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# Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of Inter-religious & Inter-cultural Dialogue

## Ethics and Society: An International Journal
## Religions and Cultures for Peace and Harmony

**Vol. 6**

**Contributors:**

Dr. Francis Gonsalves
Dr. Roberto Catlano
Brahma Kumari Vinita
Uzma Naheed
Dr. Kokila Shah
Fr. Dr. S.M. Michael
Fr. Dr. Stephen Fernandes
Dr. Marie Fernandes
Sharmila Dhote
Dr. Sr. Teresa Joseph

**Edited by**
Archbishop Felix Machado
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**Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair for Inter-Religious And Inter-Cultural Dialogue**
**St. Andrew's College, Bandra, Mumbai – 400050**

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It is *Open*, because it recognises within each human being the spiritual openness, that means the religious dimension which constitute man's nature.

Therefore, it works through the initiatives that I am going to illustrate [or: that I have illustrated]; valorising man in his spiritual dimension, hoping that the different expressions of it do not become an occasion for violent conflicts, but rather a loyal and constructive comparison, for reciprocal enrichment and a common search of truth.

**Adv. Giuseppe Musumeci**
**President**
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# Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation
# Chair of Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Dialogue
# St. Andrew's College, Bandra

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To promote peace and harmony for a holistic development of society.

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The Chair of Inter-Religious and International Dialogue at St. Andrew's College aims at promoting:

- The exchange of knowledge concerning religions and cultures in dialogue with one another
- Advanced studies and research in Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue
- A space for dialogue so as to foster social harmony and national integration
- The transformation of society by training people to live in peace and harmony.

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**Lectures**: Lectures by distinguished persons of various religious traditions and cultures. The lectures will aim at creating better understanding among the students and participants, and promote peace and harmony.

**Research**: Offers the possibility for scholars to work on research papers and publications.

**Inter-Collegiate Programmes**: Essay and Quiz competitions, Seminars, Debates and Exhibitions.

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# INTRODUCTION

Our readers will find various articles from several perspectives in this journal. Around the central theme: ***TheRelevance of Religion***, our authors succeed to offer a realistic and enriching contribution on religion, religious practices, mercy, peace, justice, globalization, and reconciliation as the essence of inter-religious dialogue.

Dr. Francis Gonsalves SJ writes onThe Relevance of Religion, Today The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue. He highlights that all religions—big and small—are characterized by four C's: (i) Creed, (ii) Cult, (iii) Conduct and (iv) Community. Every religion's creed, cult, conduct and community provide meaning not only for everyday life, but also for the afterlife. Positively, this has enabled believers to be open-minded before Truth, to symbolically ritualize events like birth, marriage and death, to lead moral lives and to build community. This can be called the '*power of religion*'. These are the fields which must be tapped to bring out the best in religious belief and practice. However, one must realize that there is wide diversity, if not divergence, among the religious beliefs and practices of different religions. Hence, the need for tolerance, as a very basic step, and respect and dialogue as one progressively begins to see the good and truth in other religions. Notwithstanding irreconcilable diversities in creed and cult, the ethics of diverse religions unanimously prescribe love, peace, justice, service, sacrifice and compassion as ideals that all must strive for. Can we not tap our religio-cultural resources to counteract clashes and create communities that not merely tolerate each other, but positively foster each other's welfare and growth? But, isn't religion the 'bind' that unifies everything and everyone, and the '*dharma*' that sustains the order of our cosmos, the care of which is entrusted to every woman, man and child? Can we not tap our religio-cultural resources to counteract clashes and create communities that not merely tolerate each other, but positively foster each other's welfare and growth? I believe we can, provided we prudently graft religion onto public life so as to enable societies to flower and fructify. In interfaith dialogue, we must stress what is common to religions and even acceptable to those who practise no religion whatsoever. Compassion is the confluence where all creeds can congregate and construct some form of global community.

Roberto Catlano writes on Return from exile The Role of Religions in a Globalised World. In the last decade, political scientists speak of 'return of religion to the public sphere of life'. It is an ongoing unanticipated process, especially in the West, evolving for quite some time with a multiplicity of aspects suggesting studies from different perspectives, involving political science and sociology of religions, but also ecclesiology with relevant implications for pastoral theology. The author focuses on historical aspects, the exile and the return of religion, religion in today's world: a contrasting panorama, the role of ecclesiology: a contribution towards a positive attitude and the category of fraternity. How Associations formed by lay people, have an impact at the social, political, educational and cultural level. Some of them, with a highly international spreading, - Sant'Egidio Community and the Focolare Movement, Comunione e Liberazione to mention the more developed ones - were able to join their commitment for renewal within the They are playing a constructive role in contributing to a mutually enriching encounter of faithful of different religious traditions. Roberto refers to similar phenomena of renewal which are happening within other faiths and traditions. They carry thought-provoking commonalities with the ones happening within Catholicism and Christianity. In fact, as much as the Catholic renewal movements and associations, also these groups in the Islamic, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu world show a commitment in renewing their own traditions, trying to make their Scriptures relevant in today's society.

Brahma Kumari Vinita highlights what Religion or "*Dharma*" means Dharna. Dharan Karna or Dharna means practical Inculcation of Knowledge and Virtues in Life. She then moves on to affirm that Religion is not just code of superficial things to be followed, but dharma or true religion is a Knowledge/Code of Conduct that takes one towards the Ultimate Truths of Life and takes one closer to one's Higher Self. Right thoughts will lead to right action called as Dharma. Meditation empowers one to practice "Swadharam" i.e the true religion of Every soul which is "Peace" through which one will get "Swarajya" i.e. Self Rule/Sovereignity.

Uzma Naheed offers an Islamic perspective on Relevance of Religion. Islam emphasized on equality of people, irrespective of races, caste and tribes. The only criterion of merit is goodness and piety- colour or birth or rank, do not matter. Gender Justice, Just Islam,

Social Justice, Economic Justice are some of the significant points brought into this article. The universal nature of humanity is underlined in Quran. God's purview and compassion is for every one – "All creatures".

Dr. Kokila Shah affirms that Jainism deals with the permanent values of life, which are of enduring benefit to mankind. Distinctive Jain principles can be used to facilitate and establish peace on the globe. In India religion and philosophy are not isolated practices but they are intertwined with life. Lord Mahavira was the great apostle of peace in the world and with the Jain principle of non-violence world can travel along the path of peace and freedom from fear. Perhaps in the twenty-first Century Jainism may rule the world with its principle of non-violence. Jain message of peace and world fraternity is a call for internationalism. The ethical principles of Jainism prescribe a code of conduct, which requires an individual to be an ideal person with non-violence as the foundation of his life. The author proposes a realistic and very committing agenda for action.

Dr. S.M. Michael in his paper Culture, Religion, Nationalism and Fundamentalism in the Post-Modern and Globalized World Today presents the complex reality of religion in the post-modern and globalized world of today. Whether we like it or not, globalization is the determinant material and social force of our times. Globalization refers to the expansion of global linkages, the organization of social life on a global scale, and the growth of a global consciousness, which leads to the consolidation of a world society. In cultural terms, globalization implies an increased cultural interconnectedness across the globe, principally as a result of the mass media, and also because of flows of people in migration, tourism and the global economic and political institutions leading to similar life patterns in different parts of the globe. One of the things that characterize the post-modern world we live in,is the breakdown of absolutes - in morals–sexual anarchy; in metaphysics–doubt; in epistemology–confusion and ambiguity. Symptoms of this cultural and intellectual malaise are everywhere discernible. Post-Modern ideas and values are projected in the powerful media. The media has a tremendous impact on the young. While globalization as a homogenizing process is active, we also observe cultures and religions asserting their separate identities. Fundamentalism was a reaction to modernism Hence, we need to be very careful to distinguish

between “the fundamentals” or Foundation of Faith in a religion and “fundamentalism”, which is a direct use of religion in politics for a narrow purpose leading to fanaticism.

Dr. Stephen Fernandes writes on Reconciliation as the Essence of Inter-Religious Dialogue. Mercy and Reconciliation are linked to Peace, Reconciliation is essential for Interreligious Dialogue and Peace.The quality of mercy is essential in order to reconcile with one another and build bridges of communion and peace with one another.People everywhere are asking the question whether peace can ever be achieved in our planet. Peace is the fruit of love, mercy and reconciliation and goes beyond what justice can provide. There is an increasing need for interreligious dialogue today, given today’s situation of conflicts, disputes, violence, threats to life coupled with the suppression of religious freedom in many countries.

Dr. Marie Fernandes traces the Loss of Faith and its Reflection in Literature from the period of the Renaissance, to the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason. This was largely due to the advancement in science and technology and the spread of secular learning. During the Victorian period too while there emerged a middle class morality, it was also a time of religious turmoil. Matthew Arnold the poet writes with great confidence, ‘where religion has failed us, poetry will save us’. The twentieth century witnessed the two Great Wars and this dealt a further blow to religious sentiment. There is however a new wave of spiritual awakening reflected in the works of Neale Donald Walsch and others.

Prof. Sharmila Dhote, in her article, Quality Of Life as a Function of Spiritual Intelligence takes the reader from Rational intelligence to Spiritual intelligence and quality of life. This paper is an attempt to examine the influence of spiritual intelligence on the quality of life among working women. During the early 20$^{th}$ century, it was believed that Rational intelligence (IQ) was related to success in life. Later, in the mid-1990s, it was propounded that emotional intelligence (EQ) is responsible for faring well in life. However, at the end of the 20$^{th}$ century and beginning of 21$^{st}$ century, spiritual intelligence (SQ) was considered as the ultimate intelligence. This umbrella intelligence which includes IQ and EQ, allows human beings to be creative, adaptive and enable moral judgements, listening to the inner voice. Human brain is wired for activation and utilisation of SI but in most cases it remains dormant, missing out on a richer quality of life.

Quality of life (QoL or QQ) is contingent upon each one's belief system. Life represents a large canvas, comprising of various aspects (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual), social well-being, career, family, socio-economic status etc. Life quality can be enhanced by the application of IQ, EQ and SQ in different degrees.

Sr. Dr. Teresa Joseph fma, writes on Peace a Universal Forum for Dialogue of Life Among Believers. Her article from an interdisciplinary and interreligious perspective highlights what unites believers to each other and how important it is for all to live in unity and peace empowering and commissioning each one to be an ambassador of peace and harmony. The vision of unity that sustains our cultures, philosophies and religions is our greatest strength. Encounters among people of different religions are one of the strongest signs of our times. Getting to know other religions is the key to the heart of joint collaboration. Dialogue is of great importance in establishing a secure basis for peace.

# The Relevance of Religion, Today
# The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue

**Dr. Francis Gonsalves, SJ)**

## 1. Introduction: Is Religion Redundant or Relevant?

Ever since the Enlightenment and thereafter, religion has lost ground in the public sphere. If not in the East and South, at least in what was formerly called the 'Christian West', many nations have relegated religion to the private sphere. Less said about religion, the better! Fortunately, this esteemed institution has had the good sense to have an "*International Symposium on the Relevance of Religion, Today*;" and, there are representatives here from the major religions who will speak about the relevance of their respective religions. As a theologian, I must confess with a modicum of embarrassment, that theologians have, over the years, been accused of being fairly truthful, but rarely relevant. I shall try to be both! But, first, let us define the terms of our discourse.

## 2. Definitions and Clarification of Terms:

The word 'religion' finds its etymological roots in two Latin words: first, *religare*, which means 'to bind' or 'establish links'. Religion binds / links one to God, to other human beings and to mother earth: Nature. Second, it also stems from *relegere*, meaning, re-read, interpret the Mystery called God, Brahman, Ultimate Being, etc. Although we can never understand the mystery of God fully, we have the faculty of reason and the facility of language, by which we try to express in and through human symbols, myths, narratives, etc., ultimate truths about life, death, birth, cosmic origins and destiny. In this regard, all religions give us insights into the Ultimate Reality or Absolute Being and map out pathways by which we can reach the ultimate goal or terminus of life—called salvation, *mukti*, moksha, nirvana, etc.

Besides trying to understand what religion is from its etymological roots, we have definitions of religion given by religionists and sociologists alike. J. Milton Yinger defines religion as: "A system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people

struggles with the ultimate problems of life."[1] Postmodern thinker John D. Caputo writes: "Religion is fundamentally a defiant gesture. It speaks in the name of life and against the powers that demean and degrade life. It does not arise negatively from a rejection, but affirmatively, from an affirmation of life, from the momentum and energy of life itself."[2] Thus, we take religion to be: (a) basically, community-activity, (b) dealing with ultimate meaning, (c) enabling humankind to address life's problems, (d) containing life-affirming energy that, as we have seen, 'binds' or 'links' believers to each other, to all of creation, and to an Absolute, often called God.

We could make further distinctions between religion and faith, as well as between religion and spirituality. One often hears the comment: "I am a spiritual person, but I do not follow any religion." From this statement it is clear that while religion is understood as organized and structured around beliefs, rites, rituals, and sets of do's and don'ts, spirituality is the deeper, undergirding realm of the spirit, by which acknowledges that one is not just a material being, but one has the faculties of self-reflection, conscience, and awareness of some 'sacredness' that abides within us and impregnates all human beings to bear fruits of loving, caring, sharing, concern for the other and so on.

Like spirituality, faith is also difficult to define. In fact, there is only one definition of faith in the Bible: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Normally, people who are religiously inclined are regarded as having 'faith'. However, in the broadest sense, an atheist and an agnostic too might claim to have faith—for example, in humankind or in oneself, without giving any ultimate meaning to this kind of faith. In this sense we also speak of 'trust'—a kind of confidence upon which our everyday life is built, without which it would be impossible to live beside and with each other.

## 3. Contours and Colours of Religion in India

Although our Constitution describes India as a 'secular state', we must note that the word 'secularism' is understood differently in the West and in India. In many Western societies of Europe and the USA, secularism refers to the principled stance of the state to stay away from any public manifestation of religion. In other words, there is a

clear division between 'religion' and 'politics' with the former relegated to the private domain, and the latter entrusted to the systems and structures of the state like the Parliament, the judiciary, etc., and elected representatives like ministers, presidents and parliamentarians. Questions about secularism, and whether such a clear-cut division between religion and politics is possible and advisable, are being debated at present with diverse views.[3] By contrast, secularism in India simply means that no one religion is privileged over the other.

There has been a long history of secularism in India, spearheaded by two broad streams and two eminent statesmen: (a) Nehru and the Nehruvian, and, (b) Gandhi and the Gandhian. Nehru desired to divorce religion from politics and keep the state neutral towards all forms of religion (*dharma nirpekshata*), while Gandhi intended that all religions be treated with equal respect (*sarva dharma samābhava*) while seeking reform within the framework of Brahmanical Hinduism. Without going into details of these two strands, Indian secularism has been characterized not only by its tolerance of all religious traditions, but also by its quest to further all that is good and true in all religions. This has led to religions in India having a kind of 'totalizing character'[4] that encompasses every realm of the life of most Indians. This is seen in many ways, as follows:

First, in almost every state in India, we see prolific manifestations of religious practice. For instance, at daybreak, one hears the cries of the *muheddin*'s *azhan* inviting Muslims to start the first *namaz* of the day. This blends with the clanging of temple bells as Hindu devotees, after their morning ablutions, perform the *surya namaskar*, chant the *Gayatri mantra* and go with their *thalis* containing offerings for the deity, part of which will gratefully be consumed as *prasadam*. In areas inhabited by many Christians, one hears the pealing of church bells as believers proceed for morning worship or the celebration of Mass, while Buddhist monks might practice *vipassana* in silence. Besides the religious practices of these major religious traditions, there's the strong presence of the so-called 'little' religious traditions like the subaltern, popular, *bhakti* and folk religious traditions that have their unique worldviews, distinct ways of worship, sustaining spiritualties, pantheons of *devas-devis*, and so on.

Second, besides group or community expressions of religion, we have individual expressions of indoor devotions carried on in Indian households: the lighting of *diyas* (earthen oil lamps), the burning of candles and *agarbattis* (incense-sticks) before images of deities, the veneration of icons and images of deities with floral-*malas*, the smearing of sacred ashes or holy water and oil on the forehead, the wearing of medals-bracelets-amulets, the reciting of rosaries/beads, the setting aside of a little food for ancestral spirits, and so on. These indoor devotions often overflow into outdoor individual, symbolic actions like closing one's eyes while facing the rising sun and bowing reverently to it, or bowing one's head respectfully as one passes a *mandir, masjid, gurudwara* or chapel, or tossing a coin into a river while crossing over-bridge by bus or by train, or placing one's palms downward on a *durgah* or *samadhi* of a holy person and then placing them upon one's forehead as an invocation for blessing, and so on.

Third, at what might be called a 'sociocultural level' of religious expression, although supported by religious myths and symbols, Indians celebrate with great fanfare festivals like *Holi* with its riot of colours, Diwali with its *diyas* and firecrackers; and, often Christmas, too, even if naively equating it only with Santa Claus festivity. Moreover, in many Indian states, cyclical celebrations coinciding with the moods and rhythms of Mother Nature are celebrated by all; for e.g., *Baisakhi* of Punjab, *Makar Sankranti* of Gujarat, *Ugadi* of Andhra Pradesh, *Onam* of Kerala, *Pongal* of Tamil Nadu and so on. These celebrations are not specific or limited to one particular religious community or the other, but are universally celebrated and bring communities together as few other occasions and events do. Thus, the expression of religion in public has rarely been a problem in India, except, of course, when religious symbols are used—or, rather abused—to murder and maim, ironically, in God's name!

## 4. Commonalities of All Religions: The Four "C's"

From all we have elaborated earlier, we can conclude that all religions—big and small—are characterized by four C's: (i) Creed, (ii) Cult, (iii) Conduct, and (iv) Community. The creed comprises of scriptures, teachings and beliefs that propose ultimate truths. The cult comprises of prayers, rites, rituals and *sanskaras* that one

must perform to connect with the Ultimate. Conduct is concerned about morals and ethics—the do's and don'ts for upright, moral living. Finally, every religion conceives of some form of community: *Ram Rajya* (Hinduism), *Sangha* (Buddhism), *Umma* (Islam) and the Kingdom of God (Christianity).

Every religion's creed, cult, conduct and community provide meaning not only for everyday life, but also for the afterlife. Positively, this has enabled believers to be open-minded before Truth, to symbolically ritualize events like birth, marriage and death, to lead moral lives and to build community. This can be called the '*power of religion*'. These are the fields which must be tapped to bring out the best in religious belief and practice. However, one must realize that there is wide diversity, if not divergence, among the religious beliefs and practices of different religions. Hence, the need for tolerance, as a very basic step, and respect and dialogue as one progressively begins to see the good and truth in other religions.

On the negative side, religion is susceptible to manipulation since, by positing an invisible Ultimate as the sole authority and arbitrator of religious activity, many self-appointed religionists or self-proclaimed saviours manipulate people and enjoy power, privileges and pleasures scarce related to religion. Such '*religion of power*', so to say, must be critiqued and crushed, or else it will create conflict and chaos in India. We do see many instances of this.

While one strives to understand the creed and cult of another religion, it is always difficult to feel totally at ease in participating in these two realms of religion. For instance, a Muslim will love reading the Quran, but is not likely to feel deeply attached to the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible. Moreover, a Hindu might admire the story of Jesus but will not feel at ease participating in the Eucharist or praying at a masjid. And, a Christian, might practice yoga as a discipline, but might not agree with its religious underpinnings or feel at easy participating in some *pooja* or *namaz*. But, when it comes to Life and Community, there are more possibilities of common endeavours. For example, amidst the darkness and death of a tsunami or flood, people get together to help victims irrespective of their religion. Furthermore, for those who are sincere in their religious practice, the best way to collaborate among religions is in the area of

conduct and community. Thus, they will be eager to form communities of peace, happiness, prosperity and justice for all people—especially the poorest of poor irrespective of whether one is to call such communities Sangha, Umma, Ram Rajya, or Kingdom of God. Moreover, as we shall soon see, there are certain values which are common to all religions, such as love, compassion, concern for others and the like.

In sum, despite irreconcilable diversities in creed and cult, the ethics of diverse religions unanimously prescribe love, peace, justice, service, sacrifice and compassion as ideals that all must strive for. Debates on beliefs and rituals are useless since we usually compare the best of 'my-our' religion with the worst of 'your-their' religion; and, we often pigeonhole religions into prejudiced conceptions of how we see them rather than on what they actually are. Religion will be relevant and beneficial to society only if we engage in initiatives that benefit all people beyond the confines of creed, caste and culture. A good example would be the Sikh '*langar*' where all people—irrespective of class, caste and creed—are fed. Such an initiative powerfully symbolises human equality and our eagerness to eradicate hunger.

## 5. Religion in Global Society: Clash? Or, Challenge?

In the light of the commonalities that we see among religions, we are still aware that problems persist. Today, religion is assuming newer avatars in global society. There are the pessimists who see that religion is going to lead to further violence and bloodshed. Samuel Huntington's celebrated 'clash of civilizations' book subtitled 'remaking of the world order' is disturbing simply because no sensible 'world order' will be possible if his ill-conceived 'clash of civilizations' becomes a reality.[5] More disturbing is the fact that we will be condemned to live life in our tiny religio-cultural ghettoes fearful that religion will be used like some dynamite destructive of both, Life and Community. But, isn't religion the 'bind' that unifies everything and everyone, and the '*dharma*' that sustains the order of our cosmos, the care of which is entrusted to every woman, man and child? Can we not tap our religio-cultural resources to counteract clashes and create communities that not merely tolerate each other, but positively foster each other's welfare and growth? I believe we can, provided we prudently graft religion onto public life so as to enable societies to flower and fructify.

In his book '*Religion and Globalisation*' Peter Beyer distinguishes between 'function' and 'performance' as regards the role of religion in global society. 'Function' refers to religion addressing intra-communitarian matters, whereas 'performance' occurs when religion applies itself to problems that emerge in the larger landscape of nation and world.[6] To give a current example, when Pope Francis or the Dalai Lama exhorts Christians and Buddhists, respectively, to have a greater devotion to the Eucharist or to spend more time in spiritual disciplines like *vipassana*, they are in the realm of 'function' since they are addressing the believers in their own religions. However, when Pope Francis addresses lawmakers in the US or at the UNO, or when the Dalai Lama addresses University students on global issues like ecology, peace, justice, cooperation, etc., they are at the level of 'performance'. Religions must realize that they will be effective only if they serve other subsystems in society. They can also act as a critique of fanaticism and fundamentalism.

In a country like India, which is a socialist, secular democracy, each religion must uphold every dictate of its Constitution since this is a 'sacred document', so to say, that has been drawn up after deep deliberations, discussions and debates. The Constitution should never be tampered with, and democracy should not be destroyed by any form of *majoritarianism* (dominance of a majority group), as well as *minoritarianism* (appeasement of a minority group). For nation-states, the Constitution is the prime 'political symbol' of a federation of peoples that guarantees all individuals and communities their rights; and, if the nation is to function smoothly, then, this Constitution must legally bind all citizens irrespective of creed, class, caste, culture or other communitarian differences. Once the stipulations of the Constitution are enforced, multi-religious societies like ours should strive to ensure that the religio-cultural resources of communities are recognized and respected.

## 6. Interfaith Dialogue as the Need of the Hour

The word 'dialogue' comes from two Latin words '*dia*' which means 'through' and '*logos*' which means 'word'. Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their

differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. 'faiths') at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely. Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and in our places of work—it can take place in both formal and informal settings. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only—it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.[7]

Ever since Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church has advocated interreligious dialogue as a way to bring about unity and peace among all peoples. Two documents went a long way in strengthening the bonds of fellowship and dialogue with people of other religions: (a) The 'Declaration on Religious Liberty'—called '*Dignitatis Humanae*'—and, (b) The 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions'—called '*Nostra Aetate*'. The Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC), as well as the Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) have been actively promoting interfaith dialogue. At the very first meeting in Manila in 1970, the Asian Bishops made their fundamental option clear: "We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere and continuing dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of human development."

Pope Francis is a keen advocate of interfaith dialogue. I quote his words:[8]

> Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world, and so it is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities. […] In this dialogue, ever friendly and sincere, attention must always be paid to the essential bond between dialogue and proclamation, which leads the Church to maintain and intensify her relationship with non-Christians. […] True openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear

> and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being "open to understanding those of the other party" and "knowing that dialogue can enrich each side". […] Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another.

There are other papal documents like *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'* where he addresses not only Christians, but all peoples of goodwill.

## 7. Compassion and Selflessness as Core Religious Concerns

In interfaith dialogue, we must stress what is common to religions and even acceptable to those who practise no religion whatsoever. Compassion is the confluence where all creeds can congregate and construct some form of global community. Compassion, from the Latin *cum-patior*, refers to a 'suffering with' someone or something. Although grammatically passive in construction, the word suggests an active involvement in the sufferings of others, as for example, in the Greek *splangchizomai* that refers to a 'churning of the insides'—a powerful emotion that inevitably leads to effective response. In the Bible the word 'compassion' appears 78 times in 72 verses. It is most commonly predicated of God (Deut 13:17; 2 Kings 13:23) who is praised and worshipped as a loving and compassionate Father-Mother with special care and concern for the poor, the weak and the suffering (Ps 103:13; 106:45; Isa 49:13,15; 54:8; Hos 11:8).

Christianity considers Jesus the compassionate one par excellence who is deeply affected by the plight of his people. Jesus' compassion sensitizes him to the deepest needs of his people. Seeing them as being harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36), his compassion fructifies in his healing of their illnesses (Mt 14:14; 20:34), his feeding of the hungry multitude (Mk 8:2) and his resuscitation of a widow's son (Lk 7:13). Jesus' compassion is a reflection of his Abba-Father's compassion seen in his love, mercy and forgiveness of the one who suffers and the so-called 'sinner' (Mt 9:13; Lk 15:11-32).

Similar to Judaism and Christianity, Islam teaches that Allah is The Compassionate One. In prayer and meditation, among the ninety-nine names of Allah that are

commonly invoked, are the names *Al-Rahman* and *Al-Rahim*. Both these names are derived from the root *RHM*, referring to a host of meanings including the word for the motherly womb and familial love. *RHM* suggests tenderness, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, mercifulness and benevolence. Since the name *Al-Rahman* does not only mean 'The Compassionate One' but also 'The Source of All Compassion', no human being can ever be named *Al-Rahman*. At most one can be named *Abd Al-Rahman* or 'servant of The Compassionate'. Allah also demands that all human beings embrace as many creatures as possible with the bonds of compassion. Indeed, from the Qur'an and the Hadiths of Allah's Prophet it is clear that dealing with others compassionately is indispensable for salvation. This enjoins on the believer four tasks: (a) to live in gratitude [*shukr*] for Allah's compassion, (b) to ask for more of Allah's compassion [*du'a*], (c) to beg forgiveness for one's forgetfulness and cruelty [*istigfar/ tawba*], and (d) to live intensely in mutual compassion [*Tarahum*].

In his book *The Heart of Compassion*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama writes: "It can be asserted rightly that loving-kindness and compassion are the two cornerstones on which the whole edifice of Buddhism stands." Indeed, compassion for others is one of the central teachings of Mahayana Buddhism wherein one sacrifices oneself in order to attain salvation for the sake of other beings. Nonetheless, the self is also important since all of existence is regarded as interdependent and unless one has exercised self-restraint and developed self-awareness, one can never expect to reach out in compassion to others. The Buddha preached that one must never neglect one's own welfare (*attha*), which one must use by analogy to understand what the other's welfare consists in. Later, one must progress from the limited love of one's family and friends to the larger love of all creatures and of all of creation. Buddhism thus preaches that compassion (*anukampa*) is a universal ideal without boundary or limitation.

In Sanskrit, the words *karuna* and *dayā* are used as synonyms for compassion. The Brhaspati Smrti text of classical Hinduism of perhaps the 6th century teaches: *"Atmavat sarvabhutesu yad hitaya sivaya ca / Vartate satatam hrsto krtsna hy esa daya smrta //*" meaning, "Complete love belongs to one who always delights in behaving towards all beings as equal to the self, for their good and for their welfare." Other Hindu texts like the Raghuvamsa (2.11) and the Hitopadesa (1.60) remind us that

authentic dayā is not dependent on the qualities of virtues of the being to which it is addressed: "*Nirgunesv api sattvesu dayam kurvanti sadhavah,*" but is defined as the desire welling up in the heart to remove the hardships of others, even if it implies effort on one's part. Its semantic field is therefore not that of sentiment but of active desire to help others.

Jainism is another Asian religion that propagates compassion and care for every living being, even microscopic insects. The Jain *jiva dayā* tenet stresses compassion towards everyone and everything. Ancient Jain texts explain that it is the intention to harm, the absence of compassion, which makes an action violent. Without violent thought there can be no violent action. When violence enters one's thoughts, the Jain is exhorted to remember Lord Mahavir's words: "You are that which you intend to hit, injure, insult, torment, persecute, torture, enslave or kill." When one puts oneself into the other's shoes, so to say, one will desist from harming the other(s). Furthermore, one will positively strive to cultivate an attitude of amity (*maitri*) towards all forms of life.

The Indic focus on respect for life and compassion towards all living beings has inspired renowned leaders like Mahatma Gandhi to translate the ideals of *dayā, anukampa* and *karuna* into political praxis by evolving strategies of nonviolence (ahimsa). Ahimsa inspired the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela, who adopted similar strategies in their own contexts. The principle of ahimsa is based on the basic premise that the life of all creatures—especially human beings—is sacred and cannot be destroyed by murder and violence. Nonetheless, in the struggle for justice and truth (*satyagraha*), one must be ready to suffer and bear pain oneself. This is where the idea of self-sacrifice surfaces.

The compassionate one readily dies for the welfare of the other. All religions teach that compassion is an internal, spiritual power based on one's right relationship with oneself, with others, with all of creation and with God. The power of compassion is unleashed only if one 'feels' the suffering of the other as if were one's own suffering. This first level of feeling or emotion is a form of knowledge that must lead to action. When one feels the others' pain and suffering, one is moved to alleviate that suffering. Whether one takes action as a result of religious motivation or mere humanism is not

important. What is vital, however, is that through compassionate actions we are able to proclaim to those who suffer that we are 'with them'. We can build global community upon this bedrock: a stance of solidarity.

## 8. Interfaith Dialogue and '*Trialogue*': The Only Bridge Across Religious Divides

In dealing with the 'other', we basically have three options: First, be indifferent to the other—i.e., you do your thing and I'll do mine. You don't disturb me and I won't disturb you. We tolerate each other and there'll be peace. Such a stance is unbecoming of civilized human beings. Second, is to convert the other at all costs since I am the only one who has the truth. I refuse to listen but I only talk and talk. This will never work in the long run. Third, is the way of dialogue which we have just discussed above; and, I would also add '*Tria-logue*' where we not only listen to the other and try to form some synthesis, but we also realize that besides the 'two' of us in dialogue, there is always another option. Such thinking and relating with others makes us humble, open and genuine seekers in the quest for the Divine. God will always remain a Mystery even if we feel that God has fully revealed Godself to us in our different religions.

## 9. Some Practical Suggestions for Dialogue at the College Level

Having seen the importance of interfaith dialogue, we can think of some practical suggestions which can be implemented at the college level:

1. Celebrate all the religious feasts with posters, decorations and information about that feast. This should be done prior to the day of the feast itself.
2. Invite well-known religionists to speak about religion. However, avoid the fanatics who are not ready to listen to anyone but only seek to convert others.
3. Plan visits to places of worship in small groups with prior arrangement of persons who are in charge of these places.
4. Organize in small groups some sessions of clarifying doubts and prejudices about religion. In such groups be ready to critique all that is wrong in your own religion and listen to all that is good in the other's religion.

5. Once in a while, have a common interfaith prayer service where religious texts from the different religions are read out.
6. Read the religious columns of dailies: Speaking Tree, Mystic Mantra, Inner Voice, etc
7. Spend some time in silence – either at the start of the day or at the end of the day – for prayer, contemplation, meditation, etc. Get in touch with your deepest self daily.
8. Get familiar with the sacred Scripture of your own religion and read texts of at least one more religion.
9. Be ready to protect religion from fanatics. Speak up for truth, love, peace, justice.
10. Be sensitive to the poorest of poor and the weakest persons who are loved by God.

## 10. Conclusion: May Religion Bind Us for a Better World

Religion is a powerfu\l source of energy. It can be used or abused. There are many people who ironically kill in God's name! But, can we live as sisters and brothers, all children of God? Gandhi said: "True religion is not a narrow dogma. It is not external observance. It is faith in God and living in the presence of God. It means faith in a future life, in truth and Ahimsa. Religion is a matter of the heart." Let us work join hands and hearts for a better India, and a better world. [End]

**ENDNOTES:**

1 See his *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 7.

2 In *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 280.

3 See, for instance, Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan Van Antwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), for diverse viewpoints of Western authors on secularism.

4 T.N. Madan, "Secularism in its Place," in *Politics in India*, ed. S. Kaviraj (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 344, speaks of the 'totalizing character' of Asia's major religions.

5 See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New Delhi: Viking & Penguin Books), 1996, for details.

6 See Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 79-81.

7 See http://www.coistine.ie/what-is-interreligious-dialogue. Assessed on January 26, 2016.

8 http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/pope-francis-on-the-relationship-between-interreligious-dialogue-and-evangelization.

# Return from exile
# The Role of Religions in a Globalised World

**Dr. Roberto Catlano**

## 1. Introduction

In the last decade, political scientists speak of '*return of religion to the public sphere of life*'. It is an ongoing unexpected process, especially in the West, evolving for quite some time with a multiplicity of aspects suggesting studies from different perspectives, involving political science and sociology of religions, but also ecclesiology with relevant implications for pastoral theology.

On February 11, 2013 in a conference held at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome[1], the then Italian Foreign Minister, Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, concluded his inaugural speech with the following statement.

> the Western countries have, for a long time, dwelled in the illuminist illusion. … the religious discourse would fade away from the realm of politics and concentrate on the individual dimension of faith and belief. Today, nothing could be farther away from that. Religion remains in the full spotlight of domestic and international politics.[2]

What happened a few minutes later proved the Italian diplomat's considerations absolutely right. The hall of the Ministry, filled with diplomats and academics from different parts of the world and from several cultural and religious backgrounds, was suddenly crossed by a shock-wave. The Minister himself, other diplomats and journalists left the conference within seconds. The news had reached that Benedict XVI had announced his resignation from the papacy. What unfolded was a live confirmation that "*religion remains in the full spotlight of domestic and international politics*".

What has happened with the election of Pope Francis and the impact he has had for the last three years on public opinion all over the world is a further evidence that the phenomenon is very much present in today's world.

## 2. Historical aspects: the exile and the return of religion

### 2.1 Why religion was exiled?

The processes which caused the relegation of religion to the margins of the European society has its roots in the *Treaty of Westfalia* (1648). This act proposed – or imposed - a new reference paradigm based on the simple concept that religion, if politicised, represents a source of violence and never leads to peace. Consequently, European public life marginalized religion and, progressively, ignored its potential role in relations among states. Here lies the beginning of what has been named as the *exile of religion*.[3] From that moment onwards, the European ethos appeared to be marked by a rejection of whatever could be defined as religious or religion oriented. This tendency appeared to be "*inscribed in the genetic code of the discipline of international relations*".[4] In the following centuries, colonialism would have made "*the European idea that you cannot be modern without throwing off religion's yoke* [*have*] *a massive influence all around the world*".[5] In fact, from being an *agent of violence*, religion became a victim "*insofar as it was exiled from the modern constitution of international relations*".[6] Accused of being source of oppression and violence, through historical and hermeneutical processes, it was marginalised in the name of common good of civil society and for peace keeping among states. Especially after World War II, politics seemed to have secured a even more defined autonomy from religion, which saw its influence being restricted to the family life and private sphere.[7] The process seemed to be successful: secularisation appeared to emerge as the clear winner.

### 2.2 The world that none expected: historical return of religion

Something unexpected happened, as political scientist T. Fitzgerald, effectively describes: "*We saw what we thought was a body lying on the ground, either asleep or dead …, suddenly … moving. Then it sprang up to its feet and attacked us. Furthermore, this living corpse wears many masks*".[8] This body, believed dead by many, is religion, which, though in a variety of modalities, has come back to life.

In the last decades, in fact, much to the initial surprise of some observers, religion has probably represented the most effective and successful mobilising factor of public opinion, playing a fundamental role even in Europe, the continent which sanctioned its exile status. Already in the fifties of the last century, the religious element was present in disguise in the process towards the formation of European Union. The so-called founding fathers of Europe - Schuman, Adenauer and De Gasperi – shared, in fact, a profound Christian-Democratic formation. Later, in 1989, the dissident Christian spirit was one of the main factors –thought not the only one - which caused the sequence of events leading to the collapse of the Soviet system.[9] Moreover, it cannot be ignored the social and political impact of Pope John Paul II's amazing capability to attract hundreds of thousands of people for religious services and events. Outside Europe, the Khomeini revolution and the appearance of international terrorism, which, being identified with Islam, immediately took a religious colour, played a decisive role in the process of proposing the religious factor at the public level. Even other developments cannot be underplayed. The socio-political movements of South America, for instance, had a deep rooting in *Theology of Liberation* and conflicts which erupted in different corners of the globe, at the side of social and political motivations, often carried a religious shade: the civil war in Sri Lanka, the conflict in East Timor, the Tibet issue and the South-Sudan strife. The north-African upheavals of 2010, along with socio-political roots, also had a religious element which cannot be disregarded. To all this we can add the fact that United States of America proposes at different levels of public life constant references to religion. George W. Bush (Jr.), during his eight years mandate at the White House, kept on making religion-linked remarks. Bill Clinton himself was in close contact with Evangelical preachers like Billy Graham and in his public speeches often quoted Jesus Christ.[10] Another astonishing case is the one of Brazil, the largest catholic country in the world, where, without taking into consideration the role evangelicals play at different levels - in political parties, trade unions and other civil associations -, no analyses and understanding of the Brazilian present democracy is possible.[11]

## 3. Religion in today's world: a contrasting panorama.

As it emerges from what has been said so far, considering the role of religion in today's world, means to face profound contradictions. Here is an attempt to pin-point a few aspects.

### 3.1 A post-Christian and neo-Pagan world.

On one side, it is widely acknowledged that, in the Western world, Christian religion, both catholic and main-stream protestant churches, is going through rough time. "*Europe once co-terminus with Christendom is now post-Christian and neo-Pagan*".[12] "*In Europe we are hanging on by our fingernails*"[13], stated David Cornick, General Secretary of *United Reformed Churches* in United Kingdom. "*The fact is that Europe is no longer Christian*".[14] The barycentre of the Catholic and main-stream protestant Churches has, since long, shifted from Europe to Asia, Africa and, above all, South America. The western world is more and more post-Christian and Christianity is more and more a religion outside Europe. Nevertheless, thanks to Pentecostalism, Christianity is still the fastest growing religion. According to a wide-spread and almost unanimous conviction in Church environments, this present situation is the result of the rampant process of secularisation and of laicism, developed in Europe for long time. Globalisation has caused a further dip in religious affiliation, creating indifference. For several decades now, it is common to speak of Europe as of '*land of mission*' and the cry for a '*new evangelisation*' has the once-Christian countries as its main target.

### 3.2 *"We live in a world that is not supposed to exist"*

On the other side, in the effective words of American political scientist, Scott Thomas, "*we live in a world that is not supposed to exist*"[15]. In Europe, till a few decades ago, there was an adamant and unshakable conviction that society in future would be characterized more and more by secularism and rationality. On the contrary, for a few decades, almost without realising it, a multiplicity of phenomena are taking place, which can be effectively summed up by the titles of two books and an article: *La revanche de Dieu* (*God's Revenge*), *God is back*

and *Return from Exile*. The first title[16] is by a French author, Gilles Kepel, who, already in 1991, had the perception that something significant was happening. Since mid-seventies, what was emerging was a new religious discourse which aimed not so much at seeking an adjustment with secular values, but, rather, at ensuring again a sacred foundation to the organisation of society.[17] In the last three decades, as already described, the role of religion has been more and more interwoven with phenomena, which, paradoxically, are the ones which were expected to provoke its progressive disappearance.

First among them is globalization with all the implications that it carries along. Looking around the world there are some facts which were absolutely unheard of and unthinkable till a few years ago: thousands of conversion to Christianity or to Jehovah Witnesses in the new republics which were part of the Soviet Union in Central Asia; spreading of Evangelical Churches in Morocco and Algeria, to the point that in this country in 2006 the local parliament has passed a Bill against proselitism. Evangelicalisms is growing at an amazing pace in Brazil, where according to 2007 data, had already reached 25 millions of faithful. Today, one eight of the two billions Christians is a Pentecostal or an evangelical.[18] This phenomenon is not confined to the Christian context. It represents the true religious reality in today's world. In fact, also in other religions there are similar manifestations, which confirm the shifting towards a specific type of religiosity. Within Islam we have Salafism or the so-called *Tablighi Jamaat* and some expressions of neo-Sufism. Radical Salafism, in its variety of shades and groups, apart from being a fast growing process, attracts youth of different cultures and ethnic proveniences, including Europeans or Americans with Christian background. Al-Qaida used to draw the highest number of converts (around 10-20% of followers at the international level)[19] and tended to entrust to them different kinds of responsibilities.[20] We all know very well what has happened with the insurgence of Daesh in the last two years and a half. Another phenomenon worth paying attention is the so-called *silent penetration* of Asian religions (Hinduism and Buddhism above all) in Europe and North America. In Italy, for instance, contrarily to what is widely believed, the largest move of people who change their religious affiliation is not the one from Christianity to Islam, but the one towards Buddhism.

In fact, neo-Buddhism, as much as neo-Hinduism and neo-sufi movements, are fast spreading in the West and not by migratory channels.[21]. Another interesting aspect is that access to religion is often through internet and social net work. There are frequent cases of young professionals who join contemplative life, both in Buddhist tradition as well as in Christianity, having come in contact with the monastery they have chosen, through the web. Till a few decades ago, Hinduism was a religion, or cultural phenomenon, easily identifiable with the Indian sub-continent with the exception of few important diasporas (in Australia, in Bali, in England and in other Commonwealth countries). Today, certain expressions of Hindu traditions attract followers in several European countries, in North America and other places too.

## 3.3 Some remarks on the phenomenon

The overall panorama is far from being simple and easy to read. Some considerations may be helpful to further explore its complexity.

### 3.3.1 Overlapping of New Religious Movements across boundaries

Many of these manifestations of religions come back are provoked or promoted by a umber of *New Religious Movements* (NRM) which carry common or similar elements: charismatic dimension, attitudes which are typical of or close to fundamentalism and capable of a powerful impact on people. A surprising factor of this revival of religiosity is the overlapping of phenomena which, at first sight, would appear contradictory. In France, for instance, in recent years, the construction of new mosques outnumbered the one of new churches and the areas where new Evangelical groups or Pentecostal communities make their appearance are, in 80% of cases, same vicinities where new mosques are built.[22]

Moreover, religious *revival* is often linked to public sphere of life. In Myanmar, a few years ago, Buddhist monks almost threw the dictatorship into a crises, eventually paving the way to some reforms. In Sri Lanka, religious element, though not the real cause, was definitely a relevant factor in the bloody war which was fought for 25 long years between Tamils and Sinhala army. Later, some Buddhist

monks have founded a political party - *Bodu Bala Sena* (BBS) - which, on line with the *Hindutva* phenomenon in India, aims at ensuring that Sri Lanka may be the country of Buddhists and strive, even violently, to recover its traditional values. At the beginning of the present decade, we have seen the religious element at work in the upheavals in north-Africa.

### 3.3.2 The role of migration processes and diasporas

A very important role is the one played by the growing number of small, medium or large ethnic, cultural and religious *diaspora*, created by migrating fluxes caused and favoured by globalisation. After two millennia during which the word *diaspora* was referred to the people of Israel, or, later, used also for large communities uprooted from their geographical contexts - Chinese, Armenians, etc. -, today almost each ethnic or cultural group has its own *diaspora* spread in different parts of the planet. Their role is crucial as "*religious diaspora communities are one of the most significant types of non-state actors in world-politics of the twenty-first century*".[23] They contribute, in fact, to formation of specific identities, which are often closed and self-centred. They favour transnational net-works, contributing to the globalising processes. Within their folds, a myriad of initiatives are born at the social, educational and religious level and to the benefit of the communities of origins. It may be limited to an economic support with educational aims, but it can cross certain legal borders up to the point of financing terrorist activities, guerrilla for independence or even a true conflict. Moreover, *diasporas* directly impact the new societies where they settled down and grow and the one they originally come from. Europe has become a true *Dar al-Islam*, home for Islam. With a population of approximately 15 million people of Islamic faith, the continent already counts many Muslims who are European citizens and soon there will be many more of second or third generation. This marks an epoch-making turn around for European history. On the macro-level, this change is visible in politics and policies about the legal regulation of religion in the public space and, more practically, in the everyday functioning of social services and reform of school programs.[24] The continent cannot ignore anymore the presence of so many people of different faiths. Willing or unwilling, Europeans are called to accept the fact that Islam and

Muslims are part of their continent and their integration is a must. Often, not only societies seem to be incapable of handling the problem, but also Churches feel threatened by a sort of Islamic invasion of what was the Christian stronghold. At the same time, such a large presence of Muslims in Europe impact Islam too. Through personal links and organized networks as well as the old and new media, the Muslims who live in what we could call the European part of *umma* also influence their Islamic areas of origin, including those from which first generations of immigrants originated. This carries numerous effects.

### 3.3.3 Reformatting religions in the globalised world

All phenomena described so far are transnational and transcontinental. As a consequence there had been a progressive erosion of the identity between religious and ethnic or cultural belonging. Moreover, the migratory processes favour a well marked de-territorialisation of religions.[25]

All religions are in the process of reformatting themselves as global faiths and not longer as typically European or Indian or Japanese. They are more and more detached from their typical national or continental culture and try to adapt themselves to be part of a world-wide market. The process of de-linking religion from a specific territory, which for millennia offered the cultural context for its birth, development and growth, is clearly visible in the spreading of Pentecostalism, which, moreover, offers an image of global denominationalism.[26] Pentecostalism appears to be the religious form best conducive and more easily adaptable to globalisation. It is defined as '*the first truly global religion*'.[27] At the same time, probably as a reaction to this process, we observe in all major religions of the world, a clear tendency to acquire a purer dimension of one's own religiosity. Another point which emerges from analyzing these processes, though apparently in contradiction with the previous considerations, is a sort of homogenisation of religions, probably thanks to the migratory waves which favour encounter of and reciprocal influence among cultures and religions. This is true especially at the level of religious practices: rituals and meditations. We cannot fail to grasp how religions which appear so distant one from the other, as they are born in contexts

which often had nothing in common with each other, often refer to similar values or propose benefits to their followers which are close to each other.[28]

### 3.4 Rethinking the role of religions

In front of the panorama which has been described, offering contradictory signals and complexity of problems, what seems to be most urgent is a re-thinking of the role of religion within the different states and in the relations among states. In reference to this, attention has to be drawn on two points: a phenomenon which was unexpected but it is now evident cannot be ignored any longer. It needs to be properly re-addressed. Furthermore, it is urgent to understand how can religion be acknowledged in its new role and what practical adjustments have to be made.

In order to find an answer to these questions, it is necessary to reflect on the type of role religion is destined to play in our present time. The 20th century, witnessed the presence of ideologies (Fascism, Nazism, Marxism and Leninism), which had a coagulating power for the European societies. They acted at the social and political level guaranteeing a sort of world balance. Their antagonist forces were also part of this process. This balance created after the Second World War, characterized by the Cold War as contraposition of the two blocks, was suddenly splintered with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which provoked an unexpected vacuum at the world level. To find a new equilibrium new models of belonging had to be identified, and religion offered the most handy contribution to this search. Religions, in fact, have replaced ideologies as a coagulating factor at the global level.

> In the last decades we have witness a coming back of the religious factor in international relations. Not only the foreseen decline of religion due to modernisation and secularising processes has not happened. In many countries, instead, religion has become a mobilizing … and influencing factor. Moreover in western societies the religious question has come back to the centre of debates and political dynamics, both at the national and international level. The religious revival is a global phenomenon, which ignores the geographical and cultural boundaries, involving all religions.[29]

## 3.5 Global and local, universal and particular

Re-thinking the role of religion in society, political life and state-to-state relations is not limited to one religion and one culture or even one corner of the world. It is a global phenomenon, often led by what is defined the *global south*, which involves countries with different cultures and religions, including the indigenous and traditional ones. This calls for the immediate necessity of redefining the normative structure of global society, which cannot be any more Eurocentric. It must include and express ethical, social and religious values of the great traditions in the world. This was clearly intuited, already in 1997, by a great prophet of the post-communist era, Václav Havel.

> It is not enough to take the set of imperatives, principles, or rules produced by the Euro-American world and mechanically declare them binding for all. Different cultures or spheres of civilisation can share only what they perceive as genuine common ground, not something that few merely offer to or even force upon the others. The tenets of human co-existence on this earth can hold up only if they grow out of the deepest experience of everyone, not just some of us.[30]

This perspective is, for sure, stimulating but reality is far more complex. Globalisation, in fact, apart from being the *locus* and the *humus*, where the return of religion is happening, is also its conveyor. This leads to two consequences which appear contradictory. On one side, as already suggested, contributes to a homogenization of cultures and religions which justifies the definition of a *global market* for information, youth culture and religions too. This phenomenon is transversal and break through all possible geographical, regional, ethnic, religious and cultural barriers. At the same time, again it is globalization which favours a fragmentation of the world, giving life to more and more marked identities. The overall panorama tends to become a mosaic of small specific identities which strive to affirm themselves at the cost of or against the others. As a consequence, we simultaneously live in a reality which is global and, at the same time, local and particular[31]. In this context religion can take a significant role in creating conflicts

and clashes. If globalisation is influencing religions by transforming them, on the other side, it is true that religion has a role on the evolution of globalization.[32]

## 4. The role of ecclesiology: a contribution towards a positive attitude

To the above mentioned questions - how can religion be acknowledged in its new role and what practical adjustment can be made? - answers are invited and sought for not only by political and sociological scientists. Also ecclesiology needs to address the problem and the sudden development, trying to read it and offer answers from its own perspective. The resurgence of religion, in fact, has a pluralistic components which is crucial. We cannot speak of coming back of religion but of '*religions'*. Faithful of different traditions, therefore, today are called to meet in order to avoid clashes or solve tensions which unavoidably arise.

Ecclesiological reflection can contribute in a number of ways to positive developments of these processes. First of all, it is necessary to promote a positive reading of the present unfolding of historical developments. Secondly, all possible initiatives aiming at a constructive attitude towards pluralism have to be encouraged. Finally, it has to be facilitate the putting into action of methodologies which can favour encounter, rather than a clash, among people of different religions and cultures. Three dimensions can be suggested. They are not necessarily to be promoted in a temporal succession, but rather fostered in a harmonious way.

### 4.1 Events with symbolic relevance

It is useful to favour processes which can facilitate the deepening of the role of religions as instruments of encounter and social integration. In this context, we have to reflect on the positive role played by some events which can be easily defined as historical, having offered a highly symbolic value with a powerful impact on public opinion and state authorities[33]. A definite land mark, was the *Assisi Religious Leaders Meetings* called by Pope John Paul II in 1986 and in 2002, and the more recent ones, convened by Pope Benedict XVI, in October 2011 and by Pope Francis on 20th October 2016. Referring to 1986 meeting, which

remains a reference point, not only as an ecclesial event, but as a world-politics approach to pluralism, a theologian commented:

> John Paul's initiative … cannot be easily framed in the context of any of the then existing theologies of religions. That gesture stands till today as something unique … and no theology of religion is equipped to comprehend the richness of that event. … It was not a World Parliament of Religions, which was celebrated for the first time in 1893, …. It was the witness that one's own identity can welcome the *other*. … religious difference was celebrated in common as a practical commitment to peace[34].

All this should suggest a due reflection at the ecclesiological level on the consequences that events of highly symbolic significance can carry, not only within Church domain, but also at the political and diplomatic level with positive impact on peace building and conflict resolutions process. At the same time, ecclesiological analysis can help to ensure that the necessary attention is addressed to avoid the risk of overemphasizing the role of religions and religious leaders at the international level. Religious leaders, in fact, should not be charged with responsibilities, functions and duties which are not theirs and which have to remain political.

## 4.2 Encouragement of the role of new actors in the encounter among religious traditions

In the complex and articulated processes we have tried to explain in a summary so far, a relevant, though not exclusive, role is the one played by new actors: ecclesial communities, movements and associations or NGO's. Many of them are religiously affiliated or spiritually motivated.

### 4.2.1 Associations, Movements and Ecclesial Communities

Some of the ecclesial movements, which were born and developed within contemporary society, appear to be a positive answer to the process of secularisation. The phenomenon has been visible, above all but not exclusively, in

the Catholic Church, which witnessed the birth and development of many small, medium and large ecclesial communities. Quite a few of them, in the course of time, were able to achieve a visibility even at the international level.[35] Some observers have no doubts in affirming that the presence of these new realities in the Church was a surprise event which posed complex problems to sociology of religion in the domain of secularised theories[36]. These new ecclesial realities propose, in fact, an interest in religious life which focuses on rediscovering the centrality of the Gospel, with a renewed commitment in living it in daily life. It is through this vital approach that these associations and communities, largely but not exclusively, formed by lay people, have an impact at the social, political, educational and cultural level. Some of them, with a highly international spreading, - *Sant'Egidio Community* and the *Focolare Movement, Comunione e Liberazione* to mention the more developed ones - were able to join their commitment for renewal within the Christian folds with a very active involvement in the field of interfaith and intercultural dialogue. They are playing a constructive role in contributing to a mutually enriching encounter of faithful of different religious traditions.

> [*We wish to contribute*] so that religious pluralism can shed its connotation of division and conflict, and emerge to represent for millions of men and women, the challenge of recomposing the unity of the human family, so that the Holy Spirit may in some way be present and active in all religions, not only in the individual members but also in the inner workings of each religious tradition[37].

In fact - and here there is an even more surprisingly evident development - we cannot ignore similar phenomena of renewal which are happening within other faiths and traditions. They carry thought-provoking commonalities with the ones happening within Catholicism and Christianity. In fact, as much as the Catholic renewal movements and associations, also these groups in the Islamic, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu world show a commitment in renewing their own traditions, trying to make their Scriptures relevant in today's society. They often have the same commitment in building bridges with faithful of other religions, favouring positive end enriching encounters among cultures. As protagonists of this panorama we

can mention the Japanese *Risshô Kôsei-kai*, in the *Mahayana Buddhist tradition*, the once called *Muslim Society of America* within the Afro-American Islam. We cannot forget in the Hindu world the role played by *Gandhian movements* not only as a socio-political phenomenon which eventually led to Indian independence, but also as a re-interpretation of the *sanathana dharma*.

These movements can be important actors in the process of redefining the public role of religion.

> Representatives of the main world religions can provide the '*social capital*' in terms of social networks and commitment in rebuilding mutual trust, an essential condition to '*sustainable peace*'. The peace-building process, taken as a non-mechanistic and dynamic way does not start and end with the launch of a peach-keeping operation. In such cases religion can play a limited but essential role of conflict *de-escalation*[38].

Moreover, in the effort of deepening the role of the Church in humanity, it has to be acknowledged that today these communities and movements are true agents of dialogue and encounter between religious followers, capable of involving also leaders of the main religious communities at the national, continental and world level. An in-depth study of these agents of renewal, within the Catholic Church as well as in other religions, can help ecclesiological investigation to reflect on the fact that the Spirit is active also among followers of different religions. This enables to trace a common spiritual trade-mark.

## 5. Conclusion: the category of *fraternity*

The reappearance of the public role of religion in today society at different levels calls for the urgent shaping of conceptual and hermeneutical categories capable of understanding the phenomenon and fully relocate the religious factor at the socio-political level. Religions, in fact, can contribute a great deal to peace building and social integration processes, through values which are often shared in common. Among these, *compassion*, *peace*, *love*, *justice*, *equality* seem to be the ones

largely shared by all cultural and religious traditions. They represent concrete reference paradigms, not only at the spiritual level, but also to favour formulation of foundational principles for a new global governance. In today's context, the need is felt for categories, which can be inclusive while ensuring a recognition of identities.

The idea of *fraternity*, one of the pillars of the French Revolution, is probably the key for this process as it can be applied to politics and social life, while it is widely referred to also in cultures and religions other than Christianity and the West. One the main principles of *sanathana dharma*, the religions of the Indian sub-continent, is *vaisudeiva kutumbakan*, the *world is one family*. The same perspective can be found in *Nostra Aetate*, the document which at the end of the Vatican Council II marked to opening up of the Catholic Church to other religions and cultures. In general all cultural and religious traditions accept the perspective of the so-called *Golden Rule*. Nevertheless, at present, the category of fraternity remains still largely unexplored from the hermeneutical view-point, as it has been always considered irrelevant as alternative to traditional principles. It appears irenic and unable to impact the present world[39]. Today some observers and academics are turning to *fraternity* trying to express its centrality and proposing its sustainability. To be aware, or to become more and more aware, of the world as of the same family, could foster an ethics of solidarity among human beings and of the value of creation. This will help to look at communities – religious, social, ethnic, linguistic etc – and individuals with full respect of human dignity but also with an attention to the processes of integration which are required in our globalised world[40].In this vast effort of redefining categories for the sustainable existence of humanity as one family, the role of the Churches has to be re-examined to understand how it has to be re-defined in this context. An ecclesiological investigation cannot be missing at this juncture when religion has gain once again central stage and fraternity can be the new paradigmatic category for the world at the beginning of the new millennium.

**(Footnotes)**

1 International Conference - "*Promoting Religious Freedom and Peaceful Coexistence*", Italian Foreign Ministry, Rome, February 11, 2013.

2 Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, "Introductory Remarks", (paper presented at the International Conference, "*Promoting Religious Freedom and Peaceful Coexistence*", Italian Foreign Ministry, Rome, February 11, 2013.) (http://www.esteri.it/MAE/IT/Sala_Stampa/ArchivioNotizie/Interventi/2013/02/20130211_Terzi_seminario_Promoting_Religious_freedom_Peaceful_Coexistence.htm), (accessed on 20th May 2013).

3 See Gilles Kepel, *La revanche de Dieu: chrétiens, juifs et musulman à la reconquête du monde*, (Paris: Seuil 1991).

4 Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopoulos (ed. by), *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2003).

5 John Micklethwait and Adrin Wooldridge, *God is Back*¸ (New York: Peguin 2010), 10.

6 Petito and Hatzopoulos (ed. by), *Religion in International Relations*, 1.

7 See Kepel, *La revanche de Dieu* quoted in Luca Ozzano,*Fondamentalismo e democrazia. La destra religiosa alla conquista della sfera pubblica in India, Israele e Turchia*, (Torino: Progetto Alfieri and Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 2009), 22.

8 Timothy Fitzegerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations.*(New York: Continuum 2011), 30.

9 See Fabio Petito, "Il ritorno delle religioni nelle relazioni internazionali e qualche riflessione sul caso singolare dell'espansione globale del protestantesimo", *ISPI - Quaderni di relazioni internazionali*, 12 (4/2010):44. (translation by the author of this article)

10 See D. Michael Linsday, *Faith in the Hall of Power: How Evangelical Joined the American Elite*, (New York: Oxford University Press 2007, 21.

11 Ricardo Mariano and Ari Pedro Oro, "La reciproca strumentalizzazione della religione e della politica in Brasile", *Credere Oggi*, 186 (6/2011): 70-84, 72. (translation from Italian into English by the author of the present paper).

12 John M. Roberts, *A History of Europe*, (London: Viking Adult) 1996, 583.

13 Quoted in Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *God is Back*, 134.

14 Frank Bruni, "Faith Fades Where it Once burned Strong",*New York Times*, October 13, 2003 in Micklethwait and Wooldridge, *God is Back*, 134.

15 Scott M. Thomas, "Religions and Global Security", *ISPI - Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali*, 12 (4/2010): 4.

16 See G.Kepel, *La revanche de Dieu*. The other two texts were produced already in the new millennium. *God is back* was published in 2010 by John Micklethwait and Adrin Wooldridge. The subtitle of the book clearly explains the phenomenon which is the subject of this study: *How the Global Revival of Faith is Changing the World. Return from Exile* are the words used

by Fabio Petito and Pavlos Hatzopolous to give a title to their work on the new role of religion in International relations.

17 See Kepel, *La révanche de Dieu*, 12

18 See Scott Thomas, "Religions and Global Security", 8.

19 See Olivier Roy, *La santa ignoranza. Religioni senza cultura*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2009), (Original in French: *La Sainte ignorance. Les temps de la religion sans culture*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 17.

20 Olivier Roy, "Religious Revivals as a Product and Tool of Globalisation'", *ISPI - Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali*, 12 (4/2010): 27.

21 It happens that young Japanese rediscover the Zen tradition in USA, and after long periods of residence in monastery in the West, return to Far East taking along with them an Americanized form of Zen Buddhism. Through the westernised version of an original Japanese Buddhism they try to revitalise the home religion, which is going through a critical period. (See Roy, *La santa ignoranza*, 239-247).

22 See Roy, "Religious Revivals as a Product and Tool of Globalisation", 27.

23 Scott Thomas, "Religions and Global Security", 12.

24 See Stefano Allievi, "Conflicts, Cultures and Religions: Islam in Europe as a Sign and Symbol of Change in European Societies", *Yearbook on Sociology of Islam*, 6 (2005): 18-27.

25 An example. A few years ago a young Muslim lady enrolled for a semester to attend lectures at the Gregorian University in Rome. Originally from Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, she was born a Sunni and married to a Sunni. Some years ago, she started following a Sufi master, who is a Shia. In the end, she decided to become a Shia. Moreover, the master is an American, born Christian, and turned to Islam, at present living in Finland. The case represents a summary of the characteristics of today's religion in the globalized reality: easy changing of religious denomination, following a religion which is no longer the one typical of the cultural and religious context of the concerned country, absolute de-link from cultural and territorial background.

26 See José Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited", in *Religion: Beyond the Concept*, edited by H. de Vries, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101-119 in Pasquale Ferrara, *Religion, International Democracy and Global Governance*, Panel on "Religion and Democracy", Annual Conference of Italian Political Science Association (SISP), Venice, September 16-18, 2010 http://www.sisp.it/files/papers/2010/pasquale-ferrara-729.pdf (accessed on 20th May 2013).

27 Casanova, "Public Religions Revisited",

28 See Boris Biancheri, "Editoriale", *ISPI - Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali*, 12 (4/2010), 1. (translation from the original text into English by the author of the present paper).

29 Biancheri, "Editoriale", 1.

30 Vlacav Havel, "*The Art of Impossible. Politics as Morality in Practice, Speeches and Writings 1990-1996*", (trans. Paul Wilson, (New York 1997), 195-196 inPetito, *Il ritorno delle religioni nelle relazioni internazionali e qualche riflessione sul caso singolare dell'espansione globale del protestantesimo,* 40 (foot-note 12). (translation by the author of this article)

31 See Scott M. Thomas, «Religions and Global Security» , 10.

32 An important role is the one, as already mentioned, of the growing number of small, medium or large ethnic, cultural and religious *diaspora*, created by migrating waves, which are a typical phenomenon of globalisation. Within the *diaspora* folds, a myriad of initiatives are born at the social, educational and religious level. There are also funds collections which are beneficial to the communities of origins. It may be limited to an economic support with educational benefits, but it can cross certain legal borders up to financing terrorist activities or a guerrilla for independence or even a true conflict.

33 See Pasquale Ferrara, "Religione e relazioni internazionali: un inquadramento metodologico per una diplomazia consapevole" *ISPI - Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali*, 12 (4/2010), 48. (translation by the author of the present article)

34 Giuseppe Ruggieri, *Ritrovare il Concilio,* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2012), 108-110.

35 See Salvatore Abruzzese, "Secolarizzazione e movimenti religiosi", *Sophia*, V, (1/2013): 31-44, 33.

36 See Abruzzese, "Secolarizzazione e movimenti religiosi", 33.

37 Lubich, "*Can Religions Be Partners on the way to peace?*.

38 Ferrara, «Religione e relazioni internazionali", 49.

39 See Ferrara, «Religion, International Democracy and Global Governance».

40 See Richard Falk, "A Worldwide Religious Resurgence in an Era of Globalization and Apocalyptic Terrorism" in Petito and Hatzopoulos (ed. by) *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*, 196.

# Relevance of Religion Today

**Brahma Kumari Vinita**

Religion or "*Dharma*" means Dharna. Dharan Karna or Dharna means practical Inculcation of Knowledge and Virtues in Life. Religion is not just code of superficial things to be followed,

but dharma or true religion is a Knowledge/Code of Conduct that takes you towards the Ultimate Truths of Life and takes you closer to your Higher Self. So what is that truth of Life? What is that Higher Self? What is my Eternal identity and my purpose of life on Earth.

Today when I am asked to introduce Myself or asked "Who I am" I give my name, designation, religion, nationality as my introduction. So whatever Introduction I am giving today about by myself is my acquired personality/self. I am not born as a Doctor but I acquired a degree of a Doctor. Even my name is acquired during a Naming Ceremony.

For eg.
Mr. A: Who are You?
Mr. B:"I am the Chief Engineer".
Mr. A: " I am not asking What you do? I am asking you who you are"
Mr. B: "Chief Engineer"
Mr. A: " Okay! Who will you be after retiring from this profession"
Mr. B: "Retired Chief Engineer".

We have become more of Human Doings than of Human Beings. Today I am so attached to the different labels of the body that I have. I existed even before the name and profession.. As William Shakespeare rightly said " That this World is a Stage and we are all merely Actors on this Stage" So I have to play my role in the best possible manner. The Body is my costume /instrument and Spiritual knowledge gives me the understanding of my true identity that I am a Soul, an Energy, Life Force, The Consciousness, or the Conscient Being, an Actor. This body is my instrument. I have the power of Mind and intellect.

Mind power is the biggest power and also the most misused power. Religion teaches to manage this mind, discipline and train your mind. Today we often find our mind caught with negative, waste, stressful, depressive thoughts. So when it goes unmanaged it leads to unrighteous actions. Good thoughts are the seed of Right actions.

As youth we need to lead a Positive, Powerful and Purposeful life. Make best use of our resources such a thoughts, word, time, etc. I need to attain goals and be successful. So using my resources in the right direction is essential. In the journey of life, often times, we pass through difficult situations where we may loose hope, our faith is shaken. So the Spiritual knowledge will guide us ,provide solutions. Eg. Whenever Mahatma Gandhiji would need to solve a problem or take an important decision he would refer to the teachings of Scriptures. A person asked his Doctor to tell him a place where there are no problems. The doctor showed him the path to the grave and that would be the end of all problems. The E.C.G. with ups and downs represents Life & if it becomes straight means end of life. So life means ups and downs . While going through difficult circumstances in life Religion will show you the path and provide Solutions. Religion gives me that clarity to make the journey of my life more comfortable.

It is. said that God made man in his own image
Eg. A Son goes everyday to his father and praises him and says “Father you are very Talented, very Powerful, Intelligent, Knowledgeful, Loving, Successful” So one day his Father tells Him that will you only praise me everyday? Wont you become like me? Every father would like to see his Son Empowered. Similarly our Supreme Father/God would like to see us like Him. God has blessed us with the 7 divine Innate qualities of “ Knowledge, Purity, Peace, Happiness, Love, Power & Bliss” Living in the Essence of these qualities and Sharing these with others is True Religion.

Right thoughts will lead to right action called as Dharma. All religions have given importance to doing good actions. When you look at the deities you always see them giving blessings. Religion teaches to “Give”. When you give in hindi translated as “Dena” you become like an Angel, A Deity, A Devta – *‘Dene Wale’*

Meditation empowers you to practice “Swadharam” i.e the true religion of Every soul which is “Peace” through which you will get “Swarajya” i.e. Self Rule/Sovereignity. Where you become the master of Your own Sense organs. Before we become, Managers, CMD, CEO of others we need to Manage our own Mind and our own Life. Which can be achieved through the technique of Self Contemplation and Meditation. The Swarg, Heaven, Jannat that we wish to see outside has to be within our Mind, Within our Heart first. Such Self Realization will to Self-transformation.

# Relevance of Religion-Islamic Perspective

**Uzma Naheed**
Director: Iqra Education Foundation
Member: All India Muslim Personal Law Board &
Executive Committee of All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawrat

Equality of humankind is of prime importance today for, In order to have a just society there is a need to have equality of all humankind. In fact it has to be the equality before law. Islam emphasized on equality of people, irrespective of races, caste and tribes. The only criterion of merit is goodness and piety- colour or birth or rank, do not matter. The Persian, Byzantine and Roman empires were ridden with class hierarchy, sectarian prejudices and racial hatreds. Women in particular had few rights. Family, class and social connections determined privilege and promotion. History reveals that to those living under these societies the Islamic message of equality came like a breath of fresh air.

**Gender Justice**

Gender equality has gained momentum and significant importance in today's world. It's no secret that unfortunately gender justice or women's development is mainly confined to slogans and debates. Laws, which never get implemented, do not offer any benefits to women. We reached to a stage where we offer justice to women in theory. The GDP of any country included women's contribution. No country or society can have over-all development whether social, economic, political or general, unless the society is just and offer benefits to both men and women. The logic is simple. No society could possibly develop ignoring half of its population. A woman has a special place in society in Islam. She is not looked down if she is a widow or divorcee as we see in some of the societies. In fact Prophet Muhammad (S) encouraged marriage of widows. The Qur'an says: "Men will have a share of what they earn, and women will have a share of what they earn."(Al-Qur'an, 4:32).

The Islamic Shariiah recognizes full property rights of women before and after marriage which is denied by many societies. A married woman need not link her name with husband after marriage and can keep her maiden name.

Unfortunately justice was never done with women in most of the ancient societies. In Athens, the sole purpose of the life of woman was to serve man. She was not permitted to choose her husband nor was she having the right of inheritance. In Roman society a woman who is the best source of comfort, enlightenment and happiness was transferred from one man to another like chattel. Even in United Kingdom, Mr. Fawcett Millicent started the struggle for the suffrage of woman in 1897 by establishing National Union of Women's Suffrage. This Movement got a fillip and ultimately the British House of Commons passed Representation of People Act in 1918 with a majority of 385 votes against 55, by which the women above the age of 30 years were given the right to vote. Although this was seminal point for the acknowledgement of women's right of suffrage, yet they were not given the status equal to that of men because age limit.

Islam is more relevant today as compared to any law developed in the West in last few centuries and gave full right to women 1400 years ago when Quran says:

"And according to usage, women too have rights over men similar to the rights of men over women." (Al-Qur'an, 2:228)

Islam never differentiates between men and women. Quran ordains:

"Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you be it male or female: you are members of one another ..."(Qur'an 3:195)

Allah SWT wants men to be just and kind towards women. He says:

"You are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness that you may take away part of the marital gift you have given them except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them it may be that you dislike a thing and Allah brings about though it a great deal of good. (Qur'an 4:19)

Dowry system is still practiced in India today and there are many deaths related to this evil. Islam make it compulsory for man to pay Mehr to wife which could be in cash or kind like Gold, property etc., which is actually consideration for the contract of marriage.

**JUST ISLAM:**

Justice is the key word to examine any belief, life-style or religious dogma. Justice has gained significant importance in every sphere of life. From Monarchy to Democracy, Men's hegemony to gender equality, from Caste or tribal rule to equal status of all human being, from hostilities to tolerance, from closed societies to multi religious societies, we find a paradigm shift in the way world is governed or humankind lived today.

Unfortunately, there are some elements in our society that foster inter-faith hostilities. In schools they indoctrinated to distrust people of "other faith". The purpose is to promote strife between various communities for political gains which most of time results in communal hatred and clashes.

Islam stands for peace and justice. This is the religion of logics and it's tenets and beliefs satisfy a scientific mind. Islam neither rejects today's world in Toto nor does it seek to melt into it. Islam has fundamental resilience that enables it to adapt to changing times.

In today's world, what is significant or important is logic and simplicity in rules or dogmas, which a common man could grasp and understand. Anything that does not appeal to common sense has no place in today's society and sooner or later gets rejected. Islam is the religion of breathtaking simplicity. It has no complicated philosophy, no recognized hierarchy based on caste or wealth, no living spiritual head and no priesthood. In essence: One God, One Book and One prophet. Each Muslim has direct access to God and to His Book and through it : to Prophet.

In all the societies and laws we find different set of rules for rulers and common people. Islam has same rules for both. In fact history is replete with many incidences when a common man or woman has claimed against the Caliph who was the ruler and the caliph was called in the court and stood in accused box. Sometimes when the claim was found valid the judge had given verdict against the ruler.

**Social Justice:**

To be specific Islam is also a Sociology If you look at it from social angle. Islam generates specific social practices be it in manners, culture, language, food or jurisprudence. The

Prophet's of Islam encouraged every Muslims to greet one another warmly to express that everyone is equal, to avoid gossip and slander as they lead to unjust, to accept invitation to visit one another to create brotherhood, to call on those who are sick and to join funeral processions. It is also about children respecting parents and parents giving love and affection to children. Islam encourages social activity, a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and a sense of place. It shows remarkable resilience of Muslim communities through the ups and downs of history and in their changing situation in different non-Muslim societies. Islam in itself is a civilization and a philosophy of life. These teachings if practised could alone make our society happy and prosperous.

Its general notion that a large segment of Muslim population is hyper sensitive to religious dogma and would reject any pragmatic approach to the problems facing humankind or more particularly- Muslims, without offering any alternative solutions or would immediately put your faith into question if you express an opinion that does not agree with their pre-set notions. The fact is by and large Muslims are not averse to changes within the ambit of Islamic Shariiah which again is quite elastic and adaptable to change.

Islamic laws appear harsh but the deterrent impact of Islamic laws is remarkably effective. In fact a law should be harsh to be more effective. What was wrong yesterday is wrong today and would remain so even tomorrow. Changing laws to accommodate wrongs would tantamount to making mockery of law and justice. For example look to the law of the land where drinking was a taboo and a crime in early years of post independence era; but gradually with changing times, licenses were granted to bars and hotels for serving liquor. A person drinking at a licensed bar does not commit a crime whereas the same person would be booked for a crime if he does so at another place that is not licensed. Of course with the changing time, the law needs some adjustments. The beauty of Islamic laws, which are divine in nature, is that there could be a slight re- interpretation of a law to suit changing times keeping the basic tenet intact but it has it's inherent elasticity and adapts to changing times. This is considered one of the most important features of any good law in today's world.

Recently a case received prominence in media where young girl was gang raped and the case is famous as NIRBHAY case. I observed in statements made by some of the authors

in their articles in newspapers where they said that Islamic laws in such cases are ideal. They are deterrent and no one would dare to commit such heinous crime again one a guilty is punished in public.

It was quite interesting to see debates on TVs where the moderator (a woman) asked men to change their mind-set instead of asking girls not to wear indecent dress. The thing they forget is human nature that cannot be change. Both men and women have different nature. Quran gives a simple solution to this problem we are facing today: It asks women to cover their bosom when they go out or in other words to dress decently and also asked men and women to lower their gazes.

The universal nature of humanity is underlined in Quran. God's purview and compassion is for every one –"All creatures". The world is not divided into North or South, an East and a West. On the contrary, these divisions are obliterated when Quran says: (Chapter 2 Verse 115)

To Allah belong the East and West. Whichever side you turn, there is Allah's countenance.

**Justice:**

A just society alone could remain in peace. Most of the problems human race is facing today are created by unjust be it in their own society or due to aggression by other powers. In Islam human life is most sacred when Quran says:

If anyone kills a person- Unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief, it would be as if, he killed the whole of mankind.(5:32)

Even while punishing the guilty, Islam believes in total justice. Chapter 16 Verse 126 of Quran says:

And if you punish, then let your punishment be proportionate to the wrong that has been done to you.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) always gave prime importance to peace and tranquillity. When he migrated to the city of Medina from Makkah, in the early years of Islam, he

made treaty of Hudaybia with Jews, which was first of its kind. Since the Jews did not believe in him as prophet, they insisted that he should not sign the treaty, as Prophet of God. Prophet Muhammad agreed and signed the treaty as Muhammad the son of Abdullah which was his father's name. This gives a message that Muslims ruling the people should have to be tolerant, shun their egos and should always make amicable solution to any problem with generosity and wisdom.

**Economic Justice:**

Recently there was a news item in newspapers that world's half the wealth is amassed by 60 families whereas we find children dying of hunger and malnutrition each day. A poor man cannot borrow funds for his basic needs like housing without paying exorbitant interest. The banks are lending money at very high rate of interest encouraging customers to use credit cards which gradually accumulate cardholders borrowing to an extent where he/ she is not in a position to service the debt and he is trapped. Despite huge income we find hundreds of banks failing each decade since they work against social justice and exploit people in need. Islam has forbidden Interest and allowed business to ensure that people in need are not exploited. It is for this reason that banks and governments have started a new form of banking called Islamic banking. Mr. Tony Blair the ex Prime Minister of UK said that he would make London hub of Islamic banking.

For Muslims who have income more than their needs there is a system of Zakat which such people have to pay for the society, for poor for social work. Islam encourages to give Zakat money first to your poor relatives, then neighbors and then to one's nearby areas so that the money is evenly divided among the people.

Islam gives right to women in inheritance too. She gets this right from various sources like father, mother, siblings, and husband. In fact she gets from more sources than a man could get.

# Role of non-violence in the present scenario with special reference to Jainism

**Dr. Kokila Shah**
Hon. Professor
K.J. Somaiya Centre Studies in Jainism
Adjunct Professor
University of Mumbai

Jainism is one of the oldest living religions indigenous to India. Spreading values as much as wealth, it is rooted in Indian cultural ethos .Jainism through ages is sustained to spread the message of 'Ahimsa Parmo Dharmaha'. 'Non-violence is the paramount religion.' This motto summaries the vision, moral fabric and idealism of the Jain Seers. Lord Mahavira represents the Jaina tradition of India and that of non-violence. His message is full of pragmatic optimism, self –discipline and bears special significance for better social order and spiritual advancement of mankind. It is different from Hinduism and independent of it. The paper attempts to highlight relevance of Jaina principle of non-violence in the 21st century. The ethical doctrine of the Jainas is unique and non-violence is central to Jaina system of thought In Jainism non-violence is a religion and not merely a part of religion. In Jain text It is explicitly mentioned" Every living being wants to live. Sorrow and killing are not liked by any living being. All beings love their life". This implicitly establishes that all beings have the right to live. Another Jain text says, Non-violence is for the welfare of all beings.

Violence aggravates enmity whereas non-violence promotes friendship. Further 'Nonviolence is the shelter for the terror stricken. The basis of Jain concept of non-violence is reverence for life. Non-violence is the virtue, which asks us to respect all forms of life. The quintessence of Lord Mahavira's teachings is that Religion sustains the world.

Different aspect of Non-violence

1. Non-violence is the primary, chief and principal vow and all other rules of conduct - non-stealing, truth, chastity or self-restraint and limitation of possession are derived from non-violence

2. Non-violence is the principle of interdependence. All Souls are bound together by mutual support and interdependence which is the principle ofmodern ecology. Thus non-violence is the principle for ecological harmony par excellence. It is the natural law.
3. Non-violence is the basic value In jainism this ethical value has been extended to fauna and flora,to Animal protection etc.
4. It is tolerance necessary for resolving conflicts. It can be applied as a creed on a mass scale in thefield of politics.
5. Non-violence implies vegetarianism, which is supported today by the science of medicine. Food affects mind body and soul.

Journey to spiritualism is common to all religions. The doctrine of non-violence has been universally accepted by all the religions- In Buddhism compassion occupies an important place Islam recognizes the merciful God. In Hinduism, it is a great religion. Christianity preaches 'love thy neighbors as thy self.' "Thou shall not kill" is one of the Ten Commandments in the Bible. However we find that every religion except Jainism has permitted or approved of violence in one form or the other. Perhaps Jainism is the only religion which not only abstains itself from all types of cruelties and it preaches Non-violence as it's first and foremost tenet. It considers thought at the root of action. Hence the need to change attitude. The evil practices prevailing in the contemporary society are the results of violence in thought translated into violence in action - the physical violence which, we see all around us. Violence brings disharmony polluting Individual self as well as society. We have to reinterpret the antique value of non-violence in the modern context. Psychologists agree that motivated by internal thoughts type electric power external act takes place.

**Positive Aspect of Non-Violence:**

The positive side of non-violence is as important as the negative side but it is sometimes not fully appreciated. The positive aspect implies forgiveness, kindness, charity and service, friendship towards all beings, respect for the qualities of virtuous people, utmost compassion for the afflicted beings and equanimity towards those who are not well disposed towards us. Socio-cultural dimension of non-violence is important in the age of globalization today.

**Implications of non-violence for 1) Ecology 2) World Peace 3) Interfaith Dialogue**

1) **Ecology :** Environmental degradation is burning problem of this age. Ecological crisis we are facing today is perhaps, one of the worst crises in history. Man in his attempts to get mastery over Nature has destroyed it.

   The solution to the problem will come from man himself and not from science and technology. Jain philosophy of the nature is based on non-violence. It teaches us what we at individual level can and must do to change our mind, practices and mode of living, so that environment is protected.

   In Jain literature it is said that life exists in not only human and animal organisms but also in stones, earth, water, fire, air and vegetation. Consequently man should not cause harm to them, disturbing the equilibrium of nature. The implication is that destruction of environment is an act of violence.

   Some of the steps for sustainability are as follows:
   1. The culture of over consumerism which is the result of technological revolution has to be checked, as it is the root cause of degradation.
   2. Environmental education on conservation is a must. It can show the direction for fundamentaltransformation of an individual by nonparticipation in destructive activities. There must be attitudinal change.
   3. We must educate children our Indian heritage, which it is their right to know. This will lead to change in value-system for sustainable development.
   4. Sustainability must be achieved by adopting nonviolent simple, eco-friendly life style and by avoiding eco-terrorism to preserve incredible biodiversity.

2) **World Peace** : Jain seers have craved for the peace and prosperity of all on the earth and prayed for their welfare in their prayer. Non-violence can play a role in competing terrorism. “One must almost sum up the atmosphere of Jainism in one phrase that we find in ‘*Sutrakritang’* that man by not injuring living creatures reaches the “Nirvana” which is peace-peace between man and man, peace between man and animal, peace everywhere and in all things”. Peace is an ethical issue that shows concern for humanity.

In the modern strife-torn world when all sorts of distrust, doubts and wars are prevalent all over the universe and when violence threatens to ruin the entire fabric of human civilization, the quest for peace, which is at the very heart of Jainism, is significant. Jain ethos have cosmic significance in the context of global problem of peace.

**3) Interfaith Dialogue:**

**"Religion unites and does not disintegrate"**

In this context, it is pertinent to note: Anekantvada or syadavada or theory of manifoldness of Reality or Jaina Theory of Relativity. (Multiple vision) The doctrine of multiple vision is another important contribution of Jainism, to world thought. It is extension of principle of non-violence in intellectual field. It is logic of probability or relativism based on realism. It implies non-absolutism. This theory is unparalleled in history of philosophy. 'Respect to the views of others' is important for attitudinal change. It will result in toleration- This principle develops catholic outlook necessary for peaceful coexistence It is holistic principle. The kind of intellectual toleration it will develop will further lead to an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence avoiding dogmatism and fanaticism. Much violence in the world today arises from fundamental ideological and religious disagreement "Jainism with its theory of multiple visions provides a framework through which qualities like tolerance understanding etc. can be developed". Jain thinkers have consistently shown respect for other faiths. No wonder that Jainism is opposed to all forms of religious fanaticism. Religions should unite the people and not divide them. The idea of manifoldness of reality is well illustrate by the parable of six blind men & the elephant. They all touched the elephant and then tried to describe their perception of the elephant. The one who touched the side believed it to be like a wall, the one who touched the leg described it as a pillar, the one who touched the ear described it that it is like a fan and so on. Each of them was right but each one's experience was but one aspect of reality. The truth is synthesis of all of them. It fosters tolerance, respect for another point of view. In the context of inter religious dialogue, it implies, not merely, to accept another religious view point but rather to approach it with a spirit of understanding, respect and appreciation.

The real threat to world peace comes from Ideological conflict. According to Janism antagonism can be resolved not by quarrels but by communication and understanding. It is the principle of peaceful coexistence. This means toleration, which is characteristic of Jaina Ideology. One should accept one's faith but also respect other's faith. It is also an ideal for successfully managing conflicts-personal or interpersonal, national or international. It is the doctrine of open-mindedness, which is the expression of fundamental non-violent attitude. Jain doctrine develops cathoic outlook necessary for peaceful atmosphere.

Another principle called non-attachment to possession is a comprehensive precept or an ethical principle for a good social order. It refers to limitation of mindless accumulation of things and articles of consumption. All human vices are due to attachment to possession. "The desire for power and possession has given birth to the race for atomic weapons. This virtue stresses change in attitude".One major factor for peace is our attitude towards our possession. This is the principle of Aparigraha It means- non acquisitiveness which is a precept for good social order.

**Conclusion:**

Needless to say, that a proper understanding of all these principles will contribute to the solution of manifold problems confronting humanity in search of peace.

Today world is passing through value-crisis. These unique concepts help in building up sound value system. A new type of thinking is required. Jainism preaches that ultimately peace is conciliation. It involves factors 'within'. Main features of Jain framework for securing peace are, 1) Global disarmament, 2)self-restraint, 3) Liberation from violence, 4) Giving up ofego, negativity and impurity. Jainism offers unique philosophy for world era.

From the forgoing discussion it is evident that Jainism deals with the permanent values of life, which are of enduring benefit to mankind.

In the end, distinctive Jain principles can be used to facilitate and establish peace on the globe. In India religion and philosophy are not isolated practices but they are intertwined with life.

Lord Mahavira was the great apostle of peace in the world and with the Jain principle of non-violence world can travel along the path of peace and freedom from fear. Perhaps in the twenty-first Century Jainism may rule the world with its principle of non-violence. Jain message of peace and world fraternity is a call for internationalism.

In the age of globalization, we have to reaffirm faith in Indian ethos. We may be able to create then technocrats' entrepreneurs Managers and business leaders who would try to improve quality of the life. Lord Mahavira advocated overcoming vices like anger greed etc. and recommended the practice of certain virtues. The ethical principles of Jainism prescribe a code of conduct, which requires an individual to be an ideal person with non-violence as the foundation of his life.

Agenda for action:

1. Commitment to culture of non-violence in all fields of life at all levels- individual, social, national and international.
2. We have to come out of narrow mindedness, selfishness and egoism and practice liberalism in thought.
3. To eradicate the desire for acquisition by resisting greed and feeling of passiveness and thus practice restraint.
4. To adopt the principle of 'Live and Let live', for ecological equilibrium. Protection of wild life.
5. Development of toleration through interfaith dialogues is important. People should be educated for peace and harmony.
6. Last but not the least- Ethico - spiritual considerations are significant and for that implementation of virtues and value- perspective should be stressed.

I would like to conclude the paper with an optimistic note: "No wonder then that Jainism is a system which offers much that is permanent and eternal and has stood the test of time, it has helped and still help humanity to regain its inner balance which is the crying need of the present age.

In the end, indeed, non-violence is the most sublime gift of Jainism to the world which is for the welfare of all, the protector of the universe.

# Culture, Religion, Nationalism and Fundamentalism in the Post-modern and Globalized World Today

**Prof. Dr. S. M. Michael**

## 1. Introduction

Many social scientists characterize the present world as the Post-Modern and Globalized world. They have their own distinguishing features and characteristics. Religions in this post-modern and globalized world show two contrasting phenomena; on the one hand it shows a lot of relativistic and secular tendencies, on the other hand it manifests rigid and fundamentalist qualities. This paper tries to study the complex reality of religion in the post-modern and globalized world of today.

## 2. Major Cultural Trends of our Times

There are two major ideologies dominate the present global world scenario. The future of the global world, according to some scholars will be unidirectional that is to imitate and incorporate the ideology of the triumphant global free market capitalism and its consequent economic, social, political and cultural paths. This position is articulated by Fukayama in his celebrated volume "End of History" (1992). Opposing this view some other scholars are of the opinion that today's world is a diversified world. We cannot trust any of the major ideologies posing to be the future. We need to recognize, and further multiculturalism and suspect and oppose the ideologies which try to homogenize cultures, peoples and religions. In today's world both these ideological trends co-exist with their variations. Thus we see the dominance of the Globalization of culture led by the market economy and politics on the one hand, Post-modernism, Multi-culturalism, Nationalism and Fundamentalism on the other. Religions are interwoven in the midst of the above processes of globalization, sandwiched between these conflicting and contradicting trends of world history.

All these ideas and processes have brought two major trends with regard to religions of people, one, secularization and relativization; and the other is religious fundamentalism.

### *2.a) We live in a Globalized World*

Whether we like it or not, globalization is the determinant material and social force of our times. Globalization refers to the expansion of global linkages, the organization of social life on a global scale, and the growth of a global consciousness, which leads to the consolidation of a world society. In the context of the end of the Cold War era and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Francis Fukuyama rhetorically and smugly put forth the thesis of the "End of History" (1992), celebrating the triumph of the West-driven free market system, democracy and individualism. Fukayama felt that globalization is the embodiment of rationalism, efficiency, material abundance and liberal democratic values.

It is supposed that the world has no other choice but to imitate these values in the course of its history. Thus, the process of globalization is said to be the impact of the rapid transformation of cultures currently underway in the world, effecting, churning and bringing about change everywhere. No corner of the world is untouched as globalization carries on its conquest of the world. Globalization is said to lead to cultural homogeneity. Interaction and integration diminish differences; and global norms, ideas or practices overtake local mores and many cultural flows, such as the diffusion of news.

Globalization takes the whole world as a single economic unit and the market as its instrument. The economy in a globalized world is characterized by open, liberal, free market and free trade with less regulatory barriers. It is marked by international investment and instant capital flows. Due to this, multi-national companies move into different locations where labour is cheap. People from different national boundaries shift their places of work and residence exposing themselves to different cultural worlds. As a result the world is becoming a highly interconnected world through economic, social, political and cultural contacts. As a consequence, the

world is shrinking in terms of time and space making the world feel smaller and distances shorter. The intensity and the momentum of this process are further enhanced by the sophisticated instant communications and ever-expanding fast travels. Globalization symbolizes a world in motion providing people with resources to new ways of being human in the fast changing world (Hall, 1996:619).

In cultural terms, globalization implies an increased cultural interconnectedness across the globe, principally as a result of the mass media, and also because of flows of people in migration, tourism and the global economic and political institutions leading to similar life patterns in different parts of the globe. Globalization opens up the local culture to other ways of living and gives alternatives. As a result of the accelerated pace of life, transience seems to have acquired an edge over permanence and durability. The cultural baggage of globalization is reflected in the world-wide diffusion of American pop culture. Entertainment around the world is dominated by American movie corporations and American-made products.

Thus, globalization also produces new understandings of culture, nationality, environmental relations and many other aspects of social life. All these affect our traditional ways of living and managing world affairs. Globalization excludes a whole lot of unskilled groups of people, giving rise to the impoverishment of a lot of people. Due to privatization, there is a loss of guaranteed employment. Many people are in an uncertain position with regard to their secure and worthwhile future (see Jogdand and Michael, 2003).

### *2.b) We Live in a Post Modern and Relativistic World*

The globalization project is based on the principles of modernity of the 17$^{th}$ century Enlightenment philosophy. Overall Enlightenment was characterized by rationalism and scepticism about traditional doctrines and supported the empirical methods of science. The proponents of Enlightenment had supreme confidence in the capacity of human person as a rational being and believed in a rational, scientific approach to religious, social, political, and economic issues. They promoted a secular view of the world and a general sense of progress and perfectibility. Such

ideas of civilization promoted by globalization dominated the thinking of the intellectual world during the 19th and up to the middle of 20th centuries. Science and technology were becoming increasingly powerful. Secularization was accepted as the natural and inevitable process in the development of human society.

All the same, a close look at the process of globalization will show that the triumphalism and complacency of globalization is proving to be premature and myopic. The supreme confidence in human being and his/her rationality came to be questioned by the middle of the 20th century. The immeasurable devastation and consequent misery of the two world wars and the increasing depletion of resources and environmental problems of the contemporary world began to question the assumptions of the globalization process. Science and technology have failed to give meaning in both the personal and occupational lives of individuals, and have failed to resolve some of the institutional problems of global society. They have also failed to provide a guide to the human quest for ultimate meaning. In a lecture delivered at Georgetown University in the United States in the late 1990's, the former US national security advisor ZbigniewBrzezinsky wryly remarked: "Democracy has won. The free market system has won. But what in the wake of this great ideological victory is today the substance of our beliefs? What is the human being in the democratic West now truly committed to? Is it to hedonistic relativism? …. I think this emptiness, this potential emptiness, if not yet the reality is dangerous" (quoted in Acham 2000).

Moreover, the rise of nation-states in Asia and Africa after World War II, and the ever expanding communication system, with the migration of people from one cultural area to another have led to Multicultural societies. Migrations and population shifts in the wake of wars and natural catastrophes as well as new job opportunities in technologically developed countries have become a common phenomenon. This has added a new dimension to the debate on multiculturalism among Western scholars. In U.S.A., England, and the rest of Europe the population composition is undergoing rapid change in these years. A few years or decades ago the Western world consisted mainly of Whites with a common civilization and Christian by

religion. But today the situation is fast changing. Immigrants from Asia and Africa are settling down in U.S.A., England and other Western countries. The racial and religious composition of the population and the socio-cultural components of these countries are no longer the same. This is a new situation in America and in Europe, which were traditionally mono-cultural. For example, in England today there are a substantial number of Indians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Afro-Caribeans. The internal make-up of the country is undergoing transformation. As Bhikhu Parekh points out, "Today you have a landscape with as many mosques as churches. As a result, the Brits are beginning to ask themselves: What are we? Who are we likely to become?" (Parekh, 2001:5). They are being confronted with the new situation of multiculturalism. The subject of multiculturalism is often in the headlines in the Western media these years.

As multiculturalism increases in many parts of the world, each culture and religion claims space and autonomy. They compete with one another as the best culture or religion for the future. As a result, the modernist's quest for a universal culture is under doubt. This has given rise to a Post-Modern cultural situation.

Postmodernists question the philosophical assumptions of Modernism, namely rationality, positivism and empirical methods in science to know the reality. Postmodern culture sees doubt as a form of health. It often derives meaning or excitement through experiments with sensation, sex and drugs, and if confronted with the teachings promoting traditional values or Wisdom of the Ages it proudly rejects them as outdated and no more relevant to contemporary humanity.

One of the things that characterize the post-modern world we live in,is the breakdown of absolutes - in morals–sexual anarchy; in metaphysics–doubt; in epistemology–confusion and ambiguity. Symptoms of this cultural and intellectual malaise are everywhere discernible. Postmodernism doubts any grand theories and generalizations. A coherent general understanding across cultural boundaries is seen as virtually impossible (Bhargava, 1999). Key analytical categories may not be as universally applicable as in modernism, as we had once imagined. Paul Heelas explains this by: "The cultural becomes disorganized; less black and white.

The distinction between high and low fades away. The claim that one tradition should be adhered to because it, and it alone, is valid, is rendered invalid. And rather than authority and legitimacy resting with established orders of knowledge, authority comes to rest with the person" (1998:3-4). In the words of James Beckford, post-modernity consists in a "willingness to abandon the search for over-arching or triumphalist myths, narratives or frameworks of knowledge" (as quoted in Heelas, 1998). Post-Modernism is a revolt and a reaction against Modernism. Post-modernism is imbued with the sense of a "collapsed signification and challenged humanism". It is amorphous, eclectic, pluricultural and ideologically and aesthetically not clear cut.

The implication of the postmodern understanding of "truth" in a wider cultural perspective has been that all is relative, nothing is sure, not fixed, all is in a flux. Post modernity goes against certainty and objectivity. It rejects order and certainty. It is sceptical about categories and any idea of a stable meaning. Instead, ambivalence, variation, fragmentation and emotion are celebrated as guidelines for how we should understand the social world. Sometimes, post-modernism stresses instincts and the drive for pleasure as central to how an individual should function. Post-modernism believes that meaning is not universal and fixed, but precarious, fragmented and local.

Post-Modern ideas and values are projected in the powerful media. The media has a tremendous impact on the young. In recent years, television and other modern gadgets have begun to dictate terms in our homes. Children often remain glued to them often replacing the normal conversation in the family.

Today, a large number of world population, specially the youth are affected by Post-modern culture and its value system. Post-Modern liberal ideas hold that what is morally sound and desirable is to be determined by each individual and that one should not judge the actions of other people in terms of one's own moral values. Thus liberalism inherently entails moral relativism. Karl Acham points out that the root cause of the cultural crisis in the Western world is related to this moral relativism leading to exaggerated individualism (Acham, 2000).

## 3. Responses and Reactions to Globalization and Post-Modernism

### *a) Cultural Nationalism and Religious Fundamentalism*

While globalization as a homogenizing process is active, we also observe cultures and religions asserting their separate identities. Globalization creates a troubled relationship between the native and the international. The claim of the emergence of a global culture is accompanied by cries of alarm that local values and nation-states are suffering a sense of threat to identity (Hall, 1996:619). This has given rise to ethnic revivals, struggles for indigenous rights and religious fundamentalism as defensive reactions to globalization and relativism. They have risen from a desire to defend and preserve valued ways of life against what are seen to be pernicious effects of foreign and global influences. Fundamentalist religious movements and cultural nationalism emerge in order to strengthen the identity of one's nation and culture.

### *3.a) (i) The Rise of Christian Fundamentalism*

In the context of modernists questioning some of the fundamental tenets of Christian faith, several booklets were published between 1910 and 1915 by the title *The Fundamentals* (see Madan 1997). During 1920s, *A World Christian Fundamentals Association* was formed. In the 1960s and 1970s a certain group of Christians began to assert themselves in the context of the U.S. Supreme Court banning prayer in public schools (1963), and permitting abortion on demand (1973). They began to voice their concern about the fundamentals of their faith.

Thus, we see fundamentalism was a reaction to modernism and certain scientific trends questions the very foundation of Christianity. Darwinian concept of evolution explained the origin of the universe to the natural processes which some orthodox Christians considered went against the biblical notion of creation. Fundamentalist were now being asked defend the Christian fundamentals which were chiefly doctrinal and intended to

ward off 'the havoc' that 'rationalism' and modernism had unleashed (see Madan 1997; Marty 1986: 237).

The Christian Fundamentals Association questioned the scientific explanations of the universe as proposed by Darwin and others. They began to develop their own scientific explanations in accordance with the Biblical revelation. Even today, these associations and a few new ones try to influence the American politics with their fundamentalist ideas.

Following the Second Vatican Council's efforts (1962-1965) at ecumenical reconciliation, and the perceived *compromise* of the Catholic Church with modernity, conservative Catholics also began to voice their concern about the fundamentals of the faith.

Similar trends emerged among other religious followers of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and others in the context of increasing nationalism and religious revivalism.

### *3. a) (ii) Islamic Fundamentalism*

The book *Fundamentals of Islamic Thought* came to existence in 1985 in the context of Iranian Revolution. It has its roots in the modernization process in Iran by Reza Shah Muhammad Pahlavi after World War Two. This modernization process of Iran was a follow up of the earlier attempts carried forward at the beginnings of the revolutionary changes that occurred in 1905-11 in the Islamic world. Secularization in Iran had been rapid and fairly wide-ranging, and yet it was partial. Most importantly, the civil code continued to be based on Islamic holy law (*sharia*), and Shia *ulama*, whose importance in Iranian public life dates back to the beginning of the sixteenth century. In spite of efforts to modernize Iran, the Islamic law remained powerful. Some conservative Muslims in Iran began to question the secularization process of Iran by Reza Shah. Thus, gradually, a reversal of modernization began to gain momentum around 1970s. It

ultimately led Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to be the supreme religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 following many years of resistance to Shah Pahlavi. Ayatollah Khomeini sought to destroy the 'modern' Iran that the Shah and the urban, propertied, ruling class had tried to build. It was, first, a bloody reaction to the present and a call to return to the past or the fundamentals of Islam. The idea of an autonomous secular state was rejected. The book *Fundamentals of Islamic Thought* (1985), authored by Ayatollah Mutahhari served as a manifesto of the revolution.

In recent times, the Islamic fundamentalism shocked the world by its cruel and inhuman and horrifying images of hostages being beheaded by a group calling itself ***Islamic State of Iraq and Syria,*** or **ISIS.** Today, this fundamentalist organization and movement wants to establish a Islamic Caliph.

This nostalgia to establish a World Islamic Caliph has a long history. Within 20 years of Muhammad's ministry, he united almost all of Arabia under strict monotheist faith. Muhammad's first few successors, the Caliphs, defeated the mighty Persian and Byzantine Empires. To many in the Arab world, this is evidence of the greatness that Muslim kingdoms (caliphates) can achieve if Islam is strictly practiced.

Since the beginning of the colonial era and of the enduring domination of the West over Muslim countries as well, many Muslim intellectuals and scholars have been lamenting the loss of Muslim Empire, Muslim power and Muslim glory. The disappearance of the Ottoman Empire and the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 constituted in the Muslim psyche the crystallization of such threefold decline. Since then, many Islamic movements have emerged having as their explicit goal the revival of the Muslim *Ummah,* the reform of Muslim societies

If there is no consensus about the primary reason for the decline of Muslim power, according to some Islamic scholars and religious leaders, the reason behind the loss of their power and glory is because they have abandoned God's revealed law the –*Shariah*– this being the best way to order society. Therefore, they hypothesize, if Muslims implemented *Shariah*, they would certainly once again be glorious, like their forbearers. A systematic implementation of the *Shariah*, they believe, will once again restore global leadership and moral sovereignty to Muslims. An Islamic state, they envisage, is the vehicle that will re-implement *Shariah* in the lives of Muslims, re-establishing Islam as a global power. This is the basic premise behind the movements broadly defined under the rubric of political Islam, such as *Jamaat-e-Islami* in South Asia, and the Muslim Brotherhood –*al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimeen*– in the Arab World. Geographically speaking, these movements can be global, seeking to establish a global Islamic Caliphate (Akasheh, 2015).

Muslims believe that every action of theirs is governed by Islam; a government is a public expression of this action. The Muslim fundamentalist asks, "How can there be a Muslim government that is not Islamic?" They believe that, not only does Islam have a built-in political system, but also that all Muslims are religiously required to follow this system. Geographically speaking, these movements can be global, seeking to establish a global Islamic Caliphate. This is the basic premise behind the movements broadly defined under the rubric of political Islam, such as *Jamaat-e-Islami* in South Asia, and the Muslim Brotherhood –*al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimeen*– in the Arab World and *HizbutTahreer.* There are some other militant organizations which are country-specific, seeking to establish an Islamic state, such as *Hamas* in Palestine, or *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan* (TTP) in Pakistan (Akasheh, 2015).

The Arab Spring –region wide mass uprisings in 2011– transformed Arab politics by bringing to an end long enduring dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt,

and Libya, and precipitated reforms in Jordan and Morocco and brought civil war to Syria. The initial euphoria of revolution and early transitions to democratic governance underscored the immense popularity, organizational acumen, and depth of support for political Islam as they won elections in Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. In 2012 it appeared as if the future of the Arab World was political Islam in power, sustained by democratic legitimacy through electoral victories. Across the region political Islamic parties were getting the opportunity to shape the political future by writing constitutions and shaping regimes (Akasheh, 2015).

It is in this context the present Syrian conflict began in the early spring of 2011. It began as a democratic desire to dethrone President Bashar al-Assad's government as a nationwide protest. The government forces responded with violent crackdowns. The conflict gradually progressed from mass protests to an armed rebellion after months of military sieges. A United Nations report released in December, 2012, stated that the conflict had "become overtly sectarian in nature" between Alawite – dominated government forces, militias and other Shia groups fighting primarily against Sunni -dominated rebel groups. Initially, the Syrian government relied mainly on its armed forces, but since 2014 local protection units made up of volunteers known as National Defence Force have come to play a larger role, gradually becoming the primary military force of the Syrian state. From the early stages, the Syrian government received technical, financial, military and political support from Russia, Iran and Iraq. In 2013, Iran-backed Hezbollah entered the war in support of the Syrian Army. These violent conflicts gradually led to the formation of Islamic military state of *`Islamic State of Iraq and Syria'* (ISIS) led by **Salafi Jihadist** which follows an Islamic fundamentalist Wahhabi doctrine of Sunni Islam. This group calls itself **`Islamic State'** (IS) ever since it proclaimed a worldwide Caliphate in June 2014 and named Abu Bakr al –Baghdadi as its Caliph.

As a caliphate, it claims religious, political and military authority over all Muslims worldwide. As of December 2015, the group has control over vast landlocked territory in Iraq and Syria, with a population estimate ranging between 2.8 million and 8 million people and where it enforces its interpretation of Sharia Law. ISIL affiliates control small areas of Libia ,Nigeria, and Afghanistan, and operate in other parts of the world, including North Africa and South Asia (Akasheh, 2015).

There are many other groups that are seeking to establish some form of government Islamic polities, states or caliphates– not as end in themselves, but as instruments for global Islamic resurgence, and even political unification.

The rise of Islamic State has caused immense destruction and loss of life. The six years of war in Syria according to the UN, over 250,000 are dead, and well over a million wounded. But officials acknowledge that that figure has not been updated in months. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition group that monitors the war, puts the death toll at more than 270,000, while a recent report by the Syrian Centre for Policy Research, an independent think tank, said the conflict has caused 470,000 deaths, either directly or indirectly (Indian Express, March 17, 2016).

### *3. a) (iii) Emergence of Hindu Cultural Nationalism*

The emergence of Hindu cultural nationalism has its roots in the nineteenth century Hindu revivalism and may be seen as awareness to the Christian challenge to its culture and tradition (see Madan, 1997: 207). The Christian view of human person as being created in the image and likeness of God is in contrast to the hierarchical social system of ***varna*** and caste. The ideal Christian vision that every human person is created in the image and likeness of God endowed every human being with inherent dignity. This vision helped to bring about reforms such as the abolition of Sati, child

marriage and challenged the unjust caste oppression and untouchability. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), the father of Modern India, recognized the need to have rational approach to Hindu culture and promoted reform within Hinduism by his BrahmoSamaj movement. On the other hand, DayanandSaraswati (1824-1883) by founding Arya Samaj in 1875, wanted the regeneration of Aryavartha. Dayananda's attack on Christianity and Islam was vigorous. The Arya Samaj had two items in its manifesto: Shuddhi, the meaning of which is purification, a term for the ceremony by which non-Hindus were converted to Hinduism, and Sangathan which literally means union, that is the promotion of solidarity among Hindus.

A striking feature of the revivalist movements was their concern with the identification of true scripture and with scriptural authority. These efforts reached their climax in the later writings of Dayanand Sarasvati. The Arya Samaj movement (1875) sowed the seeds of Hindu fundamentalism (Anderson and Damle, 1987 ; Jefferlot, 1996). The outcome of this ideology is Hindutva (Hinuness) (see Michael, 1996:294-310).

Later, in 1885 the Indian National Congress was founded by Allan Octavian Hume. Among the Congress leaders there were two factions – the reformists and the revivalists. While the reformists such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Madhava Govinda Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale promoted reforms in Hindu culture, the revivalists like the followers of Arya Samaj and Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his Congress faction opposed any kind of reform. They promoted solidarity among Hindus by organizing a ten day Ganapati festival in 1893. After the death of Tilak in 1920, when Mohandas Gandhi publicly emerged on the Indian political scene as the Mahatma, he received widespread support from the revivalists. But soon the revivalists were disturbed by Gandhi's ascetic non-kshatriya style of leadership. The style of the revivalists was aggressive and tended to reflect a Kshatriya (warrior) world-view. The concern for social reform at the beginning of the Indian nationalist movement was given a back seat

with the emergence of militant Hindu cultural nationalism. The (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) was established in 1925 by Dr. Keshab Baliram Hedgewar. The Hindu nationalists identified 'nation' and 'national culture' as basically Hindu, as deriving from Vedic times, and as fundamentally a creation of the Aryan people. And with this they tended to accept as an inherent part of their culture some form of the ***varnashrama dharma*** and to relegate other Indian cultural traditions to a secondary and inferior position.

On the other hand, the Sudra (lower caste) thinker, Jotirao Phule, the first Indian to proclaim in modern India the dawn of a new age for the common man, the downtrodden, the underdog and for the Indian women had a different vision of India ( see Keer, 1964). It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason. As we just mentioned, the 'Aryan theory of race' constituted the most influential common discourse for discussing caste and society in Phule's time. It was the confirmed and sincere view of Phule that the ancient history of India was nothing but the struggle between Brahmins and non-Brahmins. He worked tirelessly to uplift the non-Brahmin castes. To establish a casteless society, Phule founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj on 24th September 1873 (Keer, 1964).

Ambedkar, the great liberator of the Dalits, was very much inspired and guided by the noble example set by Mahatma Jotiba Phule. At the beginning stages of his public life Ambedkar wanted to reform Hinduism, especially in the context of the untouchables in Hindu society. In 1927 he revolted against the caste rule which prohibited the untouchables from fetching water from the wells of the upper castes. He organised a satyagraha in Mahad and led a large number of untouchables to drink water from the town tank. Though he was unsuccessful in his attempt, that became one of the first "untouchable liberation movements," which ended with the public burning of the Manusmruti. Ambedkar's analysis of the reasons for

caste and untouchability revealed that the Hindu scriptures are directly linked to the degrading status of the untouchables in Hindu society. So, in 1929 Ambedkar advised the untouchables to embrace any other religion that would regard them as human beings, give them an opportunity to break off from the oppressive structures and enable them to act, eat, walk, and live like men.

In spite of this suggestion, he was still emotionally tuned to Hinduism and was making efforts to reform Hinduism. In 1930 he led a "temple entry" movement in Nasik. Ambedkar asserted: "So long as we consider ourselves to be Hindus and so long as you consider us Hindus we have a right to enter a temple and worship the idol. We do not want separate temples". The Nasik Satyagraha for entry of the untouchables to the Kalaram temple went on for six long years until April 1936 without gaining its specific objective. During this time he realized the limitation of Hinduism and its impossibility to be reformed, and so he declared in 1935: "I born a Hindu but would not die a Hindu".

Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on the 14th October, 1956 with his five lakh followers (Keer, 1974).

Thus we see the concept of culture, nation and religion in India is very complex. This complexity was to a certain extent integrated in the formation of Indian Constitution in 1950. The Chairman of this drafting committee was none other than Dr. Ambedkar. The Indian Constitution recognizes cultural, religious, linguistic, ethnic and ideological pluralism. Indian Constitution is the foundation of Indian unity.

But, in spite of this equalitarian Constitution, a certain Hindu fundamentalist question the existence of other religious groups in India. Hindu militancy organizes itself politically to assert its view of India. On December 6, 1992 through a long process of political and cultural mobilization, the

Islamic ancient iconic heritage, the Babri Masjid which was built around 1527 was destroyed by the Hindutva political-cultural movement.

With the forming of Central Government by the political wing of RSS in 2014, reports are emerging that the present Hindu government is taking all steps to Hinduvize the culture of India by bringing changes in the educational system. The Indian news papers are filled with reports (see the news papers 2014-2016) of Hindu cultural nationalism which is trying to impose of its idea of nationalism compelling that one is a nationalist only if he/she utters certain slogans like "***Bharat Mata ki Jai***" or if you are refrain from eating "cow" meat. According to P. Chidambaram, the "new champions of the slogan have a purpose in mind: they use the slogan to peddle the specious argument that those who raise the slogan – and only those – are patriots and those who do not are not patriots and are, therefore, anti-national" (2016:12). He further cautions that "`Project Nationalism' seeks to bludgeon the people to submerge their individual identities in a presumed national identity – that there is one history, one ethnicity, one race, one culture and one system of values that binds the people of India. It is this presumed national identity that emboldens self-appointed leaders to lay down rules on what one should eat or wear or read or view; or who one should love or marry; or who should be included or excluded or punished" (Chidambaram, 2016: 12). The violence against the minority religions is also showing an increase in the last few years.

## 4. Future of Culture and Religion in the Globalized and Post-Modern World

### *a) To distinguish between 'The Fundamentals' (Foundation of Faith) and 'Fundamentalism' (Fanaticism – Religion based Extremism)*

The rise of fundamentalism is related to the question of meaning, identity, power, dignity and self-esteem. It is religious politics. Fundamentalism is partly a reaction to the spread of the relativistic outlook and it asserts that faith must be taken seriously; if not, it ceases to grip the mind or to orient or guide the person. Hence,

paying only lip-service to it is to defeat its potency and purpose. The fundamentalists, who today predominate in many parts of the world accuse the relativists of diluting moral conviction and fervour and of thus weakening the moral fibre of man in his fundamental essence.

It is important to understand that the vast majority of those who lend their loyalty to a religious outlook are not fundamentalists, and this applies correspondingly to their moral orientation. This majority can be regarded as representing a methodological or philosophical point of view which is the very antithesis of the relativistic point of view. Hence, we need to distinguish between 'fundamentals' of a religion and 'fundamentalism'. When religion is used narrowly for selfish power, and to oppress people due to socio-political and other reasons, it may be named as fundamentalism (Barr, James 1978:2). All the same, a deep commitment to faith in the 'fundamentals' of a religion cannot be called fundamentalism.

Hence, we need to distinguish between "faith foundation" i.e. `fundamentals' of a religion and "fundamentalism" which connotes rigidity, intolerance, arrogance, hostility, divisiveness, prejudice and other negatives to describe narrowness, bigotry, obscurantism, and sectarianism (Barr, 1978:2). So when one talks about fundamentalism, one is actually talking about experiences, situations, and an environment that does not promote harmony, tranquility and brotherhood but encourage a context of growing hostile, divisive, separatist tendencies.

Clarifying the foundation of one's faith in terms of religious life in the complex and ever-changing and challenging world scenario of today cannot be called fundamentalism. On the other hand, using religion for the sake of narrow and selfish power games and economic interests is 'fundamentalism'. Fundamentalism in the negative sense is an aberration of religion. It is linked to political and economic interests of certain vested parties to maintain influence, power, wealth and status. It is invoking God for their inability to find a way out and to lead the people to light. Fundamentalism is one of the more dangerous tools of interested parties because it uses, or rather abuses religious beliefs which have an intrinsic mass appeal.

Hence, we need to be very careful to distinguish between "the fundamentals" or Foundation of Faith in a religion and "fundamentalism", which is a direct use of religion in politics for a narrow purpose leading to fanaticism.

### *b) Going Beyond Ethnocentrism and Relativism*

Evaluating other religions and cultures in the light of one's own is known as 'ethnocentrism'. This tends to foster claims of superiority vis-à-vis other religions. The other important attitude towards religion is 'relativism'. It is an intellectual position that holds that every religion is equally valid and we should not compare religions. The relativists stress the validity of all claims to truth and regard them as equal, since the world is moving in the direction of equality among men, cultures, nations, as well as genders. Therefore, to try and pursue a claim to any kind of unique truth is merely a cover for domination. It is the stand of the relativist that each religion has its own integrity, its own system of values. What is 'good', what is 'right' what is 'beautiful' do not exist by themselves. To hold that any religion is intrinsically better than another is felt to be somehow wrong, offensive, and narrow-minded. Hence there should be no value judgment on religions.

A blind belief in the superiority of one's own culture or religion is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism leads to fundamentalism. Hence, we need to go beyond ethnocentrism. The relativistic worldview, on the other hand, making all cultural and religious values equally good is also impossible to hold. It is because this will justify some of the values such as human sacrifice (*sati*), female infanticide, headhunting, religious wars of aggression (*jihad*), religious murders, religious castes (*varna-dharma*), untouchability etc. present in certain religions. All these are justifiable according to a logic that stems from within the system itself. Relativism leaves us as separate islands of subjective being. The practical and effective alternatives are not ethnocentrism versus relativism, but rather rational norms with a potentiality for universal acceptance and realization. That means we must endorse some ultimate and absolute values. This presupposes a *normative* ethic.

### *c) Priority of the Dignity of the Human Person and towards Inter-cultural Transformation*

In the context of religious fundamentalism and relativism, we need to place the priority of human person over all other considerations. We need to safeguard the dignity of man/woman over all other considerations.

Today, religious fundamentalism in India manifests itself in the form of cultural nationalism. In fighting religious fundamentalism today, we need to ask ourselves what does nationalism mean for the poor, oppressed and marginalized? Are they able to experience a sense of common humanity in the indian nationhood? Or is nationalism the luxury of the rich and the powerful? As citizens, we need to be concerned about human dignity and the integration of all indians. In the context of hindutva and exclusive and narrow hindu nationalism, we need to define nationalism in such a way that the poor and the downtrodden receive their due attention and care. As concerned citizens we need to ask what nationalism means for the poor; dalits, tribals and other weaker sections. behind the dreams and aspirations of these marginalized groups lingers the hope that a nation of fairness and justice will be realized, a nation, humane and inclusive.

## 5. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, we may say that the wind of change due to globalization has gradually reached the whole world. The world has become small. Every aspect of human life is being affected by this process. Religion, culture and nation are challenged to reorient themselves to the newly emerging global order. Economic activities and power relationships are also adapting themselves to this process. Globalization is a double-edged sword. It has exciting possibilities but can also usher in unprecedented miseries. Globalization, which supports a secular and liberal culture also, creates a troubled relationship between the local and the international. The spread of a global culture is accompanied by cries of alarm that local values and nation-states will suffer a sense of threat to their identity. Fundamentalism feeds on this sense of a weakened identity.

Resurgence of religion in the globalized world is associated with the new emerging socio-political and cultural patterns. It is an outcome of cultural crisis and a sense of loss. It is related to the question of meaning, identity, power, the dignity and self-esteem of human person. It is a revolt against cultural relativism. It is a response to a changing social order.

In this context, the future of religion in the globalized world should be not one of fundamentalism but based on the foundations or fundamentals of one's religion. Globalization and post-modernism lead to either cultural and religious ethnocentrism or relativism in the minds of people. But both these approaches have their own limitations. Our search must be towards seeking truth rather than a blind adherence to a religion. Lastly, in the context of raising cultural nationalism, we need to ask what nationalism means for the poor; Dalits, tribals and other weaker sections. In building a nation, there should be fairness and justice for all the citizens of the country.

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# Reconciliation as the Essence of Inter-Religious Dialogue

**Rev. Dr. Stephen Fernandes**

**Introduction**:

People everywhere are asking the question whether peace can ever be achieved in our planet. There is so much conflict and violence taking place in different parts of the world today, that it appears as though disputes, confrontations, riots, terrorism, attacks and war has become part of our human existence. As the Second Vatican Council put it years ago: "War has not ceased to be part of the human scene".[1] There is so much suffering and loss of innocent lives due to violence and terrorism. In this regard, in *Centesimus Annus,* St. Pope John Paul II remarked: "it must not be forgotten that at the root of war there are usually real and serious grievances: injustices suffered, legitimate aspirations frustrated, poverty, and the exploitation of multitudes of desperate people who see no real possibility of improving their lot by peaceful means.[2] Reconciliation with one another and peace can only come about when we learn to treat each other as brothers and sisters and recognise our shared vocation as children of God. Further, the pursuit of reconciliation, peace and human development can become more effective if we invite and involve people of all religions to collaborate with one another and work together in dialogue with one another to build bridges of understanding and promote respect for human life everywhere. Religious collaboration is essential to heal wounds of division and bring about peace. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia,* St. Pope John Paul II clearly stated: "Given the appalling situation of conflict in so many parts of the world, the Church is called to be deeply involved in international and interreligious efforts to bring about peace, justice and reconciliation".[3]

**Mercy and Reconciliation are linked to Peace**

Peace is the fruit of love, mercy and reconciliation and goes beyond what justice can provide. Humankind cannot accomplish its task of constructing for people everywhere a world more genuinely human unless each person devotes himself to the cause of peace

with renewed vigour.[4] Peace is an irrepressible yearning present in the heart of each person, regardless of his or her particular cultural identity. Consequently, everyone should feel committed to service of this great good, and should strive to prevent any form of untruth from poisoning relationships.[5] Peace is not as the mere absence of war, but is called the effect of righteousness; it is the fruit of the right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society".[6] The truth of peace calls upon everyone to build sincere relationships, to follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others, and to be faithful to their word.[7]

Christian Reconciliation is an encounter with God, an encounter with others in the community and an encounter with oneself. It consists of the realization that God loves humanity, that God loves every single person and hence each of us is urged to reciprocate and love God and our neighbour. God's love for us is unconditional, merciful and eternal. Being human, each one of us is weak and hence we often turn away from God's love. The root cause of this is our own selfishness and egoism which prevents us from being open to others. One of the central commandments of Christianity is love of one's enemies. The second letter of Clement states: "whoever does not love the one who hates him or her is not a Christian".[8]

Reconciliation is very essential for the promotion of peace in society. "The Church extols reconciliation, pardon. In inviting pardon of God, she invites men to practice it among themselves. People themselves have a need to be reconciled, to look upon others with new eyes, to overcome old grievances, to open the doors to their enemies without humbling them, and to seek to build unity again.[9] Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI had urged each one of us to be peacemakers – by replacing forgiveness and nonviolent solutions to situations of hurt and violence. Referring to the Gospels of the Beatitudes he said: *"…this Gospel is rightly considered the "magna carta" of Christian nonviolence; it does not consist in surrendering to evil—as claims a false interpretation of 'turn the other cheek' but in responding to evil with good, and thus breaking the chain of injustice... The revolution of love, a love that does not base itself definitively in human resources, but in the gift of God, that is obtained only and unreservedly in his merciful goodness".*[10]

In Buddhism, the admission of one's wrong doing, the making of amends and the exercise of restraint in the future to prevent its recurrence are three essential ingredients for effective reconciliation. According to the Buddha, amity, unity and harmony together ensures peace and security. This the Buddha enjoined in the Samannaphala Sutta as follows: For the growth of the Dhamma and Vinaya, one who admits an offense must make amends according to the Dhamma with restraint in the future. (DN 2).[11]

The quality of mercy is essential in order to reconcile with one another and build bridges of communion and peace with one another. True mercy is the most profound source of justice and peace. We recollect here Jesus' words in the Gospel of Matthew: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy".[12] At the opening to the Second Vatican Council, St. Pope John XXIII stated that the Church must use the medicine of mercy rather than the weapons of severity.[13] In his Encyclical Letter, *Dives in Misericordia,* St. Pope John Paul II dedicated a complete chapter on "The Mercy of God in the Mission of the Church". He stated that it is the task of the Church to give witness to divine mercy. This encyclical invites each of us not only to experience God's mercy but also to practice mercy towards others. In the words of the Pope: "the Church-professing mercy and remaining always faithful to it - has the right and the duty to call upon the mercy of God, imploring it in the face of all the manifestations of physical and moral evil, before all the threats that cloud the whole horizon of the life of humanity today. The Church must profess and proclaim God's mercy in all its truth, as it has been handed down to us by revelation.[14] Hence, we can be true witnesses and agents of God's mercy only when our thoughts, words and deeds are shaped by mercy.

**Reconciliation is essential for Interreligious Dialogue and Peace**

Dialogue is an essential condition for the promotion of peace in the world. St. Pope John Paul II asserted that "Dialogue for peace is a challenge for our time".[15] In speaking to the people of Asia, he said: "All Christians must therefore be committed to dialogue with the believers of all religions, so that mutual understanding and collaboration may grow; so that moral values may be strengthened; so that God may be praised in all creation. Ways must be developed to make this dialogue become a reality everywhere, but especially in Asia, the continent that is the cradle of ancient cultures and religions... Christians will, moreover,

join hands with all men and women of goodwill who share a belief in the inestimable dignity of each human person. They will work together in order to bring about a more just and peaceful society in which the poor will be the first to be served. Asia is the continent where the spiritual is held in high esteem and where the religious sense is deep and innate: the preservation of this precious heritage must be the common task of all".[16] Interreligious dialogue presupposes a heart to heart listening to one another in a spirit of respect and trust. It is speaking the truth in love and striving to arrive at a common agreement in truth, but where that is not possible, to honestly admit and state that we agree to disagree.[17]

The Asian Bishops affirmed that "dialogue with our fellow Asians whose commitment to other faiths is increasingly important".[18] One of the resolutions of 1970 says: "We pledge ourselves to an open, sincere and continuing dialogue with our brothers of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another how to enrich ourselves spiritually and how to work more effectively together on our common task of total human development".[19]

Our human society can become more human only if we introduce mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation in all our mutual relationships with one another. St. Pope John Paul II instructs us the "forgiveness is also the fundamental condition for reconciliation, not only in the relationship of God with man, but also in relationships between people. A world from which forgiveness was eliminated would be nothing but a world of cold and unfeeling justice, in the name of which each person would claim his or her own rights vis-a- vis others".[20] "To refuse forgiveness and reconciliation is for us to lie and to enter into the murderous logic of falsehood".[21] He goes on to say that "mercy becomes an indispensable element for shaping mutual relationships between people, in a spirit of deepest respect for what is human, and in a spirit of mutual brotherhood. It is impossible to establish this bond between people, if they wish to regulate their mutual relationships solely according to the measure of justice. In every sphere of interpersonal relationships justice must, so to speak, be "corrected " to a considerable extent by that love which, as St. Paul proclaims, "is patient and kind" or, in other words, possesses the characteristics of that merciful love which is so much of the essence of the Gospel and Christianity".[22]

People of every religion must join the quest for peace by examining our own readiness to forgive others and to be reconciled , and by making gestures of forgiveness and reconciliation

in our own family, social and political responsibilities.[23] Without peace between religions, peace in the world is not possible.[24] There is an increasing need for interreligious dialogue today, given today's situation of conflicts, disputes, violence, threats to life coupled with the suppression of religious freedom in many countries. We need to constantly search for creative measures to build peace on earth. The Golden Rule states that we should not do to another what we do not want done to us. This Rule is found in all the great religions of the world. According to St. Augustine, God wrote this rule in the hearts of all human beings.[25] In Judaism, it is found in the book of Tobit, Chapter 4, verse 15 and the book of Sirach, Chapter 31, Verse 15. In Christianity, in the New Testament it is found in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 7, verse 12 and in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 6, verse 31. This Golden Rule has functioned as an important element in dialogue between religions and it is humankind's cultural heritage.[26] This means that compassion, sympathy, love, mercy, reconciliation, readiness to help and beneficence belong to the wisdom of humanity.[27] Hence, every religion is convinced that connecting religion to violence is a misuse and an aberrant form of authentic religion. There is an urgent need to utilize the universal human virtues of reconciliation and mercy in order to dialogue with various cultures and religions and work together with them to bring peace in the world.[28]

**Conclusion:**

All the religious traditions of the world clearly agree that peace is a divine gift too humankind. We recollect here the words of Blessed Pope Paul VI who stated that "Progress must be made towards a peace which is loved, free and brotherly, founded on a reconciliation of heart".[29] Hence, reconciliation becomes the way to overcome the barriers of hatred and violence with the powerful weapons of love and forgiveness. Let us work together in a spirit of dialogue with people of all religions to promote world peace.

**Endnotes**

1 The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 79.

2 St. Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, no. 52.

3 St. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 38.

4 The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 77.

5 Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, Message on the occasion of the World Day of Peace, 2006, no. 6.

6 The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 78.

7 Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, Message on the occasion of the World Day of Peace, 2006, no. 6.

8 Second Letter of Clement, Verse 13 f.

9 St. Pope John Paul II, Address to the Members of the Diplomatic Corps, 14 January 1984.

10 Emeritus **Pope Benedict XVI,** Vatican City, 18 February 2007

11 Ananda W. P. Guruge, The Buddha on Reconciliation in the Keynote Address of the 25th General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 13-17 November 2010.

12 The Gospel of Mathew, Ch 5 Verse 7.

13 St. Pope John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Speech of the Solemn Inauguration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 11 October 1962, no. 16.

14 St. Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, no. 12, 13.

15 St. Pope John Paul II, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 1983.

16 St. Pope John Paul II, *Radio Message in Manila*, February 21, 1981. See AAS 73 (1981) pp. 393-94 and J. Neuner - J Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, Bangalore, TPI, 1987, no. 1040.

17 Walter Kasper, *Katholische Kirche: Wesen-Wirklichkeit-Sendung* (Freiburg i. Breisgau: Herder, 2011), 47f, 417f.

18 "Asian Bishops' Meeting: Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops Meeting," 29 November 1970, Manila, Philippines, n. 24, in FAPA I, 3-10

19 "Asian Bishops' Meeting: Resolutions of the Asian Bishops Meeting," n. 12

20 St. Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, no. 14.

21 St. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1980.

22 St. Pope John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, no. 14.

23 St. Pope John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1980.

24 Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 191), 75-76.

25 St. Augustine, *On Order*, II, 25; *Confessions*, I, 18, 29.

26 Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 58-59.

27 Walter Kasper, *Mercy, the Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey, 2013, p. 64.

28 Ibid., 65.

29 Blessed Pope Paul VI, *Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, 1975.

# Loss of Faith and its Reflection in Literature

**Dr. Marie Fernandes**

In his book *God: A Brief History* John Bowker asserts that the search for God began long before writing and printing. In early times therefore, ideas, stories and beliefs had to be remembered and passed on by word of mouth. Much information is still preserved and transmitted in this way, but it is impossible for us to know how old it is or how much it has changed over time. There has never been any human society in which God has not been apart, usually a controlling and creative part.[1]

People tried to find answers to what they experienced around them. Thunder and lightning, earthquakes, pestilence, famine and death were something that frightened them. They remained in awe of the transformation of night to day, the change of seasons, the miracles of seed and harvest and the other wonders they witnessed. Many religions evolved to try to address these concerns.

In the 14th century the Renaissance started in Italy and flourished in Western Europe until about the 17th century. It was the period and intellectual movement in European cultural history that is traditionally seen as ending the Middle Ages and beginning Modern Times. The aim of Renaissance education was to produce the 'complete human being,' the Renaissance man, conversant in the humanities, mathematics and science, the arts and crafts and athletics and sport; to enlarge the bounds of learning and geographical knowledge; to encourage the growth of scepticism and free thought, and the study and imitation of Greek and Latin literature and art.

Humanism was the first feature of the Renaissance. It freed man from the hold of rigour and puritanical negation of life, by advocating that man is the centre of life. Humanism relegated God and religion to the periphery. It was responsible for reducing the hold of the Church on an individual's life and setting him free to develop his natural self. Humanism came to influence different aspects of life, especially art and literature. After many centuries, for the first time, the beauty of the human body came to be depicted without restraint in art and literature. Human nature itself came to be examined in all openness.

The major influence that worked the change in the secularisation of thought and style in literature, in European countries, was that Christian scholars fled to Italy, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. It was the Eastern Roman Capital. The Western Roman Capital was at Rome. These conservators of culture fled with rare manuscripts of Greek and Roman authors. They were not theologians but pure scholars. The Italian nobles sheltered them and encouraged them to spread learning.

The revival of interest in classical literature in a way served to deepen the glory of man. The glorification of the individual was in direct contrast to the medieval approach. Initially man was looked upon as a product of the original sin of Adam. With the paramountcy of the Catholic Church, every man was regarded as a penitent and had to work out his salvation and the church would co-operate. The Church had a definite influence on man's mind for four hundred years. All knowledge was related to the *Bible* and theology.

With the arrival of the learned men, thought was revolutionised, therefore man's thinking was separated from the Bible and theology and knowledge was secularised. The intention of education was no longer didactic. The poems of Homer and Virgil, the lyrics and satire of Horace and the plays of Seneca were revived as a result of human interest. A growing concern for secular man and his experience was evinced.

The notion of man as an achiever was celebrated. Man was no longer seen as an insignificant thing on earth. *Tamburlaine, King Lear* and *Hamlet* exemplify that man has tremendous potential. They celebrate the spiritual aspiration and fulfilment of man. According to Laurie Magnus, the whole philosophy of the Renaissance was contained in Hamlet's perception.

> "What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god; the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals —" (*Hamlet*: II, ii, 303-307)

If man was glorified and became the sole concern of the writers, the world of human experience became the focal point of human attention. Writers laid stress on individual man's ambitions, longings and aspirations. Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* celebrates necromancy and the dark arts. It is a deliberate attempt to disrespect Christianity and the

Church. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is no longer forbidden, or, if it is forbidden so much the more exciting. Faustus says with confidence.

> 'Had I as many souls as there be stars,
> I'd give them all for Mephistopheles.
> (*Dr Faustus* I, iii, 100-101)

Christianity was the religion of Love, which found expression between mother and child and man and God. Since the Virgin Mary lost her importance, the attributes of perfection, generosity and love were transferred from the divine beloved to the human beloved.

Dante, a famous Italian poet, is best known for his epic poem *Divina Comedia*or *The Divine Comedy*. It is an allegorical account of his journey through Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, guided by Virgil and his idealised love Beatrice. His other works include *La Vita Nuova* in which he celebrates his love for Beatrice. He is one of the earliest poets to shift his focus from the divine beloved to the human beloved. He had several followers among the English poets.

Petrarch, the Italian lyric poet and scholar, also celebrated this theme in his *Canzoniere***,** which is a sonnet sequence. In these sonnets, the poet craves for the affection, favour and sovereign virtue of his beloved, Laura. Love was a disciplining force, not a form of indulgence. Discipline resulted in restraint. His sonnet sequence was a significant poetic legacy that he gave Europe and England. Each poem expresses an experience of personal love and the idealisation of love. Nature is in sympathy with the poets. Petrarch found imitators among the English poets - Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare.

Sidney's poems are a combination of Neo-Platonism, the Petrarchan and the Pastoral convention. His *Astrophel and Stella* sonnet sequence was published in 1591. Astrophel means 'star lover' and Stella means 'star'. This sequence is partly autobiographical and was published after his death. It was probably written just before and after his proposed marriage to the beautiful Penelope Devereux failed. Sidney is writing in a convention about a courtship that should have ended in marriage. There is sincerity and depth in this sequence and it is written with real feeling.

Spenser's achievement was of a different kind from Sidney's. The *Amoretti* sonnet sequence published in 1595 was written in honour of Elizabeth Boyle. It was a synthesis of various tendencies — the Petrarchan and Neo-Platonic influence and also the use of native English in his treatment and conception of nature. In this sequence the beloved becomes the source of bliss and happiness, a solution to problems, a lodestar and a haven of peace.

Shakespeare's sonnets fall into two distinct categories. About 50 early sonnets are taken to be addressed to a young man whose identity is established but still remains a matter of conjecture. The remaining 100 sonnets are addressed to a female beloved, reputably to the 'Dark Lady". Shakespeare's sonnets go well beyond their conventional manner and philosophical idealism, to reveal depths of thought and feeling that are known only to one who have come to grips with life and pondered over his experience with detached and sane judgement.

Following close on the heels of the Renaissance was the period of the Enlightenment. Philosophers and thinkers were of the view that the advances made by science and industry heralded a new age of egalitarianism and progress for mankind. Many voices were expressing sharp criticism of some time-honoured cultural institutions. The Church, in particular, was singled out as thwarting the forward march of human reason. Many intellectuals of the Enlightenment practiced a variety of Deism, which is a rejection of organized, doctrinal religion in favour of a more personal and spiritual kind of faith.

For the first time in recorded Western history, the hegemony of political and religious leaders was weakened to the point that citizens had little to fear in making their opinions known. Criticism was the order of the day, and argumentation was the new mode of conversation.

In Europe, Voltaire and Rousseau were the torchbearers of Enlightenment literature and philosophy. Rousseau was a strong advocate for social reform of all kinds. Voltaire on the other hand used wit and sarcasm to entertain his readers while making convincing arguments for reform. His pen name, Francois-Marie Arouet, probably shielded him from the persecution which his writings encouraged. His writings were caustic and severe for those in power. He reserved especially pointed barbs for the Church, which he reviled as intolerant, backward and too steeped in dogma to realize that the world was leaving the institution behind.

On the other hand, Jonathan Swift writer of *Gulliver's Travels* was very different. He was a clergyman of the Church of Ireland and was a moral defender of the Church. He was convinced that morality, politics and religion were inseparable. He strongly believed the Truth expressed by Christianity was misrepresented, corrupted by people who behaved like Yahoos. Unlike many thinkers of his time, he saw the Church as a force for rationality and moderation.

In the nineteenth century, science held a place of prime importance among the intellectual pursuits of common man. Sir Charles Lyell in his *Principles of Geology* (1833) established first that the earth was millions of years old; when according to the *Book of Genesis* the earth was a few thousand years old. He also maintained that man lived on earth for a much longer period than that given in the Bible.

Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) propounded the theory of 'Natural Selection' and 'Survival of the Fittest' on the basis of 'Might is Right'. *The Descent of Man* (1871) gave a scientific explanation to the theory of evolution and man's descent from the monkey. With this man's faith in Christianity was shaken.

The Victorian age might be regarded as an age of religion. It was an age in which the religion of the middle class set the tone of manner, dress and taste that the lower orders adopted in their struggle towards respectability. It was an age in which even Ministers used religious vocabulary in their speeches.

Yet the Victorian age might be regarded as an age of religious decay and uncontrolled sectarianism. Scientific discoveries like Darwin's theory of evolution about human life on earth shook Orthodox Christians but they refused to face the challenge of science and tried to ignore the problems that the spirit of inquiry raised. But others upheld rationalistic theories and justified the materialistic basis of society. Gissing the novelist made a character in his novel *Born in Exile* say, "What we have to do is to reconstruct a spiritual edifice on the basis of a scientific revolution." Protestantism thus found itself more and more powerless against the new Biblical criticism.

But those Christians who could not find any permanent satisfaction in a purely material conception of life and the universe, became agnostics, in other words they believed that

nothing could exist beyond the limits of this physical universe. Matthew Arnold in his *Study of Poetry,* boldly stated that 'where religion has failed us, poetry will save us'.

> We should conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.
>
> (*The Study of Poetry,* Para 2)

But literature came to the aid of religion and upheld an idealistic view of the Universe. Carlyle preached the necessity of faith and declared that the existing social ideals were inadequate. Tennyson's poetry reflected this struggle of man against his religious faith, in his poem *In Memoriam*. He expressed the agnostic view when he wrote.

> "We have but faith; we cannot know!
> For knowledge is of things we see"

Liberalism that made democracy and reform the keynotes of the Victorian age had a disturbing effect on religion. Liberals like John Stuart Mill valued Christianity only as a code of ethics and rejected its mystery and dogma. This secularisation of religion provoked a strong protest from the orthodox in the form of what came to be called *The Oxford Movement.* A group of clergymen –John Keble, Edward Bouverie Pussey and Henry Newman wrote a series of sermons called *Tracts for the Times* between 1833 and 1841. They pleaded for the revival of orthodox Christianity with the emphasis on dogma and ritual and thus tried to reduce the difference between Protestant and Catholic churches.

To reconcile scientific temperament with religious temperament had become difficult for intellectuals. The cry of Jean Paul Sartre on his deathbed "Oh God, if there is a God, save my soul, if there is a soul"shows how scepticism had made reason prevail over reason and faith.

However scepticism and agnosticism did not disturb the orderly life of individuals. Soon the intellectuals began to feel that agnosticism which was the product of man's rationalism

made an individual starve his emotional side. Beatrice Webb who had turned away from Catholicism said that it was impossible for a woman to live in agnosticism. Later she wrote, "It was the habit of prayer that enabled me to survive and emerge relatively sound in body and sane in mind." By prayer Beatrice Webb meant "communication with an all embracing spiritual force."

In the late Victorian period those intellectuals who found commercialisation and agnosticism of English life stifling, turned to Hinduism, Buddhism, theosophy and other cults. Hinduism and Buddhism influenced Yeats. Thomas Hardy turned to 'Determinism', the 'Powers that be.' that frustrate the efforts of man. An increasingly large number of educated men and women developed a humanistic attitude to life that made them accept the human condition of love, loyalty, duty, respect for intelligence and feelings. Humanism helped to keep alive and maintain standards of sincerity, delicacy and intellectual honesty by which religion itself had to be judged. Writers like Arnold, Huxley, Trevelyan, Thomas Carlyle helped to create levels of understanding and agreement between the two opposites of science and religion.

At the beginning of the Victorian period Romanticism was not dead but its creative force was not as intense as during the Romantic Revival period. Instinctively, after the rule of emotions, dreams and the tumults of the soul, the mind turned to reason and the need for order prevailed. This search for balance is most general and most typical feature of the Victorian age. The pendulum which was about to swing away from Romanticism of the early nineteenth century swung back, and the anti-Victorian movements – The Oxford Movement, the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and the Aesthetic Movement made Romanticism challenge the threat of the supremacy of reason.

In the twentieth century life and literature were shaped by the two world wars. Victorian morality was replaced by sensuous desire and erotic carnality. It was a literature of isolation and helplessness with fractured minds and shattered sensibilities. T. S. Eliot's poems *The Waste Land* deals with the damaged psyche. Europe had lost a whole generation of young men to the horrors of the wars causing a general catastrophe as survivors struggled to find their place in a radically altered society. *The Hollow Men* beautiful articulates the condition of modern humanity. These are bodies like a scarecrows stuffed with straw, incapable of feeling or thinking and more importantly, lacking a soul.

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar.

(*The Hollow Men)*

In our own times a whole new range of books offer answers to some of life's most difficult questions. In his book, *What God Wants* Neale Donald Walschargues that most religions preach a Separation Theology that excludes the other. He asserts that God want *Nothing. God is life and life is God.* Nothing stands outside God and therefore there is no separation between God and anything at all. If God is All in All, there is nothing that can exist except God, in its varying forms. He says, 'God IS you'. He preaches the Theology of Oneness and advocates the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have it done unto you. He finally invites us to see ourselves connected with all of nature, to experience God in everything.[2]

**Endnotes**

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2 Neale Donald Walsch, *What God Wants* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2005)

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# Quality of Life as Afunction of Spiritual Intelligence

**Prof. Sharmila Dhote,**
Asst. Professor Department of Psychology

## Introduction

Since the dawn of humanity, across the life-span i.e. from birth to death, man is adjusting to life. Adjustment is the essence of leading a peaceful and contended life. In the 21st century, globalisation has revolutionised the world and impacted all aspects of life, thereby increasing the complexities of life.

An individual's belief system is a reflection of the quest for survival/existence or living. Some rely on materialistic possessions to bring happiness or respectability, whereas others are inclined towards newer learning and awakening and rely on spirituality. However, a contended life can only be achieved by striking a balance between materialism and spirituality.

## Intelligence

The beginning of intelligence theory goes back to Plato and Socrates who reasoned that intelligence would always organize things in the best possible way. Darwin and Galton added that human intelligence is evolutionary and contributed to the degree of success people have in life. Different psychologists like James Cattell, Alfred Binet, Lewis Terman, David Wechsler, Charles Spearman, Louis Thurston, Donald Hebbs, Guilford, and Howard Gardner have formulated various definitions of intelligence. "Today, the nature of human intelligence is considered one of the most controversial and highly debatable areas of psychological theory and research" (King, 2008).

A summary of the definitions reflect that human intelligence is an evolutionary and developmental capacity that is qualitative and of multiple kinds used for adaption to the environment through assimilation and accommodation. It gives humans the analytical,

creative, and practical abilities to live successfully by solving problems, creating products, and delivering outcomes within a specific culture.

Till the mid-1990s, the much talked concepts in psychology were IQ, and EQ. Rational intelligence (IQ) is logical, problem-solving intelligence. One of the most popular measures are the Standford-Binet Intelligence Scales. Earlier, it was taken as a sign-post of people's ability. However, today it no longer holds true. Brewer, Mark, Dr. (2008)endorses that people who successfully tackle the big issues of life are not necessarily blessed with significant mental aptitude. They possess something more than sheer intellect.

Goleman, Daniel (1998) referred to emotional intelligence(EQ) as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well ourselves and in our relationships". A comprehensive theory of emotional intelligence was proposed in 1990 by two psychologists, Peter Salovey, at Yale, and John Mayer, defining emotional intelligence in terms of being able to monitor and regulate one's own and others' feelings, and to use feelings to guide thought and action.

**Spiritualintelligence**

By the end of the 1990s, advances in psychology and neuroscience identified Spiritual Intelligence (SQ) as a further dimension of intelligence that is even more significant i. e. Intelligence of the 21st century.

Before defining spiritual intelligence, it is important to establish what it is not and define a few key terms. Spiritual Intelligence is not spirituality or religion, nor is spirituality synonymous with religion. Religion is characterized by a class system that delineates the spiritual leaders and followers of the doctrine (Hildebrant, 2011), it is focused on the rituals and beliefs with regard to the sacred within institutional organizations (Armam, 2009), and is defined by a specific set of beliefs and practices, usually based on a sacred text, and represented by a community of people (Wigglesworth, 2012).

Many people are "spiritual" without being "religious" in that they do not participate in organized religion, while others are "religious" without being "spiritual" in that they participate in the necessary rituals and creeds but their ethics, morals and day-to-day living do not match their professed beliefs. (Delaney,2002).

Spiritual Intelligence is an ability of an individual to act purposefully, to think about the sacred or divine force and to deal effectively with his/her environment through his/her religious faith and practises. This newest intelligence or Spiritual Quotient comes from the Latin word 'Spiritus' which means 'the vitalising principle of an organism', coined by Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall in 2000. According to them, this new intelligence gives us access to a deep meaning, fundamental values and a sense of abiding purpose in our lives and the role that the values and purpose plays in our lives, strategies and thinking processes.

Wigglesworth, Cindy (2012) defines spiritual intelligence as "the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion, while maintaining inner and outer peace, regardless of the situation". SQ is the central and most fundamental of all the intelligences, because it becomes the source of guidance for others, being an integrating intelligence, linking our rational and emotional intelligences. In simple terms, it can be stated that a man with high SQ not only responds appropriately in a particular situation or circumstance, but he also analyses as to why he is in that situation and how can better that situation. High SQ enables a person to operate beyond the boundaries.

Brewer, Mark, Dr. (2008) states that "the spiritual intelligence is available to everyone-yet only a handful of people ever take advantage of it.

**SQ and the Brain**

The empirical foundation of SQ is in neuron biology. It has been significantly proven that the unifying feeling originates in neuron oscillations in the temporal lobe. Further, the scientific and neuropsychological evidence for SQ has been put forth by identifying a God-spot or a God quotient (GQ) in the human brain. (Persingers M, 1996) and (Ramchandran, V.S 1990) Neurologically SQ is distinct from IQ and EQ. Whereas IQ and EQ are localized in opposite hemispheres, SQ is associated with hemispheric synchronization and whole-brain activation. The capability for SQ is hard-wired in the brain, but conscious intention is required to activate it. Bowell, Richard A. (2005)

**Working of IQ, EQ and SQ**

Although the human brain is designed to synchronise the working of all the Qs, Each Q has its own strength and functions separately. Thus, there are many combinations with

varying degrees.eg…While one person can be high in IQ but low in EQ and SQ, another may be high in EQ but low in IQ and SQ.

**Development of Intelligence**

Among the three types of Intelligence, rational intelligence is inborn, whereas EQ and SQ need to be developed through training. Any Intelligence is strongly co-related with age, but there is nothing guaranteed specifically of EQ and SQ development. Individuals inherently possess the ability to enhance their EQ and SQ with age but it has to be supplemented with the requisite efforts.

In most cases, development of EQ and SQ occurs simultaneously. A certain amount of EQ is necessary for SQ to develop, and SQ also in turn, serves as catalyst for further development of EQ. Thus, a virtuous cycle is formed. . Individuals with high SQ are able to lead a more fulfilled life, finding deeper meaning and purpose of their lives. They operate from positivism, put in their best efforts, derive joy in helping others and thereby improve the society by using a higher dimension of intelligence. Since they are able to employ their IQ and EQ better, they are creative, adding value to own as well as others' lives.

**Spirituality**

There exists a strong misconception that pursuing the path of spirituality, involved denouncing the material world, including near and dear ones and moving far away on to mountains and jungles to engage in a rigorous routine of prayer and meditation. But this is far from the truth. Spirituality is defined in a number of different ways. Robert Emmons (2009) says it "is the personal expression of ultimate concern". Wigglesworth (2012) defines it as "the innate human need to be connected to something larger than ourselves, something we consider to be divine or of exceptional nobility". Miller defines spirituality as "an individual's personal, subjective beliefs and experiences about a power greater than themselves, and about what is sacred to him/herself, which assumes that reality is not limited to the material, sensory world" (Delaney, 2002).

**Spiritual Values**: **the Journey from Spirituality to SI**

There are certain salient spiritual values like compassion, humility, forgiveness, gratitude, etc. If a person adopts and practises these spiritual values, transition can be made to higher consciousness of personal living and other spheres, leading to development of spiritual intelligence. Buzan, Tony (2001) and Switzer, Bob (2011) emphasise that certain spiritual values are manifested in the behaviour of people who develop their SQ, in varying degrees.

**Religion and Spirituality**

Wigglesworth, Cindy (2012), defines religion as "a specific set of beliefs and practices, usually based on sacred text, and represented by a community of people". There may or may not be a positive correlation between SQ and religion. Some people may high on SQ through following a religious beliefs and practices, others may be high on SQ being atheists. Contrarily, many people, though religious, are low on SQ. Draper, Brian. (2009) believes that "overly religious people are not always the most spiritual."

Zohar, Danah (2000) professes that "conventional religion is an externally imposed set of rules and beliefs. It is inherited from priests and prophets and holy books, or absorbed through the family and tradition. SQ is an internal, innate ability of the human brain and psyche, drawing its deepest resources from the heart of the universe itself. Spiritual intelligence is the soul's intelligence. It is the intelligence with which we heal ourselves and with which we make ourselves whole.

SQ is not culture-dependent or value- dependent. SQ is prior to all specific value and to any given culture. It is prior to any form of religious expression that it might take. SQ makes religion possible (perhaps even necessary), but SQ does not depend upon religion".

Richard A. (2005) has drawn a distinction among the three Qs stating that "IQ is the intelligence that seeks to understand the "what", EQ is the intelligence that seeks to understand the "how", and SQ is the intelligence that seeks to understand the "why" of things".

**Quality of Life (QOL)**

It has previously been argued that due to the subjective nature of an individual's 'quality of life', this is a difficult concept to measure and to define, but that in general terms it may be viewed as a multidimensional concept emphasizing the self-perceptions of an individual's current state of mind (Bonomi, Patrick, Bushnell, & Martin, 2000).

The concept of quality of life broadly encompasses how an individual measures the 'goodness' of multiple aspects of their life. These evaluations include one's emotional reactions to life occurrences, disposition, sense of life ful- filment and satisfaction, and satisfaction with work and personal relationships (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999).

In psychological literature, the term quality of life and general wellbeing are used synonymously. So, QoL refers to the general well-being of individuals and societies. The term is used in a wide range of contexts. Quality of life should not be confused with the concept of standard of living, which is based primarily on income. Instead, standard indicators of the quality of life include not only wealth and employment, but also the built environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, and social belonging.

The definition of QoL poses a challenge. One could explore various domains that could be absorbed in the overall definition of this construct. That would necessitateto view quality of life as a comprehensive concept consisting of a number of social, environmental, psychological and physical values.

Quality of life can be defined as to the extent certain desirable factors are attained or retained. These include such factors as well-being, interpersonal relations, opportunity for personal growth and development, ability to exercise human rights, self-determination and healthy participation in society. Enhancement of quality of life is particularly important for those who suffer from chronic disease or developmental or physical disability.

**Quality of Life and Religion**

The relationship between religion and quality of life cannot be defied, especially in a country like India, where religion is a way of life. Religion is the essence of life following which a

person becomes mentally satisfied and faces the demands of life in a relatively positive way (Joshi & Shukla, 2004). It is a common fact that when a person follows the religious paraphernalia, he finds himself mentally satisfied and it results in terms of satisfaction and peace which is leading path of well-being.

**Quality of Life (QOL) and Motivation**

Human behavior is a result of motivation. In view of Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs, it can be said that needs which have the greatest potency at any given time affect behavior. The subsequent fulfillment of these needs definitely will improve QoL.

QoL can be broadly categorized under two conditions namely, presence and/or absence of certain factors. eg; presence of sense of belongingness, positive attitude, group cohesiveness etc. and absence of conflicting relationships, negativism, mental/physical illness etc.

**Methodology**

**Objective of study**
The objective is to establish a relationship between SQ and QoL.

**Rationale of study**
To explore if QoL can be improved by enhancing SQ.

**Hypothesis**
SQ will positively relate to QoL.

**Problem**
Does spiritual intelligence play any role in the Quality of life experienced by working women?

**Variables**
Dependent variable - Quality of life
Independent variable - Spiritual Intelligence

**Scope of the study**
The scope of the study is confined to working women.

**Sample**

The sample constitutes 300 working women of the age range 25 to 45 from various organisations.

Table 1: Sample

**Scales Tools**

The questionnaires to scale SQ and QoL

Table 2

| Questionnaire | SQ scale | QoL scale |
|---|---|---|
| Developed by | Husain, Akbar (2011) | Dubey, BL (2011) |
| Items | 31 | 20 |
| Scale | Likert (5 to 1) | Likert (5 to 1) |
| Reliability | .84 & .82 | .58 & .87 |

| LEVEL | WORKING WOMEN |
|---|---|
| Senior | 35 |
| Middle | 196 |
| Junior | 79 |
| Total | 300 |

**Aim of the study**

The present study specifically focuses on the role of Spiritual intelligence on Quality of life.

**Objectives of the study**

**1)** To measure spiritual intelligence quotient and examine the extent to which it affects the stress levels of married college teachers.

**2)** To measure stress levels of college teachers and to find out whether it is significantly related to spiritual intelligence.

**Procedure**

The questionnaires were administered to the participants and responses quantified.

**Statistical tools**

Advanced Statistics were applied to the following data for analysis, given in Table 3:-.

Table 3

| Parameter | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age (Years) | 300 | 25 | 45 | 35 |
| QQ | 300 | 54 | 92 | 87.2 |
| SQ | 300 | 72 | 124 | 90.4 |

**Results and Discussion**

Two findings are discussed below:

(a) SQ and Age. Mostly, it was found that working women in higher age group had relatively higher SQ as compared to their younger counter parts. This fact has also been substantiated by Wigglesworth, Cindy (2012). It may be positively reasoned that with age, job requirements and rigours of life, the working women in the higher age bracket, are able to develop better EQ to deal with work complexities which supports development of SQ. Also, they begin to indulge in certain spiritual practices, leading to better SQ.

(b) SQ and QoL. QoL was higher in most of the cases where SQ was high. It can be pragmatically discussed that working womenwith higher SQ view life in a broader perspective, not relating to physical comforts alone. They relate to the entire spectrum of human experience with the backdrop of pleasant and difficult moments.

**Recommendations to Improve SQ**

Since SQ positively impacts QoL, it is imperative that we live a fulfilling and satisfying life by enhancing SQ because that is the underpinning factor. Human brain is wired for SQ but it remains dormant and needs to be activated. It takes effort and time to develop SQ but it is worth the effort realizing its benefits. Some of the mechanisms to improve SQ areas follows:

(a) Meditation and Relaxation techniques.

Several techniques are available for meditation. One may choose that suits him the best. Aduration of 20 minutes is considered to be optimal. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar asserts that meditation improves and balances physical, mental, emotional and spiritual spheres of a man. Also to mention, today's Yoga icon Baba Ramdevstrongly recommends practising Yoga postures to de-stress oneself and boost health.

(b) Prayers.

For those who believe in God, prayer includes respect, love, pleading and faith. Prayer can be an effective coping mechanism. It assumes that we acknowledge that God is helping us and getting the task done. Prayer is an important tool of spiritual practice in the generic spiritual path of devotion. Prayer reduces worry and enhances contemplation.

(c) Tools to Empower.

One may choose any tool to enhance his SQ and QoL, for it will lead him to satisfying and purposeful life. Among others, Reiki is a simple and easy - to - learn technique for better life and pleasant experiences. Pranikhealing is also a popular method of soothing the body for facilitating free flow of positive energy within the body, It helps create an attitude of positivism which underlies a richer quality oflife.

(d) Observance of Spiritual Values / Qualities.

A dual approach may be of enormous benefit for spiritual seekers. Firstly, SQ may be enhanced by the techniques stated above and then apply them in day to day behaviour.

Secondly, Consciously practise the spiritual values / qualities in everyday life and increase the SQ, leading to a positive virtuous spiral.

## Conclusion

Spiritual Intelligence is the intelligence of the 21st century. Human life is the greatest gift that the God or that Infinite Energy bestows upon us. We ought to respect and love it, making the most of it. We being spiritual beings going through human experience, are obliged to develop our spiritual intelligence (SQ), which will enable us tolivethe highest quality of life (QoL).

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# Peace a Universal Forum for Dialogue of Life Among Believers

**Sr. Dr. Teresa Joseph fma**

In a pluralistic World, as a lot of spontaneous and intentional dialogues are taking place, peace can be a widespread forum for a meaningful Dialogue of Life among believers of various religions. A purposeful and decisive move to work for peace and to promote it at all levels going beyond every prejudice is a must. Training our personnel to be facilitators of peace groups, equipping them with skills and techniques for conflict resolution is possible and is a necessity today. This can be worked out together as believers. To respect our religious identities and at the same time come together and work together as much as possible for common good is the challenge that Religious Pluralism is offering to people of different religions today.

## The Religious Pluralistic Context

Today, each one is journeying with believers of other religions in the midst of an active and vibrant pluralism because "Religious pluralism has become an intellectual and spiritual fact for contemporary life".[1]The question is how much pluralism can we accept or better still how can we strengthen our religious identity in a pluralistic World? The whole process of net-working in a pluralistic context among people belonging to various religions opens enormous challenges. Another significant question we can address together is what are the possibilities and risks pluralism brings to the field of education? Certainly the need for a life-long education is a must in a religiously pluralistic society.

## Meaning and Significance of Religious Pluralism

The concept of pluralism is characterized by the idea of 'plurality', of 'multiplicity'. Pluralism acquires specific significance according to the field in which it is used. In Philosophy pluralism refers to a theory or system of thought, which recognizes more than one ultimate principle. The knowable world as it is evident is made up of a plurality of interesting things.

We can say that pluralism is the "fruit of modernity"[2]. Today there is a conscious receptiveness of the need for a positive evaluation of the phenomenon of pluralism. It is definitely an expression of the recognition of personal rights and of course contributes to the promotion of justice and peace. Pluralism brings possibilities and risks to the field of education.

"Our deepest need, as philosophy and theology in our period show, is the drive to face otherness and difference" (Tracy1990: 67). This is a very delicate and challenging task.

> "The others must become genuine others for us – not projections of our fears and desires. The others are not marginal to our centers but centers of their own. Their conflicts and their liberationist self-namings demand the serious attention of our centre on their own terms" (Tracy 1990:67).

**Religious pluralism and education**

An important field where people of all religions can work together is the field of education. Alberich lays emphasis on the following points: in a pluralistic society educative work can receive not few stimulations and to profit from possibilities unknown in the past: promotion of the personality open to dialogue and respect of difference, wider horizons of cultural enrichment; overcoming of prejudices and closed up attitudes, new possibilities of maturation in the critical sense, etc.

The existence of negative consequences of pluralism cannot be overlooked. In the field of education of the young, Alberich points out that: the process of socialization is strongly modified and shaken as much as the multiplicity exasperated and contradictory of cultural messages is often translated in the impossibility of a coherent personal integration, in the lack of values and therefore in the incapacity of maturation of one's identity.

> "Religious education must be open ended. No one has all the answers in a pluralistic society. In a pluralistic society there cannot be one answer. These little truths are not easily accepted. Each of us has wished for the grail-like single answer, and whole religious communities have claimed the one, single, clear answer. Our fear of the unknown, of change, of differences must be overcome, and our religious

education must open us to new conclusions as temporary conclusions or even no conclusions".[3]

**Strengthening of Identity**

Plurality is a natural phenomenon in every sphere of nature. Diversity adds to the richness of life. Beauty can be found only in diversity. In such a context the plurality of religions becomes a captivating challenge; "what is required of us is to face the fact of plurality of religions with a sense of admiration and respect for diversity, and sincere attempt to establish a harmonious human society. This is what we call 'religious pluralism' in the positive sense".[4]

Our identity refers to who we are. The best contribution we can offer to those around is a robust identity built up on genuine knowledge, nourished by true humility and willingness to serve. Religion plays a major role in determining our identities. Who we are and whose we are is of much importance. When the core values of our religion are assimilated and made part of our being then our identities are strengthened.

***Healthy and Realistic Response to Growing Violence***

Today, in the world, violence is ever on the increase. The media is bringing it to our notice day after day. Instead of getting discouraged and frustrated, there should be a healthy and realistic response to the situation of growing violence. In a time when conflict and tension are on the increase, it is necessary to evidence how religions can contribute to bond together peoples and nations. Today there is greater urgency for all religious leaders to come together and dialogue together. Fellowship and cooperation among religions is indeed the sure way for peace and harmony in the World. How eloquent are the words of Heschel:

"Life is a partnership of God and man … God is a partner and a partisan in man's struggle for justice, peace, love, and beauty, and it is because of His being in need of man that He entered into a covenant with him for all time, a mutual bond embracing God and man, a relationship to which God, not alone man, is committed… God's dream is not to be alone, to have mankind as a partner in the drama of continuous creation. By whatever we do, by

> every act we carry out, we either advance or obstruct the drama of redemption; we either reduce or enhance the power of evil."[5]

**Option for Peace – A Priority Choice**

All religions advocate for peace. Today, peace is no more a wishful dream of persons or communities. It is the most essential need of the hour. In the midst of growing tensions, war and hatred, in our communities, we can sustain and support those who opt for peace. Right from early childhood, we can initiate our children to be lovers and builders of peace. In the daily dialogue of life our religious communities can continue to sow seeds of peace, dialogue and harmony. Pope Francis has proposed *nonviolence* as a style of politics for peace.

> "I ask God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promotors of nonviolent peacemaking. In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms."[6]

**To Network to establish peace and harmony**

The comparative study of religions has shown how religions can collaborate and must collaborate. The political ideal of the world as it emerges is not so much a single empire with a homogeneous civilization and a single communal will, but a sisterhood and brotherhood of free nations differing deeply in life style and thinking, habits and teaching existing side by side in peace and order, harmony and co-operation, and each contributing to the world its own exclusive and specific best. When this ideal is extended also to the religious sphere then there is greater hope for people of different religions to network to establish a world of peace, harmony, justice and peace.

**Inclusion of Peace Modules in our Religion Classes**

Is it not the right time to introduce modules of Peace into our religion classes? We can take care to initiate children into the truths of their religion. We can come together to prepare peace modules and to introduce them to our younger generation. In dialogue we have to overcome our fear of the unknown, of change, of differences and our peace education modules must lead us to new horizons of cooperation and networking.

Moving beyond normal fear and prejudicewe can join hands together to build a more harmonious society. We need to comprehend the real significance of Religious pluralism. Religiouspluralism is a blessing affirms James Michael Lee.

**Religious pluralism a blessing**

***"The blessing of religious pluralism"*** this is how his contribution is titled in the book named: ***Religious pluralism and religious education***[7].Right at the introduction, Lee emphasises that Religious pluralism is a:

- ***Salvific blessing of the Spirit***
- ***Emancipatory blessing of the Spirit***
- ***Enriching blessing of the Spirit***

"Religious pluralism is a *salvific blessing of the Spirit* in that it enables persons to vastly expand their vision and their contact with the God whom no human endeavour can ever adequately contain.

Religious pluralism is an *emancipatory blessing of the Spirit* in that it enables religious instruction to burst free from those parameters and contents which have so often crippled its primary task of helping learners to touch the God in all and of all.

Religious pluralism is an *enriching blessing of the Spirit* in that it constitutes an extraordinarily rich and privileged way in which the triune God is operatively and ontically present in the modern world"[8].

Lee offers a clear description of Religious pluralism. "Religious pluralism refers to that condition in which individuals or institutions coming from anywhere in the entire spectrum

of sacral orientations interact with each other autonomously but relatedly within the boundaries of a common allegiance to the Holy. Religious pluralism means that members and institutions of various religious orientations not only intermingle with one another and respect each other's faith, but also actively cooperate with each other in order to broaden their own personal and corporate religious existence so as to infuse all reality with the full actuality of the Holy"[9].

Lee offers four well sustained reasons to uphold the necessity of religious pluralism:

> "First other religions are there. They are all around us in their resplendent richness and dazzling diversity. Non one religion stands alone; it is just one among many.
>
> Second, religious pluralism is necessary because it enables us to more profoundly appreciate and to more deeply live our own particular form of religion.
>
> Third, religious pluralism is necessary in order to correct, modify, and transform our own particular religion and to move it into the future.

Fourth, religious pluralism is necessary to bring the fruits of our religious tradition to persons and institutions representing different traditions. Each religion exists not only for its members but for the enrichment of others outside its direct ambit"[10].

**Gaining Interreligious Competence**

Interreligious competence is becoming a key social skill. Contact with adherents of other religions is not only increasing on a global level, it is augmenting within individual countries as they become more heterogeneous and pluralistic. It is no longer possible to ignore other cultures and religions. Knowledge of other religious tenets, traditions and customsisone significant prerequisite for peaceful coexistence among the diverse cultures present in society today. Only such knowledge can help us understand and benefit from our everyday experiences.

With gaining of experience in interreligious competence, today there are colleges and educational institutions that are developing new approaches to successful interreligious dialogue. As a first step, the initiatives and organizations that are already

focusing on interreligious dialogue are being networked to help them intensify their exchange and to pool the resources available to them. In addition, there are organizations that are examining the role interreligious competence currently plays in school and university curriculum. As part of this focus, approaches are being developed for assessing interreligious competence among professors and students and for using innovative methods to impart it, such as virtual competence centers or certification programs. Expert panels, exchange programs, discussion forums, seminars both national and international are also being organized to help increase the interreligious competence of opinion and thought in the political, social, educational and spiritual spheres.

> "Indeed informal contact and friendship between those of different religions may well be a powerful incentive to learn and to explore more in their respective faiths, so that as well-informed religionists they will be able to begin to dialogue! Perhaps it is not too utopian to envisage a day when inter-faith schools of Nurture and the Academic Study of Religion may be set up in spiritually mixed communities to prepare believers for dialogue."[11]

> Students are encouraged to move into grassroots, to assume voluntary services in slums and in less developed areas as part of their interreligious commitment. St. Andrew's College Bandra has excelled in this. Twelve teenage Student representatives of the Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation Chair of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, St. Andrew's College Bandra together with their Professor Sharmila Dhote made possible an Educational workshop voluntarily for around 120 children, at Cheeta Camp in Northeastern Mumbai suburbs. Every Sunday, for three months, these volunteers would spent eight to nine hours at Cheeta Camp. The children were taught basic communication skills in English, computer skills, arts, crafts and Maths which could be utilized in daily life. They were also given possibilities to learn the basics of living together in peace and harmony.[12]

### *A "UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace"*

The idea of a "UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace" was proposed for the first time on March 2006 in the framework of the Project "Towards the creation of a spiritual forum for world peace at the United Nations", which had been launched two years earlier (May 2004) at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, near Geneva, by an international group of volunteers belonging to different religious/spiritual traditions and linked to several interfaith organizations. That group called as the "Partnership Committee" (PC) prepared and circulated a draft proposal, starting a process of consensus building.

After an extensive process of consultations, which included Mr. Kofi Annan when he was still the UN Secretary General, the idea of creating a permanent forum was replaced by a more realistic goal: to have the United Nations declaring 2010-2020 as a "Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace."[13]

There are a number of national and international seminars and symposiums taking place among believers of various religions and are oriented towards building up better understanding, exploring new ways of working and collaborating together for peace and harmony.Interreligious or interfaith forums in this context arefor surepraise worthy initiative which would certainly facilitate internal dialogue and cooperation within the religious spiritual constituencies as well as resolute actions for peace with relevant partners.

### *Conclusion*

Our reflections have human beings all over the world belonging to one religion or another as the main focus. Our concern has been to become aware of those levels of existence where people of every religion can meet as brothers and sisters to address the challenges increasing violence bring to us. Peace can become a Universal Forum for Dialogue of Life among believers. This calls for urgency to get to know other religions, interact with believers and enter into dialogue with them in profound humility and mutual respect. Genuine dialogue would certainly lead to a mutual enrichment and transformation. Cobb has expressed it pertinently:

> "The Christianity which will be transformed by incorporating the Buddhist understanding of reality will be very different from any form of Christianity with which we are already familiar. Buddhism which incorporates Jesus Christ will be very different from the Buddhism that we know. This will not erase the difference between the two religions; rather, it will offer a new basis for a new renewed dialogue and an unprecedented transformation. All those entrenched positions will gradually begin to disappear."[14]

Education can and ought to play a noteworthy role in bringing believers together. Therefore today, academic magnificence is challenged to be part of the crowd and to open the way to the responsible task of preparing personnel who facilitate the process of dialogue, peace and harmony.In a religious pluralistic world,we are co-pilgrims with our brothers and sisters of every religion and as such we need to elucidate our respective scriptures and communicate our belief in a heart to heart dialogue.We can only comprehend from the perspective we occupy; we can only understand whatever truth is from the specific cultural, religious, social, gender-specific perspectives we dwell in. Perhaps Shakespeare expressed it best of all: "***There is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them though we may".*** This means to know the story of our religion, and what riches of religious traditions do we have to contribute to the building up of the human family. In a world of growing violence, there is urgency to network with believers of other religions to ensure peace and harmony in society and the world at large.

> "Men have called their eternal Other with many names. When they were singing of the One whom they call this way, they were intending always Other; the first myths were songs of praise. Consequently the names took their abode in the language of it; for men it became always more strong impulse to think and to say their eternal Other as an it. But all names of God were saved: because in them not only of God, but also to God was spoken."[15]

**This article from an interdisciplinary and interreligious perspective highlights what unites believers to each other and how important it is for us to live our lives in unity and peace empowering and commissioning each one to be an ambassador**

**of peace and harmony. The vision of unity that sustains our cultures, philosophies and religions is our greatest strength.**

> "In fact I am convinced that the various religions, now and in the future, will have a pre-eminent role in preserving peace and in building a society worthy of man. Indeed, openness to dialogue and to cooperation is required of all people of good will, and in particular of individuals and groups with specific responsibilities in the areas of politics, economics and social life, at both the national and international levels." [16]

Encounters among people of different religions are one of the strongest signs of our times. Getting to know other religions is the key to the heart of joint collaboration. "The Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions…she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them" (n.1).[17]

Dialogue is of great importance in establishing a secure basis for peace. "The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace". Through net-work we learn to discover our common origin and common destiny. The persuasive words of Pope Francis are so appropriate:

> "All of us want peace. Many people build it day by day through small gestures and acts; many of them are suffering, yet patiently persevere in their efforts to be peacemakers".In 2017, may we dedicate ourselves prayerfully and actively to banishing violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to becoming nonviolent people and to building nonviolent communities that care for our common home. 'Nothing is impossible if we turn to God in prayer. Everyone can be an artisan of peace'."[18]

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# Contributors

## Our Editors

1. **Archbishop Felix Machado**: He has a Licentiate in Catholic Theology from the Catholic Theological Faculty, Lyon, France (1974-76). He has an M.A. in Theology (with specialization in Catholic Missiology) from the Maryknoll School of Theology, New York, USA (1980). He holds a Doctorate (Ph.D.) in Catholic Dogmatic Theology from the Fordham University, New York, USA. He has been Professor of Catholic Dogmatic Theology, Missiology and formator of future priests at St. Pius X College, Mumbai from 1984 to 1993.From April 1993, he had been called to Rome in order to work in the Roman Curia (Holy See, Vatican) at the Asia Desk of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. On 1 October 1999, he was nominated Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Vatican, by Pope John Paul II and confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI.

   He has been visiting Professor of Catholic Dogmatic Theology and Missiology at: Pontifical Institute, 'Regina Mundi' in Rome; Pontifical Institute of the Sciences of Education, 'Auxilium ' in Rome; Rome Centre of the Loyola University in Chicago, USA., and at the Pontifical Urban University, Rome.

   He has published three books: *Jnaneshvari*, *Path to Liberation*; *Journeying Together* (in English, French and Italian), a Marathi translation and short commentary on the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*. He has also published over a hundred articles in various international academic journals of theology. On 16 Jan. 2008, Pope Benedict XVI has appointed as Bishop of Nashik with personal title Archbishop. He is now Archbishop of Vasai Diocese.

2. **Dr. Sr. Teresa Joseph fma**is a Salesian Sister of the Bombay Province who holds a Masters' degree in Science of Education with specialization in Catechetics from Auxilium, Rome and a PhD in Missiology with specialization in Inter-religious Studies from the Gregorian University, Rome. Teresa has authored several books and has contributed numerous articles for various journals in India and abroad. One of her books *Dream Big! Dream True* is a best seller published by Better Yourself Books and has just gone for the 7th print.

## Our Contributors

1. **Prof. Dr. Francis Gonsalves** is a Jesuit of the Gujarat Jesuit Province. Hehas a Licentiate in Dogmatic Theology from the Gregorian University, Rome, and a Ph.D. from the University of Madras, Chennai. He has been a Professor of Theology at the *Vidyajyoti College*, Delhi, for 18 years since 1997, and also its Principal for 4 years. He is currently Professor of Systematic Theology as *Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth*, Pune and has been visiting professor in many faculties in India, and also at Berkeley, USA, El Salvador, Italy, and South Korea.

   Besides lecturing in theology and religion, Francis is also a journalist who, since April 2010, has been regularly writing a fortnightly column called '*Mystic Mantra*' for two Indian national newspapers: *The Asian Age* (north India) and *The Deccan Chronicle* (south India).He also occasionally writes for 'The Speaking Tree' in the Times of India and the 'Inner Light' of the Hindustan Times. Till date he has authored five books, edited six other books, and written over 200 scholarly articles for publications in India and abroad.

   In addition to his interests in theology and journalism, he is deeply concerned about social issues that affect the poor, and has been involved in social-justice issues from his personal experiences of adivasis in south Gujarat, as well as slum-dwellers and prison inmates of Tihar Jail, Delhi, where he served as Director of Prison Ministry and slum outreach. His areas of interest are inter-disciplinary approaches to theology; interfaith dialogue and interfaith initiatives; socio-religious and subaltern movements; networking with committed groups on socio-justice issues; and, developing poetry, music, art, dance and drama as sources of theology.

2. **Dr. Roberto Catalano,** Director of the *International Office for Interreligious Dialogue*, Focolare Movement – Rome (Italy)

   Born in Turin, Italy, holds a Master Degree in Philosophy and Sociology from *UniversitàdegliStudi di Torino* and a doctorate in Missiology from the Urbaniana University in Rome. He lived in India for 28 years where he worked as Cultural

Officer at the Consulate General of Italy. Actively involved in interreligious dialogue has organised several symposia and events in India and in Rome between Hindus and Christians. After his appointment in Rome has organised events with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Jews.

He is visiting professor at Urbaniana University, Rome (Italy), University Institute Sophia, Loppiano-Firenze (Italy) and Asus (Accademia di ScienzeUmane e Sociali), Rome (Italy). He authored several articles for journals and magazines and published "*Spiritualità di comunione e dialogointerreligioso. L'esperienza di Chiara Lubich e delMovimentodeiFocolari*", Citta Nuova, Roma, 2010 and *William Carey e il Trio di Serampore. La missione e isuoirapporti con l'induismo,* Aracne, Roma 2012.

3. **Brahma Kumari Vinita** has been associated with Brahma Kumaris Institution since the last 25 years. She has completed her Graduation in Commerce and done Computer Software from Mumbai. She is a faculty member to conduct training programmes and Impart Spiritual Education on several various topics in many organizations.

   She is currently rendering her services as a Rajyoga teacher at Santacruz Centre, Mumbai and is a Faculty Member of Shipping Aviation and Tourism Wing of Rajyoga Education & Research Foundation, Brahma Kumaris.She has also served as a faculty member of the Transport Wing National Campaign "Life's Journey on the Wheels of Goodwill" from Mumbai to Chennai.She has also traveled to countries like U.S, U.K. and Canada to create spiritual awareness.

4. **UzmaNaheed,** Director: Iqra Education Foundation, Member: All India Muslim Personal Law Board &Executive Committee of All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawrat.

5. **Dr. Kokila Shah**, Hon. Professor K.J. Somaiya Centre Studies in Jainism and Adjunct ProfessorUniversity of Mumbai. Adjunct Prof. Former HOD Philosophy. R. J. College, University of Mumbai.M.A, First Class First Gold Medalist.University of Mumbai. Presented more than seventy research papers at seminars and conference. Published articles on Jainism in English and Gujarati.Recipient of number of awards. Authored and edited books. 10 students awarded Ph.D under her guidance

6. **S. M. Michael SVD** (Sebastian M. Michael) is the Program Director of Institute of Indian Culture (IIC) Mumbai, He is Professor Emeritus and Adjunct Faculty of Cultural Anthropology, University of Mumbai. Among his several books, the edited volume *Dalits in Modern India: Vision and Values* (1999) was a best seller of Sage Publications. It has been translated into several languages. He is a Consulter to the Pontifical Council for Culture, Rome. He is presently the SVD Zonal Coordinator for Asia. He was also the Secretary of the Bombay Archdiocesan Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue.

7. **Rev. Dr. Stephen Fernandes** is resident Professor of Ethics and Moral Theology at St. Pius X College, Mumbai. He has a Doctorate in Moral Theology from the Academia Alfonsiana, Rome, Italy. He also holds a Master of Commerce (M.Com.) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree from the University of Bombay. For two terms he was the Secretary of the Bombay Priests Council. From the year 2008, he is the Executive Director of the F.I.A.M.C. Bio-Medical Ethics Centre, Mumbai.

   From the year 2000, he is Theological Consultor, C.C.B.I. Commission for Doctrine and Theological Consultant, Catholic Medical Guild of St. Luke, Mumbai. He is also a Life Member of the National Catholic Bioethics Centre (NCBC), Philadelphia, USA. He is a Member and Consultant, International Association of Catholic Bioethicists (IACB), Toronto. He is the Secretary, Permanent Diaconate Programme, Archdiocese of Bombay. He has presented research papers on Ethics and Justice issues at local, national and international conferences. He has to his credit published articles in various journals on Ethical issues and issues of justice and peace.

   In May 2006, he received the Pope John XXI International Award "Premium Deontologiae" for research on the occasion of the XXII World Congress of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC) in Barcelona, Spain. In January 2008, he received "The Iustitia et Pax Medallion" from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Vatican City in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the promotion of Justice and Peace.

8. **Dr. Marie Fernandes** is Principal of St. Andrew's College, Mumbai. She was also a member of the Board of Studies in English at the University of Mumbai and is a

recognized Research Guide. The title of her PhD thesis was *"The Animal Fable in Modern Literature"*. This was subsequently published in 1996. She has to her credit a number of research articles published in journals both in India and abroad. She was awarded the prestigious – 'International Visitor's Leadership Award', funded by the US. State Department.

9. **Prof. SharmilaDhote** is a senior Professor in the Department of Psychology at St. Andrew's College and has completed 21 years of teaching in college. Currently she is in charge of the Cardinal Paul Poupard Foundation for Inter-Religious and Inter-Cultural Dialogue which she actively co-ordinates. She has organized International seminars and symposiums on inter-religious and inter-cultural issues and various other activities and programmes to make the organization vibrant and meaningful. She has also presented a paper at Milan, Italy titled "Eat, Pray and Love". She is also a private practising Counsellor.

10. **Teresa Joseph fma** is a Salesian Sister of the Bombay Province who holds a Masters' degree in Science of Education with specialization in Catechetics from Auxilium, Rome and a PhD in Missiology with specialization in Inter-religious Studies from the Gregorian University, Rome. Teresa has authored several books and has contributed numerous articles for various journals in India and abroad. One of her books *Dream Big! Dream True* is a best seller published by Better Yourself Books and the 7th print is just out of the press.