On the contrary, he realized that his native religion contributed to his pursuit better because he had been groomed by it. It had been in his blood and upbringing. Moreover he recognized that when one reaches the heart of one's religion, one has reached the heart of the other religions too. "Religions are different roads converging

to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads so long as we reach the goal. Wherein is the cause of quarrelling?"²³ It was this sort of inter-religious harmony that he was able to establish within his self, early in his public life that paid a great dividend later in his inter-religious movements for justice and liberation.

2.2. 'Being Religious' for Gandhi meant 'Being Inter-Religious'

Having resolved his intrapersonal conflict in the way we have presented above, Gandhi was thenceforth concentrated on the orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy of religion. Whatever truth he learnt about God he always tried to put it into practice. It did not matter to him whether this truth came from his own religion or from others. It only mattered whether it contributed to his perfectibility. So much so that Gandhi became epitome of the core teachings of all major religions. He remained a Hindu all through his life. He had to stake his claim that he was *sanatana* Hindu.²⁴ Nevertheless he acknowledged influences from various religions. Gandhi followed seriously and systematically *ahimsa* which is the core of Buddhism. He even developed a full-fledged theoretical structure out of it. If you take *Anekantavada* as the core of Jainism, Gandhi took that theory and applied to his inter-religious living. He drew lessons for his *Satyagraha* from the Sermon on the Mount. For Gandhi, Jesus was the supreme *Satyagrahi*.

Does this mean that Gandhi was eclectic? By no means. Eclecticism means collecting the many good elements from various sources, by way of selection, and juxtaposing them all together. At best they may be likened to the different constituents of a salad. Now, Gandhi never was keen on simply collecting the good points of different religions and creating a new religion, for example like the efforts of Akbar the Great's *Din-i-Ilahi*. He drew inspiration from all religions he had come across. But he assimilated them and made them all part and parcel of his spiritual pursuit. The pilgrim's progress was so successful, bringing about a personal transformation in his personality that the whole world as well as followers of all religions recognized him as truly 'Mahatma.'

2.3. Inter-Religious Collaboration

Putting into practice the good elements of all other religions was not useful to merely his own enrichment but to the whole humanity. He wove the various features of goodness and elements of holiness found in all major religions into such a synthesis that he was able to inculcate it among people of different religions so as to establish harmonious relation in their practical life, empowering them to cooperate with one another to achieve societal liberation from various types of oppression and injustice.

First of all, in South Africa, he united the Hindu and Muslim laborers in fighting

against the racial discrimination of the British. There were more than 12,000 indentured laborers in South Africa. They were all Hindus and Muslims. On the opponent side, they were all Christians. Gandhi realized that the real cause of their oppression was their failure to follow the core of their religion: the love-maxim. That very maxim he put into practice even as he was opposing the oppressors, as a technique of resistance. In their civil-disobedience movement in South Africa, the Hindu and Muslim resisters were trained by Gandhi to have this attitude and approach: 'Even as, we are here not to hate you. We rather love you, as our erring brothers. So even as we are fighting staunchly with you for our liberation, even as we are firmly resisting to obey your unjust laws, we are still loving you resolutely. Hence we will undergo voluntarily and patiently all the sufferings that will accrue out of this disobedience. Blood we should shed, but that is to be ours and not yours. And we will wear you out by our suffering-love.'

That is precisely what Christ teaches through his love maxim in Mt 5:39. Paraphrasing this passage, scripture scholars today²⁵ are bringing out the rich potential of active but non-violent resistance involved in the three realm of injustice: social, economical, and political. But already at that time Gandhi took this principle seriously and empowered his protesters to suffer with a view of

converting the opponent. The oppressors were Christians, who wrought untold injustice on the Indian laborers in South Africa, and as such they were violators of the love maxim. The Hindus and Muslims, who opposed their injustice by defying the unjust laws and by volunteering to undergo all the sufferings, were keen on putting the love maxim in action, purely with the sole motive of converting the non-practicing Christians and never wanting to punish them. So the whole fight was really an 'inter-religious cooperation'.

Then on his return to India, when Gandhi took up the leadership in the freedom struggle, he was quick to perceive the overpowering influence of the Hindu extremists in the nationalist movement. It was Gandhi who instilled confidence in the minorities and brought in the cooperation of Muslims, Christians and Parsis to work with the Hindus to the fight against the political slavery of the British imperialism. The members of the Satyagraha Ashram belonged to all major religious. Similarly Gandhi wooed the volunteers from every major religion in carrying out the constructive programmes like the removal of untouchability, prohibition, health education, economic equality etc.²⁶ Again he gave to communal unity such a prime importance that he made it as the first and most basic of all his constructive programmes. It was indeed beyond his control that partition of India took place. When communal frenzy cropped up,

Gandhi went to Calcutta, on a pilgrimage of peace, took up the 21 days fasting and got the communal peace established.

We all usually think that a communal problem is political problem and so only a political solution needs to be given it. But Gandhi does not take it merely as a political problem. Neither does he think that a mere political solution will be a real solution. Gandhi viewed communal problem primarily as a religious problem. So he was keen on trying to solve it at the heart level through religious means. In that connection Gandhi was conducting inter-religious prayer among people, thereby cultivating a culture of peace among people of all religions. That is how he organized inter-religious prayers during the last 100 days of his life. It was in that prayer ground that he gave his last breath and shed his blood for the ransom of communalists.

2.4 Inter-Religious Harmony in the State Governance

Gandhi was totally opposed to any one religion becoming a state religion. At the same time he did not visualize total separation of religion from the state, as the western secularism had implied in their polity. But he certainly wanted all religions to permeate the polity with their true religious aroma in the governance of the state. That meant shedding of their, petty ghetto minded attitudes, sectarian approaches and fundamentalist methods. It is significant to recall what he said about religion: "Let me explain what I mean by

religion. It is not the Hindu religion, which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which changes one's very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the Truth within and whichever purifies. It is the permanent element in human nature which... leaves the soul restless until it has found itself, known its Maker and appreciated that true correspondence between the Maker and itself."²⁷

It is with this meaning of religion that Gandhi allowed India to function as a Republic. So, for Gandhi, India could not be a theocratic state, but still not a state devoid of any religious influence. It was to be a state with influence from all religions minus sectarianism of each. How fittingly has Louis Fischer remarked about the irony that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, who was not religious, established Pakistan as a state based on religion, while Gandhi, who was completely religious, worked to establish a secular state.²⁸

It was a trans-religious way of understanding religion that had immense impact on the political scenario of India immediately after the Partition. Again it was that trans-religious approach of Gandhi that paved the way for smooth co-existence of all religions in Indian polity. Thereby he has really contributed to the possibility of inter-religious harmony in the secular India. If the communal conflicts that crop up now and then, it is because of the extremist elements in religions.

As far as Gandhi was concerned, he was convinced that all religions are true on account of which Gandhi was able to establish a cordial and smooth relationship with people of all religions and enjoy an inter-religious cooperation and friendship of people belonging to various religions

3. THE GANDHIAN THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY

In the light of the knowledge Gandhi gained to handle the different religious claims and on the basis of his unique experience of inter-religious actions, Gandhi was going on discovering that all religions are fundamentally true and he kept on weaving the true elements of the various religions into such a theoretical framework. It was with the help of such a framework that we could solve many of the inter-religious problems which might not have been solvable otherwise. It is to that theoretical framework we need to turn for our consideration now in this final part.

It may be easy to shed light on the Gandhian framework of inter-religious harmony by looking into how (a) Gandhi defines what religion is and (b) what religions are, and (c) the logical consequences of (a) and (b).

3.1. Gandhi's Definition of Religion

To the question 'what religion is,' various answers have been given in the past. They differ from religion to religion. For instance, the Semetic religions would

define religion in terms of binding force with God, revelation etc. On the contrary Indian religions would prefer to define religion as *dharma*, a duty based approach. In fact it is on account of this difference in approach that most of the foreign missionaries accused the Indian religions of being merely 'human searches' while their religion was the 'divinely revealed' one.²⁹ In contrast, Gandhi gives a quite distinct definition of religion which is applicable to all types of religions. Without going into details of his analysis, we may just put his thoughts in the form of certain propositions:

(1) Gandhi starts with the universal phenomenon of the whole of humanity: There is a fundamental problem about the very human existence. It may be popularly perceived as the uncertainty, insecurity or impermanence of life. Nobody has a warranty card on his/her life. Nobody is certain how long he/she is going to live on earth. Philosophically people have emphasized the state of imperfectness and faultiness as a constituent factor of existence itself. Henrich Kraemer, for example, would identify the constant predicament of human being as being caught between the two: apish and angelic qualities. There are certain tendencies of animality on the one hand, but there is also a thirst and propensity for divinity. To put it differently, there is, on the one hand, an almost naturally earning for perfection, but there is also, on the other hand, a downward pull. The same problem has

been viewed by various religions in various ways: The soul being in state of bondage (*samsara*) or ignorance (*avidya*) or of misery (*dhuka*) or defiled by karmic particles, selfishness or sinfulness that St. Paul talks of in Rom.7:14 b.

(2) Next, Gandhi holds that each religion has addressed itself to this fundamental problem and has positively and successfully grappled with it. That each religion has successfully tackled the problem is proved, according to Gandhi, by the fact of Attainments or the 'fact of saints': the liberated souls (*jivan mukta*), realized souls (*jnani*), the enlightened ones (*buddha*), the victorious souls (*jina*), the risen (the *christos*). These are facts. One cannot deny the fact.

(3) When a saint emerges out of a society, some of those who are around him are drawn to him. Having witnessed him to have tackled the fundamental problem so successfully, they too would like to tread the same path so as to get themselves liberated from the state of imperfectness. Thus there arises a close circle of immediate followers or disciples to whom he is bound to show the path of perfection.

(4) Now, as the saint tries to explain it to his close disciples his 'path', he could do so only in the way they can know, using the language which they are conversant with, making use of the symbols they have been acquainted with, and in and through the cultural modes in which they have been brought up. After the earthly sojourn of

that saint, his followers would try to 'show' the path of their master to other aspiring souls, perhaps, by simply repeating the words of the master, or by re-casting them according to the changed conditions of their times and the varied capacities of the hearers. Mostly they would focus on cultivating the same ways their Master had done, using the same symbols, habits and customs. This is how a particular cult or a form of worship arises. In short, religion is religion only because of that person of attainment and the path of attainment.

3.2. The Plurality of Religions

(1) As a religion begins to grow, some more modifications are bound to occur. The simple folk, straightforward and plain spoken persons would abide by what they were told to do. However a sophisticated person may be disturbed by a particular symbol or concept. So he may raise some doubts about the meaning of the symbol, or even about authenticity of the guru. In the process, therefore, appropriate answers need to be given to quench the genuine questions raised by some searching minds who could raise doubts regarding a particular symbol, gesture or practice.

(2) Thus there arises a set of explanations regarding the solution. Depending upon the ability of the intellectual sophistication, people are able to give justification to the cult. This is how a creed of a religion arises. Besides, as the community begins to grow in size,

eventually a set of rules and regulations begin to crop up to maintain the unity as well as the identity of the group of believers. Thus comes a particular code of conduct as the hallmark of that religion. In short, though a particular cult, creed and code emerges ultimately from the original life of attainment, it takes on different forms in response to the differences of time, place and culture.

(3) Religion therefore cannot be just an answer to the fundamental problem flowing from the attained soul, but it has to be couched in certain cultic practices, creedal explanations and moral codes. All these are determined by the geographical and climatic conditions and historic reasons. Therefore, religions are bound to be varied because of different languages, geographic conditions and climatic reasons and historic factors. Given the variety of factors, even the statement of problem and the formulation of the answers are bound to be different.

3.3. Implications for Inter-Religious Harmony

Granted the validity of Gandhi's considerations regarding what religion is and what religions are, the following points flow logically from the 3.1. and 3.2.

All religions are true since they derive their source from God the Absolute Truth, more so because all have produced the fact of saints. All religions are also imperfect for the simple reason that human instrumentality is involved in both receiving

the revelation as well as its transmission by commentators. All religions are equal in the sense that every religion has the Truth and at the same time every religion is also imperfect. i.e. Every religion is more or less true and there is the need for every religion to grow from imperfection to Truth or from the less perfect to the more perfect. All religions are bound to be varied because they are all couched in cults, creed and code which are necessarily different because of the differences of time, place, culture and history in which they arise.

No religion can claim uniqueness in terms of cult, code or creed. Granted that Attainment is the core of religion, and that cult, code and creed are results of Attainment but explained in a variety of ways because of variety of contexts and sophistication, then what matters is re-living of that Attainment and not a particular doctrine, cult or code. Any doctrine, cult or code is acceptable so long as it makes Attainment possible.

Here Gandhi introduces an important category for theology of religions. Granted that truth of religion is fundamentally in terms of Attainment, then God is the Absolute Truth (AT) because He is the Attainment, pure and simple, the Transcendent and the Perfect. That Truth which is in itself, when perceived by human beings, is Relative Truth (RT) because it is seen in relation to the subjective conditions of the subjects, depending upon the perceivers' viewpoints, standpoints, and other factors like the geographic, climatic

and cultural. So, all religions are Relative truths (RTs). By the very fact that human beings are imperfect, the RTs are bound to be imperfect. The AT may be called differently as God in English, *Deus* in Latin, *Isvara* in Sanskrit, *Kadavul* in Tamil, *Thevaru* in Kanada etc. So also the same AT may be called as Father in Christianity, *Allah* in Islam, *Brahman* in Hinduism, *Nirvana* in Buddhism. These different labels do not mean different gods. In fact, it is impossible, philosophically to hold plurality of Gods.

A religion, say RT_1 , is valid if it is intimately connected with AT. If other RTs say RT_2 , or RT_3 or RT_n are also intimately connected with AT, they are also valid. No one RT can attempt at a comparison with other RTs and claim superiority over any other. If you do, conflict would arise. If each RT sees to it that it is really connected with AT and is keen on going nearer to the AT more and more, it has done its duty. This itself will contribute to inter-religious harmony. The task of each religion, therefore, is to remove its own imperfections and go nearer to the AT rather than claiming uniqueness to itself, comparing itself with other RTs, and creating conflicts among religions.

4. CONCLUSION

In fine, it may be appropriate to draw out a couple of practical points, relevant to the practice of inter-religious harmony in a multi-religious society.

(1) Not even we, Christians, could claim uniqueness of Jesus Christ in terms of a doctrine. If at all we are keen on claiming it, it has to be by re-living the Jesus event, by living a life primarily by the Spirit and in complete surrender to the Father. In the same way, Buddhahood is not to be claimed unique in terms of the best scientifically worked out doctrine but by bringing about Enlightenment in me here and now. Similarly Jaina faith in 'Jina-hood' means a call to achieving complete conquest of self here and now and to zeroing of the karmas in me, rather than claiming it to be the most ancient and non-violent religion. All the different religions are fundamentally one in terms of Attainment, though varied in terms of creedal doctrines, cultic practices and moral teachings and philosophies. If religions realize this basic point, then, they will inevitably bring about inter-religious harmony.

(2) Another important implication of Gandhi's distinction between AT and RT is that no RT can use force on other RTs. Each RT has to abide by the light given to it and focus its attention in getting closer and closer to the AT rather than imposing its light on the other by physical force or coercion. Nonviolence of religion is a logical exigency flowing from the distinction of AT and RT, and not a matter of expediency. If this is realized by all religions, then they are bound to live in inter-religious harmony.

Perhaps, Gandhi was too ahead of times to be reckoned with in the past. However, in today's context of communal strife and conflicts, Gandhi's contribution becomes not only a viable tool but also an inevitable means for establishing inter-religious harmony.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Why I am a Hindu" in *Young India* 20.10.1927. For easy reference, See V.B. Kher, Ed. *In Search of the Supreme*, Vol.III, p. 112-113, Henceforth V.B. Kher
- ² *Harijan*, 11.2.1933; For easy reference, see Bharatan Kumarappa, Ed., *The Removal of Untouchability*, p.50-51, henceforth B. Kumarappa.
- ³ B. Kumarappa, p. 51
- ⁴ *Young India*, 6.10.1921, Cf. Bharatan Kumarappa, p.19,
- ⁵ *Young India*, 21.5.1928, Cf. Anand T, Hingorani, *The Teaching of the Gita* (Bombay : The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971), p.6.
- ⁶ *Young India*, Cf. A.T. Hingorani, p.4
- ⁷ An Autobiography, p. 101
- ⁸ *Harijan*, 6.3.1937; For easy reference, Ed., Anand T. Hingorani, *All Religions are True* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1962), p. 47
- ⁹ *Harijan*, 6.3.1937; Cf. Anand T. Hingorani, p.48.
- ¹⁰ *Young India*, 4,9, 1924, Cf. Anand T. Hingorani, p.59.
- ¹¹ *Young India*, 6.8.1925, Cf. Anand T. Hingorani, p.76.
- ¹² He even wrote a book in appreciation of Gandhi: *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Ideas* (Skylight Lives series), Sky Light Paths Publishing reissued edition, 2003.
- ¹³ "Almost Catholic" in <<http://jonmsweeney.wordpress.com/2010/02/28/e-stanley-jones-c-f-andrews-gandhi-and-st-francis/>>
- ¹⁴ *Young India*, 26.2.1925 Cf. V.B. Kher, *In Search of the Supreme*, Vol., 1. P.148.
- ¹⁵ *Young India*, 5.3. 1925, Cf. V.B. Kher, Vol., 1. P.150.
- ¹⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography* Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), Reprint 1976, pp.22-24, Hence forth An Autobiography.
- ¹⁷ An Autobiography, p.24.
- ¹⁸ *An Autobiography*, p.51.
- ¹⁹ *An Autobiography*, p. 90-92,100-102.
- ²⁰ *An Autobiography*, p.120.
- ²¹ *An Autobiography*, p.118.
- ²² These different propositions are culled from Gandhi's own words but organized in a logical coherence.
- ²³ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), p.50.
- ²⁴ V.B. Kher, *In Search of the Supreme*, Vol III., p.111-121.

- ²⁵ Walter Wink, *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa: Jesus' Third Way* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), Ch. 2.
- ²⁶ M.K. Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1941).
- ²⁷ *Young India*, 12.5.1920, Cf. Ed. Shriman Narayan, *The Voice of Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1969), p.263.
- ²⁸ Louis Fisher, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p.430 as cited by Terrence J. Rynne, *Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2009), p. 17
- ²⁹ The best example of such an approach may be Henrik Kreamer, *Why Christianity of all religions?* (London: Lutherworth Press, 1962).

DIALOGUE WITH ALL FAITHS: LIVED EXPERIENCE OF A CHRISTIAN ASHRAM

Mary John Kattikatt, FMM

1. INTRODUCTION

As consecrated persons we are to be, in the words of St. Paul, “all things to all people,” rising beyond the confines of limited interests. This is also the thrust of an ashram,¹ to listen to the Spirit beyond the narrow boundaries of religions and traditions, castes and cultures, and at the same time, appreciating and accepting truth, goodness and beauty wherever it is found so that all may live in harmony. An ashram seeks to foster all round harmony, religious harmony being an important aspect of it. How we live inter-religious harmony day-to-day and what we do to promote it in *Ishalaya*, Franciscan Ashram, are deeply linked to our spiritual and intellectual experiences and to all that have happened in the universal Church, in the Church in India and in our Congregation

after the II Vatican Council. A brief reference to these is necessary before we go into the details of our experiences in inter-religious harmony in the ashram set-up.

2. INSPIRATION FROM VATICAN COUNCIL II

The Documents of II Vatican Council and the Church’s subsequent teachings on *Dialogue with other Religions* have been the guiding principles for us to enter into Ashram way of life. *Perfectae Caritatis*, Article 3 states: “The manner of living, praying and working should be suitably adapted . . . to the needs of the apostolate, to the requirements of a given culture, the social and economic circumstances anywhere, but especially in missionary territories.” *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-*

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Christian Religions, Article 2 says: “The Church, therefore, has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly ... acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men as well as the values in their society and culture.” We also read in the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, Article 21: “ They must give expression to this newness of life (i.e. Christ’s life) in the social and cultural framework of their own homeland, according to their own national traditions.”

The subsequent documents of the Church, though do not highlight inculturation nevertheless is very much concerned about inter-religious dialogue as an important aspect of Church’s mission in the modern world.

3. INITIATIVES IN THE INDIAN CHURCH

The renewal that took place in the Church in India re-iterated these ideals of Vatican II and promoted inculturation and inter-faith dialogue as important areas of Church’s updating in India. The Seminar on *Church in India To-day*, 1969, Bangalore, called upon the Church to encourage contemplative life in all communities at every level and in particular to promote ashrams and ashram way of life. Subsequently, the *National Assembly of the CRI*, 1984, and *Yesu Krist Jayanthi*² 2000 and other public gatherings of the Church have recognized the Ashram way of life as one of the best

means of expressing consecrated life and mission within the Church in the Indian context. The Action Plan, formulated to follow up on *Yesu Krist Jayanthi* celebrations, urgently appeals to the Bishops to “initiate a process of research into this aspect of Indian Christian spirituality with the objective of formation of ashrams in their dioceses.”³ Since Vatican II, many Ashrams of Catholic initiative have come up in the country. Today they are formed into an association, named, *Ashram Aikya*. It has a President, Vice-President and a Treasurer. They meet once in two years in any one of the big ashrams like Saccidananda Ashram Trichy, Anjeli Ashram, Mysore, Vidya Vanam in Bangalore etc.

4. EFFORTS AT THE CONGREGATIONAL LEVEL

In keeping with the mind of the Church, the Congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, promoted inculturation, and inter-faith dialogue within the context of ashram way of life. The Orientations of the General Chapter of 1984 adopted three options namely *Inter-faith dialogue, Inculturation and Option for the Poor*. The life and mission of our Congregation were to be renewed along these lines. Our Provincials were given permission to make experimental ventures along these lines.

The three Provincials who played an active role in shaping the personnel for the ashram were Mother Klemens, Sr. Angela

Hurley and Sr. Mary Lily Bernard. The entire FMM Province of Chennai was given a three-day seminar on Indian Spirituality in 1978 under the direction of the two sisters of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart, Vandana Mataji and Ishapriya Mataji. A follow up seminar of eight days and later a retreat were conducted for those who desired to go deeper. This was further reinforced by another seminar by Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadoss. Sisters were also encouraged to go for an experience of ashram life and Indian Spirituality at various ashrams both Hindu and Christian, for example, *Sivananda Ashram* in Rishikesh, *Ramana Ashram* in Tiruvannamalai, *Jeevan Dhara* in Rishikesh and *Jaiharikhal, Anjali Ashram* in Mysore, *Kurisumalai* in Kerala and *Shantivanam* near Trichy. The pioneers of *Ishalaya* had availed themselves of all these opportunities.

5. FOUNDATION OF ISHALAYA: A FRANCISCAN ASHRAM

Ishalaya had its beginning in June 1986 in Adyar, Chennai. Sisters Tara, Mary John, Esther Rani and Rita Susai were the pioneers who ventured into this project.

Our first concern was to study the constitutions of our Congregation in the background of the life of St. Francis Assisi and the Bible and then in relation to the culture and spirituality of India. After this, we took up the study of the Indian Scriptures, especially the Bhagavad Gita,

the Upanishds, the Dhammapada and other classical texts in order to pick up similarities in thoughts, ideas, values etc. We were pleasantly surprised to see how God seekers in other religions too relentlessly strive towards reaching the Divine through prayer, austerity and righteous living. We discovered how close St. Francis of Assisi is to the Indian spiritual ideals of contemplation of the Divine in nature, in all creatures, in people etc. With a group of few followers, living together in simplicity and openness to all sections of the society—the rich, the poor, the ecclesiastics, the rulers etc, St. Francis entered into dialogue with all. St Francis has left a rich heritage of harmonious living with the whole cosmos. The fourteen years of our stay in Chennai was a time of deepening our experience and spirituality. There are two factors which helped us in this direction.

5.1. An Inter-Faith Study Circle

A mixed group of persons from different religious affiliations such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity along with the *Ishalaya* community formed a study circle. They met in *Ishalaya* once a week for six years. The first topic of study was *Tirukkural*, a Tamil Hindu classical book. This was followed by a comparative study of *sanyasa* in Hinduism, Jainism and Christianity. In connection with the study of *sanyasa* in Jainism, we had an enriching encounter with two Jain nuns who had come from Bombay to spend a few days

with their family in Mylapore, Chennai. They shared with us their motivation for taking to *sanyasa*, their ascetical practices, their method of meditation, their way of life etc. These studies helped us to widen our mental horizons and accept the good and the beautiful in other religions.

5.2. Net-working with Similar Groups

Another training ground for dialogue while in Chennai was net-working with like-minded people engaged in similar programme. A few of them are: 1. *Aikya Aleyam*, a centre for Intercultural and Inter-Faith Dialogue; 2. Madras Association of Inter-Cultural Philosophy at Satyanilayam, Chennai; 3. Gandhi Peace Foundation, Chennai; 4. Inter-Faith movement for Human Solidarity, Chennai.

Participation in discussions, study circles, seminars, celebration of festivals, prayer meeting etc. as well as giving occasionally lectures at the above institutions enabled us to transform our mind-set towards a more open spirituality and life-style. In Chennai, we were mostly in rented houses which had no facility for receiving people, conducting yoga classes, retreats, meetings etc.

5.3. *Ishalaya* in Palamaner

In the year 2000, the Ashram was shifted to a farm land in Palamaner, Andhra Pradesh. The ashram buildings in this new venue consists of kitchen, dining-hall and six small rooms for the core group, a Mandir,¹ an multi-purpose hall, and three

*sadhana kutirs*² with twenty-two beds to accommodate those who come for ashram experience, retreats, etc.

As Franciscans we realized that after the example of St. Francis of Assisi who entered into loving relationship with various types of people, with all creatures and with the whole cosmos, we too needed to keep broadening our vision. We realized too that dialogue in all its aspects is necessary in order to enter into harmonious living at all levels. This vision got crystallized in oil on canvas. A painting of 3.5'x2' on cosmic fraternity, displayed in the dining room of the ashram is a reminder to us of this vision. The following steps are taken to translate this vision into life:

a. Entering into the life-texture of the local people appreciating and adopting their meaningful customs and usages in music, art, way of worship, e.g., taking *arati*¹ making floral designs as decorations for celebrations, using Indian music especially *bhajans*² for liturgy.

b. Integrating the liberating aspects from the spirituality of other religions into our life and prayer, e.g., practicing *yoga asanas*³ *dhyana*⁴, *pranayama*⁵ etc., use of texts from other scriptures for study and prayer, and practicing *ahimsa*⁶ and mindfulness, values special to Jainism and Buddhism respectively. People from the locality come to participate in our prayers especially in the evenings.

c. In view of building up a harmonious local community, we have been visiting families in the neighborhood. Majority of them are Hindus and Muslims. It was a rewarding experience because we saw that people who appeared to be suspicious and indifferent at the beginning turned out to be friends and partners in dialogue. Children were our starting point. They used to come to our ashram to play, to drink water, to visit the crib at Christmas time etc. Slowly we got a small library with children's books which they started reading. They began to sing and dance on festive occasions. Through the children we became acquainted with the parents and other elders of the family. Children along with the parents began to come just to sit around to enjoy the peace and quietness of the ashram, or to pray in the *Mandir*. Visits to the families in the locality are a regular programme of our community, sometimes for special occasions such as birth, death, sickness and at other times for making acquaintances or to renew friendship.

Friendly visits and individual contacts eventually helped us to form an inter-faith dialogue group in the year 2002. Since then meetings are held every first Sunday of the month. At the beginning we took up discussions and reflections on human values like justice, peace, freedom, love etc. After two years we had an evaluation, and suggestions were invited from the group. Accordingly, now we study the scriptures of different religions. Each religion takes turn to present a selected

text from its scripture with life-oriented explanations and illustrations. Participation of the group is ensured by singing, sometimes by individuals, sometimes by small groups and sometimes by the whole group. After the main speaker finishes, those who wish to share on the same theme do so briefly. This is followed by silent meditation for five to ten minutes to interiorize what was spoken. Meeting is concluded by reciting together the prayer of St. Francis for peace. From time to time, our dialogue group takes up action-oriented programme. Some of the examples are: an exhibition entitled "Precious Me in a Precious World" highlighting the uniqueness of the human person, the need for justice, peace and means of maintaining the ecological balance; a rally in sympathy with the victims of bomb blast in Mumbai; input sessions to seven different schools on bio-diversity and the importance of environmental protection.

5.4. Perceived Impact

One of the perceived impacts of the meetings, to be noted, is that a serious conflict between the Muslims and Christians was averted. Some people of a fanatical Christian sect distributed Christian pamphlets in front of a mosque when the Muslim community was coming out after prayer. This offended their religious sentiments; they considered it as an attempt to convert them to Christianity. Muslims retaliated by beating up the Pastor. However, further violence was stopped by

the intervention of a respected Muslim gentleman who is a member of our dialogue group and who appreciates our efforts to build up harmony in the locality.

6. LESSONS FROM DIALOGUE EXPERIENCE

Involvement in dialogue has been a liberating experience. It has helped us to experience things from a broad perspective and to see that all people of the world, no matter to which religion they belong, are children of the same God, our Father and Mother, and also brothers and sisters to one another. The same God creates, sustains and saves the entire cosmos, perhaps, through different channels – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc. The kingdom of God is greater than any organized religion. Kingdom values are also human values. They form the common platform which unites us as one family. As part of this planet we have close affinity with all creatures, with nature and the entire cosmos. We belong to the Cosmic Fraternity, the Earth Family with privileges and responsibilities. Dialogue teaches us that we have the same origin and the same destiny. Whatever may be the way we follow to reach that destiny, we need to see all people as co-pilgrims. Therefore we need to have an all-inclusive attitude and to enter into communion with all. And at the same time we retain our identity as Christians.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Ashram* is a Sanskrit word having its origin in the Hindu tradition where it refers to a stage in the scheme of life of a Hindu, namely, *varnashrama dharma*, meaning, the four stages of life – student, householder, hermit and wandering monk or a *sanyasi*. It was also a place where sages or the wise men of India lived in pursuit of wisdom in all its different aspects. Down through the centuries, the set-up of an ashram, the life-style etc have undergone radical changes. Today it is impossible to give any one satisfactory definition to this word. As we understand in the Catholic Association of *Ashrams*, an *ashram* is a place where God-seekers live together.
- ² The second millennium celebration of the birth of Jesus.
- ³ Paul Puthanangady, (ed.). *Yesu Krist Jayanthi 2000 Towards a New Society* (Bangalore: 2001), p.66.
- ⁴ Place of worship, chapel.
- ⁵ A small hut or a room where the devotees live and do their spiritual practices such yoga, meditation and so on.
- ⁶ *Arati* means waiving of light before the image of God. Sometimes after waiving, the light is brought to the devotees who take its warmth with the palms of their hands and smear it in their foreheads and faces, as a sign of receiving God's blessings.

- ⁷ Chanting means devotional rhythmic repetition of God's name or any word/ phrase with spiritual meaning.
- ⁸ Bodily postures/ exercises to keep the body fit for prayer and also to enhance health.
- ⁹ Indian contemplative prayer; it is an inner pilgrimage where the devotee goes from the external to the inner core of his/ her being to experience the indwelling presence of God. We have *dhyana* in our ashram three times a day; at dawn, at mid-day and at dusk. At this time in silence and in the core of our being we reach out to all so as to be in harmony with all.
- ¹⁰ Controlled breathing, helpful for prayer and for health.
- ¹¹ Non-violence.

BOOK REVIEW

Joseph Kasmir, SJC

Martin Forward, *Inter-Religious Dialogue: A short Introduction*

One World Publications, England, 2007, P.168, ₹ 195.00

Inter-religious dialogue by Martin Forward is a highly remarkable and a relevant writing. It speaks of inter-religious dialogue and interfaith relationships by exploring the meaning, need, and its outcome in today's world. The author confesses his intention of writing this book so as to show that inter-faith dialogue is an essential strategy for meeting, understanding, valuing, learning, and living together peacefully in a multi-religious context. It is also highly recommendable for all religious people to know about inter-religious dialogue and especially for those who are interested in dialogue for deepening their knowledge.

The book starts with a brief introduction in which the author says that this book is written as a complimentary to his book "Religion: A beginner's guide". He introduces himself as a Christian Methodist and a student of Henry Martyn Institute for inter-religious dialogue at Lahore. He possesses vast experiences of living with different religious people, especially with Muslims and Hindus which led him into

deepening dialogue and understanding. The content of the book is developed mainly by presenting different authors and their writings on the same topic and by drawing ideas from them as authentic support for his topics. It is clear that Martin Forward has a tremendous, vast, deep and advanced knowledge on inter-religious dialogue. His knowledge about various authors, scholars, books, inter-religious movements, etc., are really praise worthy. He also makes use of the sacred scriptures and theological views of many major religions which give depth and authenticity to his view points.

The first and the second chapters speak of the need of dialogue and its meaning in the inter-faith context. Dialogue is presented as historically rooted and the author shows the value of dialogue by writing on some of the great people in history who engaged themselves in dialogue, such as Socrates, Paul, Akbar, Sarada Devi, etc. Besides giving the appropriate alternative strategies for a dialogical theology of religions, he also

explores his own Methodist resources for dialogue as an illustration of how every dialogician might examine their own religious resources to work out how to live faithfully in a religiously diverse world. He also gives, at the end, some practical suggestions with an invitation to develop a global ethic, a culture of partnership between people of all religions and a culture of tolerance with the golden rule that is applied to all the religions as a common ethical principle.

The third and fourth chapters speak about dialogue in the new millennium and the need to mend the world. They speak of a dialogical theology as we come to the deepest knowledge of the transcendent reality through our relationship with the other; by meeting, conversing, reading and reflecting their written words, and finally by living with others. He also explores the importance of both bilateral and multilateral dialogue as manifested by many movements and argues for an educative process that seeks to help religious people not simply to tolerate but to rejoice in the otherness of the other. This is a process that regards diversity as a transcendent value and emphasizes the need to seek a common ground in the midst of differences.

The last chapter examines the possibilities that are open to human being in an era of globalization and some particular issues in the contemporary world that have often been badly handled by the religions. Author recognizes the need for a renewal of religions for the new generations and invites everyone to go beyond the narrow boundaries. He also speaks of the changing role of woman in all religions, the gender diversity, and the care for creation as cultivated by many religions. He concludes by saying that dialogue with others will help us teach and learn from one another, disclose wisdom, and finally to grow further into the truth that offers healing to the wounded world.

As a whole, this book helps us embark on the enterprise of exploring an inter-religious theology of religions in this religiously diverse world. The author has logically and clearly developed the topics throughout the book. The book will really help the people of all religions to know the meaning and value of inter-religious dialogue and inter-faith relationships. The end notes, index and the bibliography are so rich and are useful for anyone who may want to study more on this subject.

BOOK REVIEW

Assunta Lobo, EF

Gregory Arby, *The Beauty of Communion*

Asian Trading Publications, Bangalore, 2007, P. 327, ₹ 150.00

Gregory Arby's "*The beauty of Communion*" is a manifestation of the beauty of God concretely expressed through a life of communion. Author has drawn ideas from a wide variety of sources including Christology and Ecclesiology. He focuses mainly on the beauty of Christian community life in relation to the extraordinary beauty of communion revealed in Christ. Life of faith and communion expressed in the local churches and in the basic ecclesial communities are shown as the vital elements of this beauty. The whole content of the book is mainly a development on the *Form* and *Expression* of the beauty of communion according to Von Balthasar. This book is surely a promising source for anyone who desires to live in communion in their communities.

Gregory Arby begins by introducing the readers to the heart of his master-idea that the "beauty" consists in one's covenantal relationship with God and faithfulness to His commandments. He develops the concept of God as the supreme beauty which is manifested

through the beauty of His creation. Therefore, an attempt is made to study the beauty of Christian life as a participation in the beauty of Christ mediated through the church.

The first chapter speaks of the "concept of beauty" by presenting Von Balthasar's view which is a theology of aesthetics rather than aesthetical theology. *Form* and *expression*, here, are the two poles of beauty. The perception of beauty is something revealed from above, the center of which is the beautiful *form* of Christ himself as the *expression* of the beauty of the glorious love of God, revealed on the cross in the light of the resurrection. Thus one can find communion of love as the *form* of beauty and the self-giving communication of love as the *expression* of beauty as found in the mystery of Trinitarian communion.

The second chapter sees the beauty of Christ as the supreme form of God's revelation. Author states that even though God dwells in an inaccessible light, He has

manifested Himself through the visible form of Christ. He joins St. John and Von Balthasar in asserting the inaccessible glory of God as expressed in Christ's form which is the essence of Christian faith; it is the beauty of God that appears in Christ and the beauty of Christ which is to be found in God.

The third chapter goes further to show that this form of Christ is being expressed in the beauty of the Church where the Christian life is not complete without a participation in this mediatory expression of the Church. Author depicts Mary and the Apostles with whom the form of Christ was deeply associated as models of a complete Christian life and especially Mary as the type of a perfect Church.

The fourth chapter highlights the beauty of Christian life in its form and expression. Here the concern is to explain the significance of Christian life as a life of faith. Being a Christian, being in mission, being in obedience, being in holiness, etc., are also shown as different expressions. The beauty of the Church is also explained in relation with the different states of life in the Church as our unique responses to the call of the Lord.

The last chapter speaks on the expression of this beauty of Christian life in the form of communion. So, along with the individual life, the author shows also another way of expression of life which is in the form of communion. Hence, the beautiful form of Christian life is a call to play one's role of communion in the community. The whole attention is focused on the meaningfulness of Christian life as it expresses itself in the form of communion. The author goes on to develop further the concept of communion, meaning of communion, and communion in the local church. Thus communion in the community is made possible because of the form of communion in God which is expressed in Christ through the mediation of Church and the Christian life.

This book is of a high value and quality because of its rich content and the methodology of its presentation. The introduction and the five chapters are developed so scientifically and clearly in order to convey the views of the author to the readers easily and correctly. The title itself is a source for one's curiosity to go in to depth of this book. The end notes after every chapter and the bibliography are good resources for anyone who is interested in the theme of communion.



SANYASA: JOURNAL OF CONSECRATED LIFE

A biannual published by Sanyasa Institute for Consecrated Life, Bangalore

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