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THE SIGNIFICANCE AND FUTURE OF INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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In speaking about the future of the dialogue, we have to first ascertain whether the dialogue has any future, as it seems to be called into question by some.

To a certain extent it can be said that dialogue is today at the crossroads and in that sense it rises, that is at a turning point. This is because interreligious dialogue has moved from the phase of Euphoria and joy of interreligious discoveries to meetings and seminars and now to a stage hereby we are taking stock of these dialogues. Most people involved in dialogue are well aware that in the face of the manifold problems that call for balanced responses, meeting only to discuss and share though not without value, is not enough. Further, there is the feeling that the theological thought-pattern and categories that we have inherited are not adequate enough to give expression to the experiences, discoveries and insights gained through dialogue. Thus we may say that dialogue is at crossroads. To remain where we are, doing only what we have been doing so far promises no significant future for dialogue. At the same time to launch out into joint-action for integral liberation and search for new theological categories is, to say the least, not easy, though some are already engaged in it. The crisis in which dialogue finds itself is analogous to the crisis of growth, faced by those in their adolescence. It is to be taken seriously, but not to be regretted, as it is full of promise. Dialogue has a future, but only if we are willing to move on. That hatred, violence and conflicts do not restrain us from having a dialogue.

The roots cause of hate crime and violence is strictly not religious and interreligious dialogue checks that such conflicts are restricted. To restrict many things can be done.

1. Interaction between people of different religions and the possibility of discussing their problems whether religious, communal, criminal or civic, under the aegis of local committee can help diffuse communal tension.

2. Those involved in interreligious dialogue should make people, especially the poor, realize that they have common economic and political interests though they belong to different religions and should collaborate in pursuing them. They have to be helped to realize that they all are victims of injustice and they have to unite in spite of their religious differences and fight jointly if they want to be liberated.
3. We have said that people with vested interests use religion as a uniting force to fight for economic and political ends. To counter this it has to be shown that religion is relevant to politics in providing it with ‘value and norms expressible in a common socio-political-legal system that makes common life possible.’ But that is in itself, is not a political force. This can be done only by the different religions collaborating to build a secular state which is open and positive towards all religions is favourable to the religious formation of its citizen and refuses to become denominational. And “this can be achieved only through interreligious dialogue that does not limit itself to a sharing of experiences, but devotes itself to a common commitment to development and liberatives projects.
4. Interreligious dialogue helps people to overcome ignorance, prejudices and suspicion of the other religions as well as that in which the partners mutually help to lay bare the oppressive and liberative potential present in their religions can serve to reduce communal tension.
5. It is the lack of authentic religion in the lives of people that is responsible, at least partly, for letting religion to be manipulated for nefarious purposes. In as much as interreligious dialogue helps people to deepen their faith and live their religion more honestly, it can contribute towards the promotion of communal harmony.
6. Those engaged in dialogue as well as other religious thinkers can show how religion decays when it seeks to distort history, or to arrogate itself the entire national culture, ignoring other contributors’ as well as the richness of the

historical process. They can also show how and why no religion may tolerate injustice and must denounce it always and everywhere.

7. Experience, knowledge and appreciation other religions gained through dialogue can help each religious tradition to critically examine its exclusivistic claims and adopt a more and positive and realistic attitude towards other religions.

EPOCHE IN DIALOGUE

Is understood as the bracketing of one's faith during the entire course of dialogue. The following observation maybe made in response to such a fear.

1. To bring to dialogue one's religious convictions is only of the requisitions for dialogue. It is to be done in relation to other requirements for dialogue such as human sympathy willingness to be corrected and to correct, the readiness to make every effort to overcome prejudices and preconceptions etc.
2. When one holds that one's religious convictions are true, one does not by that, hold that the religious convictions of all others are necessarily false.
3. Even when it is a question of exclusive claims, such as if one were not to confess one's faith in all honesty at the necessary moment, then one would be false to oneself and one's religious convictions and that in no way helps dialogue.
4. When truth is spoken of in the context of interreligious dialogue, one is not referring to logical truth. Truth in the context of dialogue refers rather to that which sets one free, which leads to liberation. This truth is the final analysis of God.
5. Interreligious dialogue has progressed so far and has produced so much fruit not because people involved in dialogue gave up their religious convictions but because they were ready to listen, to be corrected, to be enriched etc.

So an honest and humble commitment to one's religious convictions is not a hindrance to dialogue.

Action for justice in future will lead to and will be served by Interreligious Dialogue

1. In response to situations of injustice that call for service and concerted actions; example, oppression of minorities, bonded labour, murder of innocents etc. people of different religions come together in an atmosphere of ‘ HUMANESS’ and commitment of values. The need for joint action helps them overcome their personal or communal interests and suspicions of each other.

This coming together of persons committed to the cause of justice and right gives right to shared reflection to analyze the causes, discuss the goal to be achieved and agree upon possible ways of action. This generates a high degree of solidarity among them leading to further concerted and committed action, despite the difference among them. Thus a Christian may speak from the perspective of the kingdom of God, a Hindu from that of Ramrajya, a Marxist from that of a classless society, and atheist from that of secular humanism. Thus action for liberation leads one to share one’s values, insights as well as one’s religion and these become challenged, purified and enriched by inputs from other partners in the group. And this is interreligious dialogue.

2. The oppressed belong to all religions and even to all castes. One of the means used by oppressors to perpetuate the status quo is to prevent the oppressed from coming together to claim their rights by keeping them divided on religious and caste basis. In this context “the oppressed everywhere should realize that their best interests are served if they come together and put their collective pressures on the system for its transformation.”

Setting aside their hostile attitude towards other religions, respecting the other’s religion and treating the others as equals, will help the oppressed of different religions to work together for the common goal.

3. Action for justice presupposes that there are values and goals worth fighting for. These values find their ultimate ground in religion and not in human reason. This is because the values that one considers worth striving for, depend on the way one understands the meaning and goal of life. It is religion that

provides this understanding. While reason remains at the pragmatic and socio-historical level, religion points out that the individual, human society as well as the world have no ultimacy in themselves and are related to an ultimate being for their meaning. Hence only religion can provide values with an ultimate ground though the perspective of each religion may differ. This consensus can be arrived at only through dialogue and discussion. Thus the different groups may agree on values like life, peace, justice, freedom, equality etc. advocated by each religion, even though each religion will have its own justification for the pursuit of these values. It is but natural that through such dialogues where people share their motivations and convictions, each one is challenged corrected, purified and enriched.

4. People in a multi-religious society face the problem of building a ‘human community’ together. This demands the understanding of man and community upheld by the various religions and ideologies to be brought into dialogue to arrive at a consensus. This will help in building a dialogue.

Interfaith dialogue is necessary to promote inclusive nationalism and abhor exclusive nationalism being peddled in the name of cultural nationalism. An interfaith dialogue is essential to combat evil design and to stop the separatists and communal tendencies striking root among the members of other faiths. Such dialogue may reimpose faith in secular and democratic nationalism and each and every citizen of the country may actively participate in the nation building process.