

DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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THE BIBLE IN GENERAL

'Bible in general' would mean a symbolic understanding of the Bible, which could be applied to any religious Scripture. This understanding would harmoniously situate various Scriptural symbols of the human society.

Bible is the 'word' of God. The word 'Bible' comes from the Hebrew word 'biblos', meaning 'book' or 'the books'. This general meaning proposes broader alternatives and paves the way for Inter-Scriptural Dialogue. Even though it is the 'Sacred Book' of the Christian community, its content has a unique message in store for the entire human society. It has originated from the super-natural power, which can be expressed in a variety of ways, like 'the Infinite', 'the Ultimate Reality', 'the Absolute Truth', 'the Real', 'the Way', 'the Divine' and 'the Higher'.

Bible is the 'written' word of God. When defined, it acquires the status of a Scripture. It is preserved and communicated to the future generations. It is conditioned by historical factors. It is written in human language and is limited and symbolic. The reality is richer than the virtual expression of it; and the God of the scriptures is greater than the Scriptures. The authors wrote it prompted by the divine power. So it is an inspired message.

Bible is the 'unwritten' word of God. Basically, Bible is an oral tradition. It was a lived reality. Having been formed by the experience of a people, it was interpreted, inherited and handed over. It evolved from the womb of a particular culture, at a particular time. It is the live story of a people.

Bible is the 'voice' of God. It is the unfolding of the divine mystery. It is the recorded or unrecorded form of the divine wisdom. It is the conscience of the individual and the community. It is the source of insight and meaning in life. It is the ever-new good news, which is dynamic and evolving. It is a spiritual treasure which reveals, awakens, inspires, motivates, changes, transforms, re-creates and saves the humans. It is an ulterior force which liberates, helps go beyond and introduces to eternity.

Bible is the common heritage of the human society. Its message has a universal value. It is meant for the whole humanity, the whole creation. Its central message

does not contradict but complements other Scriptures. It remains open to other Scriptural approaches of the society. Having a common foundation, it is the shared property of the humanity. So, it is not to be monopolized by the Christian community or narrowed down in its interpretation.

Bible gains full meaning when it is in dialogue with other Scriptures. The interpretation of the Bible should not be in terms of myths and cults, but it should be liberative. The message should be applied to the context. Ours is a multi-dimensional society with diverse languages, ideologies, castes, classes, creeds, faiths, cultures, nations, traditions, customs, practices, etc. So, a multi-Scriptural attitude needs to be appropriated. Inter-Scriptural study, understanding and interpretation needs to be promoted. Commonalities are to be searched for.

Bible is the 'symbol', of the word of God. This understanding does full justice to other Christian symbols like cross and sacraments. The religious, moral and social traditions of the world have numerous Scriptural symbols, like Quran, Bhagvat Gita, Dhammapad, Guru Grandh Sahib, Avesta, Tora, Teachings of Mahaveer, Teachings of Baha Ullah, Teachings of confucius, Tenets of Taoism, Tenets of Shintoism, Atheistic Code of Behaviour, Tribal Beliefs and Practices. The symbolic value of the Bible is to be understood in a general and particular sense. Respect has to be paid to and inspiration has to be drawn other 'Scriptural Symbols' of the society.

BIBLE IN PARTICULAR

‘Bible in particular’ concentrates on the key message of the Bible. This would facilitate its core message, without compromising its genius, to dialogue with the core of other Scriptures and to focus the universal spiritual values.

The Understanding of God or the Divine can be diverse – as many, perhaps as there are human beings. Approach to the ‘non-dualistic’ concept is ‘self-realization’, whereas ‘relational ways’ respond to the ‘dualistic’ understanding. The understanding of God proposed by the Bible is ‘God as Father’. This is based on the vision of Jesus. This is a relational way par excellence. This concept is beyond gender and would mean parent (father and mother). This is the widest relational concept possible. The Semitic traditions (Jewish, Christian, Islamic and Indian) consider ‘God as Male’. The Sufi and some Indian streams conceive ‘God as Female’ (Ganga Maiya, Mahalakshmi, Durga / Shakti/ Kali). God is understood as a ‘Composite of Male and Female’ (Shiv-Shakti / Parvati, Laxmi-Narayan, Sita-Ram, Radha-Krishn) by the main-stream Indian tradition. ‘God is Neither Male Nor Female’ for the Japanese and Chinese traditions. There are also other relational understandings of God, either in male or female form. Krishn to Balram reflects ‘God as Brother’ whereas Krishn to Sudama, ‘God as

Friend'. The 'Child form of God' is highlighted by the relation of Jesus to Mary-Joseph, Krishna to Yashoda-Nand and Jankee-Vasudev. God is considered 'Guru' in Jesus to the Disciples and the Divine to Kabeer. These and other relational ways of understanding God are not contradictory to each other but are mutually inclusive ways. Hence a dialogical situating of the Christian understanding of God is required.

The filial experience of God is the core experience of Jesus (Mk 3.17; 17.5; Jn 5.19; 14.9, 10,11; 15.1; 17.10,11; Lk 10.22; 14.36;23.34, 46). This is a deep way of experiencing the divine and it is open to all (Lk 22.34-40; Mt 6.4, 6,8,18,26,30, 32; 10. 29-31 ; 12,7 ; 20.1-16). This is a spirituality of filial freedom (Jn 18.35). This filial spirituality has scope for extensive application beyond the boundaries of caste, class, creed and language.

A fraternal way of life logically follows the above filial experience. The communitarian experience of Jesus surpasses all boundaries (Mt 5.43-48). The values of social commitment proposed by Jesus are highly liberative (Lk 22.34-40; Mt 7.12; 5.9; 25.31-46). Jesus lived a life of preferential concern for the oppressed and the marginalized (Lk 19.1-10; 16.19-31; 15.1-32; 5.30-32, 23.24; 23.34; Mt. 5.43-48; 18.1-5; Jn 8.1-11; I Cor. 1.26-29). Hence a community of love and service across the boundaries certify a fraternal way of life.

The trinitarian style of life is considered the main stream tradition of Christianity. 'Three-in-one and one-in-three' is the reality reflected in the terminology of Father, Son and Spirit. It agrees with the cultural genius of India, ie. diversity in unity and unity in diversity. It is a democratic and communitarian style of life. It is a relational and spiritual approach to one-another. It upholds religious pluralism and dialogue between different spiritual streams.

The theocentric and kingdom-centred approach is the gist of Jesus' vision. Jesus's search for the Father is expressed in the words 'Your will be done' and 'Your kingdom come'. His inclination to the Father is proved by his constant reference to the Father. The 'I' sayings of Jesus were Father-oriented, too. A common belonging to the divine is the underline message for all.

The harmony model of creation presented by Paul 'One body, many parts' underlines the key to human life (1 Cor. 12.-28). The different parts have equal duties and equal rights. They have an importance and dignity, which is shared by all. 'An existence in togetherness' is the clear message communicated for whole humanity, the whole creation.

Biblical values are the sum and substance of the Bible. Christian values are to be understood as spiritual values, human values, social ethics and policies. An action programme based on the Biblical values are to be evolved in view of establishing a creative dialogue with other religious Scriptures.

CONCLUSION

In a multi-Scriptural society, the symbolic character of the Bible is its most significant message and it needs to be recognized. The Bible is the common heritage of the human society. The understanding of it has to be such that it liberates. It should facilitate the human beings a going beyond. The basic experience and mission of Jesus are to receive the focus. The Biblical message is to be interpreted in terms of the multi-dimensional context. Inter-Scriptural study and comparative understanding of the emerging unifying elements should be encouraged. The common human and spiritual values of life are to be highlighted, too. The dialogical perspective of the Bible will, certainly, usher in an age of ‘united human spirituality’. This is the glorious future the humans are to travel towards

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