

# WRONG NOTIONS ON RELIGION

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‘Unity in Diversity’ is the catchphrase of the most ‘eternal wisdom’ the Creator has scattered profusely in the creation, even to the most minute details. It is a concept that affirms ‘being different’ without being fragmented. It underscores ‘being united’ without being uniform, as well. The notion of unity doesn’t stand without its counterpart ‘diversity’. That would amount to say, ‘diversity’ is the essential logic of ‘unity’ and ‘unity’ governs the core dynamics of ‘diversity’. Diversity and unity are two sides of the same coin. One completes the other. ‘Together they stand’, divided they fall. ‘Unity in diversity’ is the combined and complete concept for a meaningful existence on earth. Failing to live the sublime wisdom of the Supreme Artist would run the risk of a life that is failed forever!

‘Rainbow’ is the gift of nature that is singularly precious. Diverse colours and shades of colours exist together, composing the rarest of the rare definitions of beauty. It is a live celebration of ‘beauty in togetherness’. In fact, every human being ought to become an artist to identify and enjoy ‘beauty in diversity’. Without doubt, uniformity has the capacity to place systems in place. It facilitates order and discipline. It has a beauty of its own right, too. Nevertheless, beauty, in the right sense of the word, is hidden in the colloquium of diversities and defeats all comparisons. Similarly, a meal is never made up of a single item, unless for extremely ascetic purposes or for the reason of acute want of means. Several raw materials are required for making a balanced diet. Many ingredients get combined into a single whole. When chewed, consumed and digested, they contribute to a richer content of blood and strength, than otherwise. No wonder, it goes without saying that the wellbeing of life is grounded in variety and versatility.

‘Differences’ in characteristics are intrinsic to the very idea of creation. Ethnic, physical, linguistic, ideological, psychological, social, religious, political and cultural traits and identities, the world over, are too obvious to ignore. This applies to India in a fashion that is ‘par excellence’. But, ‘to tolerate’ the differences in a helpless way is, in fact, not only a naive but a negative response to it. Though unintentionally, it would certainly belittle oneself, too. ‘To accept’ the other with his or her difference is the sign of a positive as well as a larger mindset. ‘Difference’, in the real sense of the word, is a source of ‘enrichment’. ‘Growing up’ to the fuller and fullest stature as human beings necessitates ‘sharing in the other’ as well as ‘sharing with the other’, through a continuous process of interactive learning. I suppose, there cannot be another way to living ‘unity in diversity’, which is the sole purpose of life.

Human history has been the greatest witness that ‘religious diversity’ has been over the centuries more a liability than blessing. It seems to have confused people. It created identity crisis in people. It created people with an enlarged ego, especially in the higher ups of the hierarchy of religion or religions. It promoted blind obedience and a cult of personality. It boosted up superstitions. It manufactured a series of fundamentalists and fanatics. Intentionally or unintentionally, religion created communal mindset and unsociable attitudes. It helped lot of people to get stuck up in the past as conservatives and tampered with their lives blossoming up towards the present and the future. Worst of all, religion appropriated self-centred and exclusive and violated the logic and existence of diversity. Evidently, though ironically so, religion became more a part of the problem than of the solution.

Henry Miller observes, ‘our destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things’. The twenty-first century world requires a new way of thinking, a new way of relating oneself to the other, in all its variations. The human civilizations have to grow beyond the childish days and appropriate adult ways. Perceptions require being transformed along with the times. The demands of the context need to be addressed. An enlightened and awakened conscience will be the source of motivation. Believers have to cross the boundaries of one’s own traditions and learn from the great values of other cultures. The collective cultural heritage of the human race has not to be divided in terms of the ethnic and religious perceptions and practices.

Sacred Scriptures and great Masters of religions have characteristic insights that are capable of eliminating all confusion regarding religion and diversity. Rig Veda, some 4000 years BC, unearthed the sanest response to the eternal phenomenon of ‘unity in diversity’ in the noble words ‘Truth is one. Sages call it by different names.’

No wonder, Mahatma Gandhi exclaimed 'I consider myself a Hindu, Christian, Moslem, Jew, Buddhist and Confucian'. How could the human mind be so small as to monopolize the truth as seen from one window! We find a similar idea in Quran 49.13, which affirms the single source the entire creation is springing from and the emerging message of unity. It also highlights the purpose of diversity as an opportunity to interact, learn from and enrich one another. The implication of the text is undoubtedly in the line of 'unity and beauty in diversity'.

In one of the temples Shree Narayan Guru got constructed, he kept a mirror, instead of the customary statue, the caption beneath which read 'Know Thyself', highlighting the thought of Upanishad. Perceptibly, the message for the public is 'God is like a mirror', which reflects the one who come before it. Religion, faith and temple are mediums that facilitate and motivate the humans to see, know and mend one's own self. They also make it easy for human beings to travel the path towards the mirror-like God. The utility of religion is to assist the humans to live a value-based life. I don't think anyone can bring to light the essence of what religion is other than Albert Einstein, who summarized it in such crystal clear terms thus: 'True religion is real living; living with all one's soul, with all one's goodness and righteousness'. Following the 'promptings of the conscience' or the 'Spirit within' and living according to the universal spiritual and human values with a strong ethical fibre' decide the relevance of one's religion or faith and all the engagement in its name.

God is light. Light eliminates darkness and enlightens the entire atmosphere. Light makes visible all that exists in the dark otherwise. Light is not meant to be worshipped. Assistance of light needs to be taken for seeing one another and all that the creation contains. Shree Narayan Guru says, 'one caste, one religion, one God for man' and 'whichever the religion, it suffices if it makes a better man'. 'Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect', exhorts Jesus Christ. 'He does everything well', that was what the people who heard and observed commented about him. The Zoroastrian principle of life goes thus: 'Good thoughts, good words and good deeds'. Gautam Buddha instructs, 'follow the middle path'. 'Harmony of the opposites' is the Shinto dictum. All these high voltage maxims go beyond the boundaries of all religious and cultural communities. They speak of an ethical and spiritual sense that celebrates the spirit of being one and diverse and cosmopolitan, at the same time.

Religion requires being revisited in the context of diversities. The increasingly globalizing world of today demands it. The perceptions of the Creator, its gender, name, characteristics, etc are symbolic and partial. No community can claim an infallible position on the theories the respective religious traditions have evolved in the context of time and space. The leaders of religious traditions need to get enlightened to accept the diversity of religious approaches. Besides, the educated, the capable, the elite and the responsible people of all communities and levels need to get awakened to their responsibilities and awaken the masses to their duties as well as their rights. They need to rise and help people rise. They need to get empowered and empower others. To see, recognize and accept 'good' wherever it is found, to foster harmonious and peaceful living. Only a religious sense that rises to secular, social, ethical and spiritual altitudes, so as to live creatively with the diversity of cultures will be able to make sense in the modern times.

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