HARMONY OF FAITHS
A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Isn't 'diversity' the most innovative and telling character of the artistic mastermind of the Creator? To be frank, 'being different', one from the other, while 'being many' is truly the hallmark of the entire nature. Obviously, this quality profusely stands out in human beings. But for this quality, the purpose of creation would have been utterly defeated; life would have been uninteresting to the core, too. In fact, life can function only when there is diversity. In the context of diversity alone, the worth of life can be truly tested, as well.

Is 'being different' something negative and so unacceptable? That is what many people think! But, obviously, this is nothing but a fundamental misunderstanding. As a matter of fact, 'difference' is a positive quality. It is an enriching factor. Both partners become richer, as they share in the individual riches of the other. Difference is also a creative faculty. The meeting of two elements results in the creation of a third element, which is different from both the first and the second. This is without a doubt mysterious. Though there are enormous similarities among them, the difference remains crystal clear. Difference stands for a 'special quality'. For that matter, creation could rightly be termed as a 'collection of special qualities'.

How could one think of 'faith' as an independent reality? Religious theories, rituals and stipulations could be autonomous units, but not faith. Faith is the 'core element' of religious and non-religious perspectives alike. It is like the self-same water, but kept in different containers. It is labelled differently, according to the shape of the containers. All the same, the content is an inter-connected phenomenon. That would amount to say, faith cannot be divided. Theories, rituals and stipulations form the externals of religion and they could be different and so very well be divided, but faith, which is the internal factor of all religions, is of the same make. The inner phenomenon of the diverse religious traditions is always an 'inter-related reality'.

Faith has two dimensions – individual and social. The individual aspect of faith is the specific character faith imbibes when it is limited and conditioned by a certain individual person, tradition or community. The social aspect of faith becomes bright when it 'exists in relation to another' individual, tradition or community. The individual and social aspects of faith cannot be dispensed with. They are like two sides of the same coin and are complementary to each other. Together, they make sense. Though the individual faith is born of the social faith, the individual faith requires to journey towards the social faith, a journey of maturing to fuller degrees and dimensions.

Faith has two directions -- vertical and horizontal. Vertical faith is that which is oriented to the divine, whereas horizontal finds its way towards one's fellow human beings and the rest of the creation. But, often people get confused, even seekers and seers, and consider it having to do with the divine or its representations only. Getting coiled around certain iconic figures or extra-ordinary historical figures and slipping away into fixed ritualistic engagements, by way of a personality cult, is only an obsession, if not a total disorientation. Faith has certainly very much to do with the day-to-day societal concerns, very particularly with one's relatives, neighbours, acquaintances and even strangers. As these directions are not one against the other, no one can consider them optional, too. One needs to bridge them together. The best way to integrate them, in the words of Jesus Christ, is 'whatever you did to one of these little brothers and sisters of mine, you did to me' (Mt 25.51). The divine and human dimensions of faith, when harmonized, makes a complete sense, and not otherwise.

How could faith-based traditions be harmonized? Great men and women, who were exceptionally tuned to the divine, were endowed with a reservoir of divine experience and enlightenment. The overflow of the same, at different times and places, became historical sources of the faith-based traditions. In course of time, the faith-traditions imbibed the socio-cultural colours of the areas of their reach out and wore a different look. Like the diverse colours and shades of colours of the 'rainbow', the faith-traditions need to stick together. Together, they will radiate a 'beauty in diversity'. A 'spirit of togetherness' is the harmonizing factor among the faith-based traditions. Streams gain a single existence in the form of a 'river', when they join together. Similarly, a happy blend of a 'sense of equality' and a 'sense of totality', along with a divine-bound energy of life, is capable of paving the way for 'harmony of faiths'.

There are several 'Christian categories' that signify harmony among faiths very expressively. Human beings are created in the 'image of God' and they bear 'God's likeness' (Gen 1.27). Human beings are the 'temple of the living God' (1 Cor 3.16). Undoubtedly, one has to pay back to God the obligation for having received life from him. However, one does not have to turn to temples of brick and stone, when there are living and moving abodes of God in one's own premises! One does not need ritualistic figures and symbols when one has real and bright images of God all around one! All beings, and human beings in special, are 'living representations' of God. Faith has concretely something to do with them!

Besides, as Jesus revealed from his sublime experience, God is like a 'father' and so all human beings are like 'brothers and sisters'. God the father is reflected in his sons and daughters. To see the sons and daughters is to see the father himself. To accept every human being as one's brother or sister and to love and serve him or her, especially the disadvantaged ones, is devotion to God, in the right sense of the word. Could one conceive one's faith as 'living harmoniously with one another', as individuals and communities of faith, tradition and culture? Could one's faith motivate one to strive honestly for ushering in a society that is ever more 'harmonious and peaceful'?

The 'way forward' for translating 'harmony of faiths' into action is 'interactive processes' among individuals and communities, without an iota of unsociability even with the so called enemies. Free exchange of perceptions, views, interests and experiences have to become an uninterrupted process of life. Individuals and communities have to get awakened, motivated and rise above the narrow borders of life as well as of religions. They are called for appropriating a 'faith' that is 'inter-related, participative, interactive, democratic, all-inclusive and harmonious'. 'Harmony of faiths' is dynamic, ever-evolving and progressive in character and that is 'faith' in the right sense of the word.

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