

A HARMONY PERSPECTIVE OF LIFE

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Introduction

We are fortunate to live in a world which is increasingly multidimensional. More and more countries are becoming characteristically multi-religious. The traditional mono-track perspective and approach to life would not respond to the challenges of the present day context. We need to search for unifying elements in different religious traditions, in order to find a human community permeated by divine promptings. The following harmony perspective evolves from this context.

Harmony

The word ‘Harmony’ has its roots in music. It is a pleasing combination of notes sounded together to make chords. It is not a single note, but a concord between many notes. It is an orchestra in which different solo players are conducted so as to create a single musical effect of fine sentiments. It is an experience of complete music co-ordinated between singing, playing and dancing, in a unique sense of togetherness.

In the general context, harmony is a collection of related things agreeing or matching with each other. It is a variety of parts co-operating or working together for a common purpose and with mutual benefit. The different parts function with an equality of importance. It is an arrangement of feelings and thoughts, interests and tastes, aims and opinions, colours and shapes, traditions and practices, streams and strands etc.

Harmony is a wholistic outlook. It is a way of unifying the various parts so as to form a single whole. Wholeness is beauty. With a variety of components fitted together well, it ensures a sense of completion. It brings different aspects together in mutual association. It establishes a process of continuous sharing of existence and meaning between the given elements. It is a dynamism of many towards a one as well as the one towards many. Thus harmony would mean a thorough integration of the multifarious dimensions of creation as well as human society.

Dialogue

Dialogue is the way to harmony. Dialogue necessitates one to open up to the other. It is not just a conversation but a positive attitude of goodwill towards the other. It involves learning from the other, respecting, loving, serving and promoting the other. It is a give

and take; it is a question and answer. It is mutual relations, mutual conversion and mutual transformation. It is a co-journey of life, a joint pilgrimage to God. It is related to existence. It is shared language, a shared ideology, a shared culture, a shared commitment, a shared faith, a shared conviction and a shared spirituality. Dialogue leads to harmony; harmony precedes from dialogue, and both are complementary.

Dialogue is a democratic concept in life. It implies a brotherly-sisterly and friendly style of life in relation to one another. It is a spiritual approach to life. It is a humble way of life, in the sense that it refrains from all sorts of encroachment of the other. It maintains an aesthetic view of life, by taking fine care of the reality of diversity in life. It attends to the singularity of each dimension and attempts mutuality for enrichment and for an integrated growth. Dialogue ends in harmony and harmony begins with dialogue.

Non-Religious Face of Life

First there is a human being, only then, a religious. Life is non-religious. One is born into the world as a human being; only then one becomes a religious human being. Being human is of primary importance. Being a Hindu, a Christian, a Muslim, a Sikh or any other is second in priority. Sabbath is for man, and not otherwise. Religion is at the service of the human being. To reverse the same would be abnormal. Belonging to a religious sect is for the purpose of making a good or a better human being. The label of a particular religion following often complicates the matter. To absolutize the religious persuasion would mean to be derailed in life. Basically, the spontaneous process of life gains top consideration. The quality of human life matters first and foremost. Human life, as well as life, is fundamentally non-religious.

Every human being is subject to the cycle of birth and death. Hunger and thirst, sleep and waking up apply to all. Food, clothing and shelter are primary requirements all over. Sensations and sensitivities are a common phenomenon. The five elements of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch are mediums of basic functioning for everyone. Thinking and feeling, imagination and experience, aspirations and ambitions, hopes and disappointments, success and failure, health and sickness, joys and sorrows, peace and tensions, order and disorder are universal human factors. Work, whatever may be its type, is the way of life, not only for survival but also for happiness. Male and female are the inevitable components of creation everywhere, the same way. Family is the mode of human life all over. Psychology and spirituality as well as biology and physiology of the humans are basically the same. Every human being has the natural need of loving and being loved. Closeness and separation, presence and absence affect all beings. Good and evil are found in the whole world. Weaknesses and strength are in all persons. All human beings are endowed with inspirations and insights. The process of learning, education and

culture is open to all. The self-realization, wisdom and enlightenment are universal and ultimate purpose of humanity.

Products of human civilization are general and have no religious binding. Roads, rail tracks, air ways and sea routes are common. People travel together irrespective of religious affiliations. Professionals and services, educational provisions and jobs are open to all. Items of daily needs, market interrelations of buying and selling bear no religious band. Sickness and medical services have no religion. Marriage, food habits, dressing habits etc. have become more of common interest. Cities are all the more becoming cosmopolitan and religious following does not affect most of the details of life.

Nature is no religious land too. Nature treats everyone equally. The sunshine and the rains come down upon everyone, the same way. Famine, earthquake, drought, flood etc. are inflicted upon all people alike in a given area. The sun, the moon and the stars are beyond religious boundaries. The season winter, summer, monsoon etc. affect all, in more or less degree. The beauty and the fragrance of the flowers, the greenery and the variety of things in nature appeal to all. The waters and the earth benefit everyone beyond the barriers of denominations. The springs, the streams and the rivers purify each and everyone who approach them without any religious reference. All beings, all human beings, survive, subsist and flourish on nature. The nature does not discriminate with anyone regarding her resources. She takes care of everyone with her motherly affection, with a characteristic sense of equality.

Unity in Diversity

The concept of unity makes sense only when the fact of diversity is acknowledged. Diversity has necessarily to be oriented to unity. Unity in diversity would mean diversity in unity as well. Diversity implies the recognition of difference. When the singularity of each member is integrated into a single whole, there is unity. Unity in diversity in other words, refers to the inner dynamics between one and many. They are like the two sides of the same coin. Being many is a material and scientific approach whereas being one is spiritual and artistic approach. Many is an intellectual and analytical approach. One is psychological and experiential approach. These approaches and dimensions are not contradictory to each other but are complementary.

Reality is multidimensional. Each person sees the whole through a part, through one's personal window. Completion is in the harmony. It is only together that we touch the immense variety of human experience and the universality of human life. Accordingly, each religious tradition is a perspective of life, of the human and of the divine. It is only together te religious perspective can meaningfully approach the unfathomable mystery of the divine. So, co-ordination between the male and female, east and west, north and

south, believer and non-believer, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the powerful and the powerless as well as between different perspective, faith positions, religious traditions, castes, classes, professions, ideologies, languages, cultures and the like become imperative for unity in diversity.

Commonalities of Religion

Religion, at its most basic concept, is an approach to life. It is a believing way of life. It is a faith response. It is a motivation and liberative force in life. It is an orientation to the human and the divine, at the same time. It is fundamental inspiration of life. It is call to go beyond. It is a vision of life and is a way of interpreting the voice of the Divine. It is a system of values and a process of enlightenment. It gives direction to life and accelerates the equality of life. It is the consciousness of life; it is the spiritual nature of the humans. It is the depth dimension and integrative principle in life. All these fundamental dimensions of religion are common to all religious traditions, in a more or less fashion.

This perspective of religion takes us to the firm conviction that all humans have a common heredity. The whole creation i.e. the nature and the human society, is a single whole and it basically belongs to the creator. The nature belongs to the human society and the human society belongs to nature, too. All the resources of the human society are a 'common heredity'. That would mean to say that all great men of the world, founders of all religious traditions, all religious scriptures, all religious paths and faiths are a common heredity of the humanity. To think my God, my religion, my religious scripture, the founder my religion are my own and the religions, scriptures and founders of others are theirs smacks of a divided and confused mind. The concept of yours and mine is a material one and it enslaves one in the worldly context. I have a basic belonging to myself and to whatever that is mine by the situational gift of the Creator. But a spiritual outlook of life invites us to rise above the boundaries of 'your and mine' and thus to consider all that is found in the human society gifts of the same God and a common heredity. Experience of the common heredity will elicit a consciousness in us that 'we belong to each other'; 'we belong together'. The humankind collectively belongs to the divine and the divine belongs to the whole humanity, in an equal manner.

A Copernican worldview of life brings religions to a common platform. As the earth and the other planets rotate around the sun, all the religions together form a circle of religion and spirituality. Spirit is at the centre and all religions are at the periphery, oriented towards and rotating around the spirit. The Divine is the pivot of all religious perspective. If religions or any particular religion are given undue importance, the Divine gets sidelined and the equilibrium of the Copernican vision of life gets unsettled. The ambition of any religious tradition to be at the centre would violate the spirit of Divine. This vision, this sense of democratic equality, is the common thread, which binds all

religious approaches into a single chain of spirit-bound life. Life is the central issue and all religious systems and paths derive meaning and relevance for their existence by being subservient to it.

A spirituality of complementarity gives religious traditions a common base. Every religious tradition has a unique identity. But then, this identity should not be an isolated identity, cut off from the identities of other traditions. In the context of the other, a related identity develops. When the individual and the social aspects of the identity are coupled together there is a developed and mature identity. And that is identity proper. Similarly, to speak of a Christian spirituality, a Hindu spirituality, an Islamic spirituality, a Jain spirituality etc. would mean a compartmentalized or unrelated concept. Actually there is only one spirit and one spirituality; that is a *human spirituality*. There is a Christian dimension of spirituality, a Hindu dimension of spirituality, a Muslim dimension of spirituality, a Jain dimension of spirituality etc. Only when these dimensions share their singularities with a sense of togetherness, the process of spirituality begins to evolve. The outcome is a common spirituality, which has both a depth dimension of rootedness in one's faith positions and a horizontal dimension of relatedness to other faith positions of the humanity. Faith opens one to the presence of God. Presence of God is double dimensional. Pope John Paul II underlined the inherent capacity of dialogue in making God's presence effective, at the August gathering at Chennai on Feb 05, 1986: "By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another we open ourselves to God."

The concept of complementarity introduces a common spirituality. complementarity would mean one completes the other. One purifies the other and one enriches the other. As male and female are complementary to each other, so are all human beings, all religious paths, all languages, all ideological approaches to one another. There is no superior, no inferior, but only co-travellers in life. The concept of complementarity proposes an open-ended dynamics. This spirituality of complementarity is a humble as well as a democratic way of being human. This is a familiar and communitarian style of being religious. This pluralistic spirituality is a joint human pilgrimage to the same one Divine, one Absolute, one God, one Infinite, one Supreme Power. To go beyond the barriers of religious systems, towards the realm of spirit, is spirituality, worth the name. This is the common spirituality of the different religious traditions. This is in fact a higher spirituality of the human.

Unifying Elements Emerging from the Multi-Religious Context

The bonds that unite are stronger than the walls that separate us. Religion, by its very purpose, is supposed to unite. But the world history proves otherwise. Religions have divided the humanity into uncountable factions and are still doing so. But if religions do not unite, they are not worth the name; but are just as enslaving heavy weight upon the

humanity. Religions can unite the humans and they should inevitably do so. Unity is walking together, and that is the way to peace. Dividing is the path to perdition. Pope John Paul II says, “either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony or we drift and ruin ourselves and others” (World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi, International Year of Peace, Oct.27, 1986)

Positive energies are to be re-discovered and increased. Unifying drive is to be promoted on a universal level. The uniting force will definitely become stronger. Every religion has to go beyond itself. A critical self-evaluation is called for. Certain insulated traditions, frozen doctrines and outdated practices need to be revised. The dictum makes full sense: ‘less luggage, more comfort.’ The political overtones increasingly at play in the religions are to be recognized and eliminated. Theological war between religions does not bring any credit to the divine, but only defames Him. A self-transformation process has to be initiated anew in a dialogical spirit. The vital need of self transformation and its liberative outcome is the primary unifying element.

The genius of Indian culture is characteristically *Vasudhaivkutumbakam*, i.e., the concept of a world family. The whole creation is a one single family. The Creator is the head of that family. The whole human society is one single family. The Divine is the head and centre of that family. We are citizens of the human society. This basic ‘world citizenship’ should keep us unified. The spirit of universal brotherhood should be the driving force in our life. And that will assure the unity of the human race as well as the whole creation.

Being in the limits is the essential plight of whatever that is created. All the elements of the creations are bound by time and space. All the human persons, all the ideologies, all the rules and policies, all the languages, all the cultures and practices, all the religious traditions and perspectives are affected by this law of nature. So, claim to infallibility and complete correctness by any person or sector cannot, in any way, be justified. One should not attempt to bite more than one’s mouth can contain. Inclination to possess truth and monopolize salvation contradicts the reality of the limitedness of the human situations. That underlines the fact that the religious traditions, like other factors of life, are limited. Hence, all religious traditions are like a ‘mirror’ to each other. One can examine the veracity of one’s spiritual vision, fitness of one’s religious faith and the quality of one’s human character with the help of the other, and vice versa. They are made for each other. They need each other for their mutual purification, enrichment and relevance. Together the diverse religious traditions pledge to transcend the limitations unto better human and spiritual prospects.

The different religious traditions are like the rays of the same sun. Individually they are just one single ray of the spirit and together they reflect the diverse aspects of the spirit. According to Raimondo Panikkar, the religious paths are like a rainbow. As the sun’s

light is refracted into a spectrum of colours, so is the divine light refracted into diverse religious traditions, reflecting the spiritual light in different degrees. They are irreplaceably unique colours and only together they form a rainbow. And only in the togetherness the unparalleled beauty of the rainbow shines, too. So also, the different religious streams will reflect a special spiritual effect of the Divine only in their 'togetherness'.

A harmony culture needs to be evolved among the multifarious religious approaches. A highly self-evident and inspiring model for this harmony culture could be seen in the many parts of the body functioning as one single body. All the parts are equally important. One part dominating over the other or suppressing or replacing the other would make the whole system of nature topsy-turvy. They function together smoothly in a pure spirit of natural democracy, par excellence. The diverse religious traditions of the world have the singular model of the creator as its ideal and perennial source of inspiration for a harmony culture.

Different religious traditions have to work together. Working together elicits a sense of 'we-feeling' and unity. *Multi-Religious co-operative scheme* should be envisaged for humanitarian purposes. Joint efforts will necessarily facilitate a related existence. An inter-religious relation is a theory. Interpersonal relationships between persons of different religious following are the practice of the same pioneered in the form of Neighborhood Community, in which the multidimensionality of faith and life bear fruit for one another. Interfaith collaboration by way of social concern will assure better society, with better human and spiritual values. Goodwill, respect, understanding, love and service, towards each other is the basic diet for a harmony culture. Searching for and promoting the universal values of all religious paths should be a common commitment, which will strengthen this culture of harmony. When every religious following becomes a good news to each other the harmony culture gets accomplished. Religious traditions should be like the streams and rivulets, which proceed from the Divine Spring, and which join together to become like rivers flowing towards the sea of the Divine. Like the flowing water they should grow beyond the boundaries of one another, with a unifying as well as liberative spirit. This is how a culture of religious harmony can evolve in the human society.

Conclusion

Life is basically dynamic in its concept. It is pluralistic and multidimensional in its process. Religion is intended to cater to the spiritual dimension of human life. Different religious traditions, while remaining deeply rooted in the respective perspective and faith experience, have to be creatively related to the other religious traditions, in a spirit of dialogue. Maintaining their respective position in the cultural periphery, they have to

remain surrendered to the central role of the Divine, in a humble readiness to play the second fiddle to the Divine. The inner dynamism of the human towards the Divine functions in the co-ordination, mutuality and togetherness of the different religious paths. To be religious is to be inter-religious, to be culture is to be intercultural, to be linguistic is to be inter-linguistic, to be human is to be inter-human and to be spiritual is to be inter-spiritual. The rich human heredity of diverse traditions is the highway to a culture of harmony. This culture of harmony will certainly usher in a better tomorrow for the 21st century and the following centuries. It will certainly facilitate a more human society to live in. It will, no doubt, accord a higher and a more qualitative achievement of the Divine in a sense of intimate togetherness among the diverse faith perspective.

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