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INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE:
AN EXPLORATION

By

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I

The entire humankind wishes that peace prevails in the world, but, as a theologian[1] has said, peace can prevail in the world only if there is peace among religions. This argument implies that for peace to prevail there must be dialogue - greater and meaningful - among different religions and an investigation of their foundations. Dialogue among different religions of the world is thus of paramount importance for peace to prevail amongst individuals, communities and nations. It also implies that relationship as of now among these different religions and the sects and sub-sects within them is not amiable and peaceful - as it should be. Since the destiny of man today is linked with the social reality of religious plurality, peace among religions becomes necessary for man to live a life of peaceful co-existence. Dialogue amongst religions is the only way out for them to co-exist in peace.

Before we take up the issue of inter-religious dialogue and its significance vis-a-vis peace and harmony among religions and in the world at large, let us first try to find out what the meaning of the word 'dialogue' is. As it is, the word 'dialogue' is a combination of two words 'dia' and 'logue'. There is no ambiguity about the meaning of the word 'logue': it comes from the Greek *logos,* meaning 'word'. It also has several cognate meanings such as a worldview and a coherent principle of how things are. In the beginning of the Bible also it is stated that 'in the beginning was the logos', implying thereby that God created the earth and heavens by uttering a word. Here the word 'logos' means Word as uttered by the Creator-Lord. But the word 'logos' means not only the spoken word but also a rational and coherent principle of the universe.[2]

On the other hand, the prefix to 'logue' has been interpreted and explained differently by different scholars. There is a view according to which the word 'dialogue' is antonym of 'monologue'. As for the former part - mono - of the word 'monologue', there is no ambiguity about the meaning of the word: its dictionary meaning is one or single, and monologue is said to imply 'a long speech by one person during a conversation in which other people are barred from speaking or expressing an opinion.' It is different from soliloquy only in that the latter negates the presence of the other whereas in monologue, there can be one or more persons listening but not responding. Those holding this view explain the word 'dialogue' as 'di' + 'logue' because in Greek, 'di' means two as against 'mono' which means one. If we accept this argument, 'di-logue' would mean a conversation between two persons, a conversation which may not necessarily be amicable and

which may not necessarily lead to a transformative conclusion; one may not listen to the viewpoint of the other with the respect it deserves and may not have the inclination to learn from that. At best it will be an informative conversation but can never become a transformative encounter which a dialogue should be.

When we talk of inter-religious dialogue, we do not take the word as such. Also, the first part of the word 'dialogue' is 'dia' and not 'di', and 'dia' is a proposition which means 'through'. It 'signifies worldviews being argued *through* to significant and potentially transformative conclusions' for one or both the participants in the dialogue. The 'di-logue' may not in the end prove to be consequential, but 'dialogue' argues important matters through with the purpose of arriving at the truth. It may also change the worldview of either of the participants. In other words, we can say that dialogue implies the presence of two different worldviews represented by two individuals or groups of individuals adhering to different ideologies, and is aimed at sharing of experiences, insights and values with the objective of reaching the truth. It can well be placed somewhere between antagonism and synthesis. It is an attempt at understanding the other in his otherness, leading possibly to significant and transformative conclusion and resulting possibly in the change of the worldview of one of the participants. In this sense, we can say that dialogue is opposed (if we must place it opposite to a word) to polemic, stereotyping and denigration, and that it must have values of respect, trust and empathy.[3]

In response to Forward's above definition, David Cheetham, in a lecture on 'Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Sikh religion' delivered at Punjabi University, Patiala, observed that 'words are often transformed in the minds and lives of those who use them. Dialogue can therefore quite unashamedly denote a spirit of deliberately cooperative, rather than abrasive, discourse.'

Another theologian defines dialogue as "the exchange of experiences and understanding between two or more participants with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding".[4] He also holds that there must be certain presuppositions on which dialogue is based to attain such an experience and understanding. He opines that only religious people – those who have had religious experience, an encounter with the Transcendent One/Truth – can conduct inter-religious dialogue because such dialogue must be based on personal religious experience and firm truth-claims. One cannot grasp all the implications of dialogue if one has not had personal religious experience. Persons without such an experience might learn about

others' religion, its history, etc., but they cannot have an authentic dialogue because both the partners in dialogue must be able to take positions as to what they believe in. However, there is another theologian who holds that "dialogue can and ought to be undertaken by a wide variety of people at several levels of faithful human living."[5] The most important precaution, according to him, each of the participants in dialogue must take is that he/she must realize that no genuine religious experience can be true only for him/her; this must be true – at least to some degree – for the other participant also. Neither of the participants needs to step outside of his/her religion and suspend his/her religious experience and beliefs: that would mean taking the heart out of such a dialogue.

Two, inter-religious dialogue should be based on the recognition of the possible truth-claims in all religions. Each of the participants must recognize the truth of the other's position. The 'truth' of the other must not be taken as fake or incomplete and it need not conform to our own truth. This implies that both the participants in dialogue must be open to the truth of the religious experience of the other. This can have transformative effect on either or both of the participants in dialogue. No one can enter into an authentic and meaningful dialogue from his own perspective of religious experience and then look at the other's religion only as a set of doctrines and rituals. One needs to go beyond these doctrines and rituals and enter into and participate in the other's experience. In other words, a true encounter with another tradition cannot take place from the outside: one must enter 'into' the other tradition to have a meaningful dialogue with it. Different religions are like different paths leading to the Centre, different historical (and thus finite) manifestations of the infinite One. Of course, there are similarities as well as differences amongst varied religions of the world and it is only proper and useful to make comparisons between religions to locate and appreciate similarities as well as differences. There is an unbreakable bond between the experience of faith and articulation of beliefs though they are distinctly different from each other.

Implicit in the above statement - inter-religious dialogue is 'authentic listening' or 'genuine listening' which, as we said earlier, implies being open to the possible truth of the other and not to presume that the other has only 'incomplete truth' - is the idea that all religions are valid paths towards the realization of Truth/God; no religion can claim monopoly over Truth; and no religion or the truth manifest in that religion is superior or inferior to the other. It is like moving from one mind-set to another, from the rejection of others' cherished beliefs to a

respectful acceptance of them as alternative ways of belief and practice. The protagonists of the former view only pronounce that theirs is the only way to salvation and their prophet is the only saviour of entire humankind. They do not want to listen to the others' point of view. Sometimes a community may identify certain other religions or groups within them with whom it may refuse to have any dialogue. A religion or sect not willing to listen implies that it is afraid of testing its convictions against those of others: it unilaterally perceives them to have gone astray from the true doctrines and practices of their faith. It is just possible that its avoidance of having dialogue with them is because it is not sure of the correctness of its own stand and it is only a stratagem to put off whatever objections/questions might come from the other. Either way, the situation needs to be rectified and can be rectified only by having dialogue with such 'heterodox' groups also.

Each of the dialogical persons – in inter-religious or intra-religious dialogue - must be deeply rooted in his/her faith or conviction because the path he/she travels necessitates him/her to embrace the outward form as well as the inward meaning of the religious tradition he espouses. Such a person must also realize that his/her deep-rooted convictions can be and should be tested against others' views by allowing them to ask questions and even voice objections. The partners in dialogue must be open to accept the differences in beliefs and also to 'enter into and feel the deeper meaning, the intent' of their respective faiths. However, this 'belongingness' to the faith of the other is always a two-way passage. It is not primarily change/transformation to the other tradition or conversion as we understand it today: it is change/transformation to the ultimate truth. Our knowledge of the others' faiths certainly enlarges the horizons of our experience and contributes to the fullness of life.[6]

There can, however, be no real and effective inter-religious or intra-religious dialogue unless and until each group/community stops believing in the myth of the superiority of its own religion/sect. Dialogue and attitude of religious superiority cannot go together. The latter must be abandoned for the former to successfully arrive at the truth through an authentic dialogue. Those who go for dialogue believing in the myth of superiority are not fundamentally different from those who refuse to have any dialogue. Both the categories follow basically the same conviction: theirs is the only way or at least theirs is the best way. Such persons need to redo their exegetical homework to look at other religions also as possible ways to salvation. Any exclusivist claims to religious superiority divide humankind into rival

camps and have many times been invoked in support of oppression, conquest and exploitation. Claims to superiority easily become calls to religious violence. We need to realize this causal link between the two, and sooner we realize it the better it will be for humankind.[7]

II

Before we take up when the idea of inter-religious dialogue got initiated, how it became a kind of movement and what role it can possibly play in the new millennium, it is only pertinent to discuss briefly some of the perspectives from which different religions or sects within them look at other religions/sects and the truth present in them. Some religions or at least some groups within several religions refuse to accept the fact that all religions are finite manifestations of the infinite One and that the diversity of religions only reveals the richness of the eternal and infinite Truth. They do not accept other religions as valid paths leading to the truth: as a theologian has said, God's voice speaks in many languages, communicating itself in a diversity of intuitions. The word of God never comes to an end and no word is God's last word. No religion or religious community is or can be deemed superior or inferior to the other. Truth or revelation is not the monopoly of any particular religion, and no religion can claim its 'truth' to be the norm of all religions. A Sufi saint makes a very valid statement comparing different religions with the metaphor of lamps: "The lamps are different, but the Light is the same; it comes from beyond."[8]

On the other hand, most of the missionary religions keep harping on the superiority and uniqueness of their respective faiths: every religion or the truth contained in it is unique to its followers, but the myth of superiority of a religion vis-a-vis other religions is not tenable. To the advocates of this myth of superiority, only their religion and their prophet can lead a person to truth or self-realization. They take all other religions as fake and deviations of one primordial religion and their truth as incomplete or completely fake. Some among them, however, tend to move from the earlier 'all-knowing' and 'let us teach you' attitude to 'listening to whatever wisdom comes from the other tradition' – from exclusivism to inclusivism. Of course, they do not treat other religious communities as pagans or infidels but at the same time they do not take their religion as equally valid and true: they insist that the ultimate truth is with their religion only and that salvation was also possible only through their religion/prophet. In this regard, we can quote the instances of Rahner and Panikkar: Rahner's theory of 'anonymous Christian', for example, is "in the final analysis still

dependent on a Christian standpoint of superiority that sets up one's own religion as the a priori true one.... All the Jews Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists are saved not because they are Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists but because in the final analysis they are Christians, 'anonymous Christians', to be precise."[9] He states that an individual who is exposed to God's grace through Christianity has, other things being equal, a greater chance of salvation than someone who is merely an anonymous Christian, a member of another religion.

As it is, there is no possibility of dialogue with the former (i.e. exclusivists) because they explicitly proclaim other religions fake with incomplete truth and other religious communities as infidels or pagans. As for the latter (i.e. inclusivists), they prefer a dialogue but to them the result of this dialogue is understandably pre-determined in their favour. There can be several reasons for such an attitude of superiority or uniqueness. One, many times such protagonists compare the scriptural truth of their religion with the prevalent practices of others: obviously, there is always a wide gap between the scriptural ideal and the practical reality. Two, a religious community can adopt an aggressive posture during its infancy apprehending that the prevailing established traditions might absorb into themselves its distinct religious and cultural identity. But with the passage of time this attitude begins to serve sectarian objectives and becomes a cause of inter-community strife. Three, this attitude was in the past inspired by political powers with expansionist colonial designs to justify their exploitative and oppressive policies in the colonies – 'the white man's burden' as it was called. Their standpoint is 'we believe in God and we are saved and you believe in God but you are damned': they assure a place in heaven for the 'faithfuls' and condemn the 'infidels' to ghetto in this world and hell hereafter. We need to be careful lest such an attitude seeps into the modern Indian polity which is gradually becoming caste or creed based. Paul Knitter, a renowned pluralist theologian, discusses in his *No Other Name?*, all these perspectives as different models for inter-religious dialogue. Since the author comes from a Christian background, most of the models he discusses are primarily Christian, but we can easily apply them to any other religion also. Among such models discussed by him are the Conservative Evangelical Model, the Mainline Protestant Model, the Catholic Model and the Theo-centric Model. He rejects the first three of these Models because they are exclusivist in ideology believing in only their tradition to be true and in the absolute authority of the Word of God as contained in the Bible. The major flaw with the Theo-centric Model is that it excludes the atheistic traditions even

though it accepts different religions as different paths to the Centre/God. However, after discussing these Models, Knitter summarizes his views in the form of two Models – the Former Model and the New Model. In the Former Model, he includes all exclusivistic and inclusivistic perspectives. This is the Model which tries to define truth through exclusion. "For something to be true, it has to be, in its category the only, the absolute truth. One can know it is true by showing how it *excludes* all other alternatives – or, more recently, how it absorbs and includes all other alternatives." However, this Model is open to criticism on several counts: its concern for absolute truth denigrates the value of other religions and this is against the very spirit of an authentic dialogue.

Knitter then goes on to propose a model which he calls the New Model as conducive to have a meaningful inter-religious dialogue. According to this Model, "no truth can stand alone: no truth can be totally unchangeable. Truth, by its very nature, needs another truth.... Truth without other truth cannot be unique."[10] Each religion is unique and distinct as it contains something that belongs to it alone, separately, distinctly, decisively. According to this Model, all the participants in inter-religious dialogue must have total personal commitment to the truth of their respective religions, and this truth must not include or exclude others but relate to them and be willing to have authentic dialogue with them. No participant in such dialogue should deny the validity of the others' truth but at the same time he must not hesitate to condemn whenever the other errs in his practices. Each religion has an authentic and unique experience of the divine but it cannot claim absolute monopoly over truth.

We must accept all religions as valid paths leading to God/Truth for a constructive and authentic dialogue: there cannot be any meaningful dialogue with those who place themselves on a higher pedestal and who approach others not to share their religious experience but with closed mind and the sole intention of converting them to their point of view. It is quite obvious that proselytizing devalues the faith of the other unlike 'mutual witnessing' which promotes mutual respect and trust. Also, this pluralistic attitude which, broadly speaking, deems all religions equally valid is the first and foremost pre-requisite for inter-religious dialogue. We can also say that this 'New Model' is quite close to the Sikh model. Sikhism is a revelatory religion and its founder, Guru Nanak, received direct revelation from God. All the nine succeeding Gurus of the Sikh religion are believed to be one in spirit though different in body. The Word as they received in revelation is expressed

in hymns which now form part of their scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib. As it is, the Word (*Sabda)* as included in the scripture is their Guru or spiritual preceptor after the ten person-Gurus. The scripture comprises hymns of six of the ten Sikh Gurus apart from certain other holy persons coming from both the Hindu and Muslim traditions. All the hymns in the scripture (of the Gurus as well as of other holy persons) are considered revelatory and all the hymns – may they, for example, be of Guru Nanak or Kabir or Ravidas or Farid – enjoy the same respect. Guru Arjan who compiled the scripture gave it this structure perhaps to reiterate that revelation is neither religion-specific nor person-specific nor caste-specific nor region-specific – the idea which is fundamental to the New Model.

Whatever model inter-religious dialogue may follow, it is rather obvious that dialogue amongst religions is of vital importance today if man wants to live, and live a peaceful and meaningful life, in the religiously plural world. Only genuine dialogue can bring about peace among religions which can further result in peace amongst different nations of the world. Keeping this in mind, Alan Race[11] has summarized the goals of inter-religious dialogue as follows:

- to promote mutual understanding between people of diverse religious traditions;
- to display the distinctive truth of the world religious traditions and the commonalities between them;
- to encourage sharing of the spiritual resources of religions with a view to tracking the social and moral problems of the world.
- to devise a united front of religion (but not one world-religion) against non-spiritual views of life.

III

No doubt, dialogue is not something newly discovered though the term 'inter-religious dialogue' came into use in the academic world only around AD 1960. Earlier, Socrates (470-399 BC), the great Greek thinker used dialogue in an effort to know 'the just, the true and the good', and he used dialogue with anybody in the market-place as a means towards the realization of that objective. According to him, lack of knowledge made humans commit sin. Knowledge is virtue and ignorance leads to evil. To Socrates, methods of enquiry were as important as the results arrived at, and the dialectical method he applied was of question and answer. Use of the method of question and answer was to Socrates a form of dialogue, each participant drawing

knowledge and insight from the other. The method used by Socrates is relevant to the method adopted by Guru Nanak only insofar as the latter also wanted to remove the darkness of ignorance from the minds of people and to enlighten them so as to uplift them from within (spiritually) as well as from without (morally and ethically). The tacit assumption in Socratic approach is that it is a matter of all participants contributing towards increased knowledge and understanding about the same genus – religion. However, the method the Guru applied as he had dialogue with holy persons of varied traditions at many different places must have been akin to the one we see in his composition '*Sidha Gosti*' as included in the Guru Granth Sahib: it is in nature critical of the practices which deviate from the core of religion. Also, there may have been some instances of inter-religious dialogue prior to Guru Nanak (1469-1539) but his '*Sidha Gosti*', as included in the Guru Granth Sahib (first compiled in 1604), has perhaps been the first written extant document. It also happens to be a genuinely authentic version of the dialogue the Guru had with the *siddhas*: herein various *siddhas* put many searching questions to the Guru who answers their queries with courtesy and confidence. Sobriety and serenity are maintained throughout and the aim is to realize truth.

The closing decades of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century was a period of great churning. It was the time when the Western imperialism was at its peak which had made the Westerns (i.e. Christians) overconfident and talk about evangelizing the entire world in that very generation (for details, see John Mott, *The Evangelization of the World in this Generation,* 1900): obviously, it was not an accurate reflection of the teachings of their religion or founder of their religion. The Christian missionaries who were patronized by the imperial government were taught that "the Sikhs may prove more accessible to scriptural truth than the Hindus and Muhammedans", though most of the converts came from amongst the Hindus and Muslims. Back in India, each religious tradition was trying to encounter these Christian efforts by setting up various organizations to stop conversions from their faith and bring back those who had already been converted. Among the Muslims associations like Himayat-i-Islam were set up for this purpose. The Shuddhi Sabha (1893), established originally by an individual for the 'reconversion' to Sikhism of those who had earlier converted to Christianity or Islam, later on enjoyed the support of the Singh Sabha as well as Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Sabha, and others also: the Singh Sabha was more focused on religious reform and education but the Arya Samaj, a product of the

complex of Aryan superiority that started with the Germans and the Calcutta School of oriental scholarship, insistence that Sikhism is not an independent religion but a part of the vast Hindu complex brought the two into polemical relationship: Sikhism was, like any other newly emerging religion, then quite aggressive about its distinct identity. Sir Khem Singh Bedi, a direct lineal descendant of Guru Nanak, added fuel to this polemic by saying that Sikhs are not separate from Hindus. Bawa Narain Singh also published a book supporting the view that the Sikhs are Hindus. Many from the Sikh faith joined the debate vehemently arguing in favour of an autonomous faith with its own history, philosophy, scripture, religious symbols, etc. One of them, Bhai Kahn Singh took upon himself to refute Narain Singh's arguments and wrote a book *Ham Hindu Nahin* (We, i.e. Sikhs, are not Hindus) which was first published in 1899.

Interestingly, Christianity and Christian Church were at the forefront in devaluing other faiths, cultures and worldviews with a view to converting from other faith-communities but they also happen to take the first initiative for the establishment of an organization which provides a common platform to all major religions of the world to learn from one another and thus to bring about harmony among them. The first such organization to come up was the Parliament of World's Religions (1893) which stressed the importance and need for inter-religious dialogue in the modern world. Of course, there were several individual efforts to understand the truth of other religions: Martin Forward includes St Paul and Emperor Akbar also in this category. However, it was the Parliament of World Religions which provided platform to almost all major religious traditions to come together and reflect on ways and means to bring about harmony in inter-religious relations. Ten great religious traditions of the world – Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Shintoism and Taoism – were represented in this Parliament: unfortunately, Sikh religion remained unrepresented. Hinduism was represented by Swami Vivekananda, a follower of Ramakrishna. He spoke on the truth of all religions which attracted the attention of all participants and his views are still relevant in regard to inter-religious dialogue.

Following the Parliament of World Religions, many more organizations have sprung up especially in the West. In fact, inter-religious misunderstandings and tensions cropped up alongside the migration to Western countries of the Asian people who happened to belong to entirely different religions and cultures. The reasons behind such

tensions were not purely religious but it did create problems between different religious communities. The first important such organization was the World Congress of Faiths founded by Sir Francis Younghusband in 1936 though there have been examples of certain individuals from the West who showed genuine interest in other especially Asian religions. Soon the World Congress of Faiths became a kind of inter-faith movement and produced some well-known scholars like Marcus Braybrooke, Alan Race, *et al.* in the field of inter-faith studies. Such organizations, both in India as well as abroad, have been contributing a lot in providing at least theoretical basis for respectful acceptance of the cherished beliefs of others as alternative ways of belief and practice.

But there is much more work that needs to be done especially in the Indian context where, unlike in the Western world, trend is leading towards intolerance of religious plurality. In the medieval India, some fanatic Muslim ecclesiastical authorities were able to exploit the then political authority to serve their ends, and it remains a fact of history that this caused much tension and conflict in society resulting in untold misery for the poor hapless masses. The Sikh Gurus who stood for freedom of conscience had to suffer because of such an exclusivist religious policy of the contemporary Mughal government: Guru Arjan and Guru Tegh Bahadur had to lay down their lives. This also happened to be one of the major reasons for the downfall of the Mughal empire. Now India is no doubt a secular democratic republic as described in its constitution but most of the political parties trying to rule India or parts of India are based on religion and/or caste: each one of them has its political base in the vote-bank of one or the other religious community or caste. Of late divisive politics being played by some political parties supported by a section of the religious classes with a certain mind-set has become a cause of concern. They fail to understand that the cultural and religious plurality of the country is an asset to the Indian federal structure, and any harm to it is sure to result in tragic consequences for the country as a whole.

The above scenario is just an example to state the fact and not a reflection on the nature of any religion: we do not tend to suggest that either Hinduism or Islam is exclusivistic in nature. There are many sane voices in both the traditions trying to present their respective faiths in their true perspective but tragedy of the present situation is that ecclesiastical authorities dominate and the academics have been marginalized. The situation is not much better with the Sikhs. The Sikh intelligentsia is either isolated or has become subordinate to the

political and ecclesiastical class. They stress the idea of acceptance of religious plurality, the need and importance of dialogue to bring about inter-religious harmony as stated in their scripture, and many times also feel elated comparing their scriptural ideal with the practices of others. No one dares confront the ecclesiastical or political authorities on the issues that go against their scriptural truth for fear of a backlash: even the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, a premier institution of the Sikhs, has failed to come up as a model of Sikh ethos. Scholars and activists in all religious traditions must accept the social reality of religious plurality in India and try and relate it to what their spiritual preceptors and scriptures stated.

There is now hardly a place in the world where the entire population has the same religious beliefs and practices. Even within the same faith-community, there are different beliefs and practices, thus further dividing a religious community into sects and sub-sects. Different faith-communities today are next-door neighbours to each other, and everybody is the spiritual neighbour of everyone else in the world. They not only meet but interpenetrate; they not only meet each other but jointly face common problems and they will have to work jointly to try to solve them. Unfortunately, however, they remain only a "medley of peoples," and they mix but do not combine together, each group holding on to its own religion, its own culture and language, its own ideas and ways. As individuals they meet, but only in the market place, in buying and selling. This is a plural society, with different sections of the community living side by side, but separately, within the same political unit. In this pluralist society, "it is morally not possible actually to go out into the world and say to devout, intelligent, fellow human beings: 'We are saved and you are damned', or We believe that we know God, and we are right; you believe that you know God, and you are totally wrong.'"[12]

The need of the day is that different faith-communities collaborate with one another by learning to live together as partners in the world of religious and cultural plurality. They need to transform the world society into a world-community, and inter-religious understanding has to be the bedrock of a happy and harmonious life of this world-community. In spite of all the scientific and technological advancement that has been made and all the material comforts which man has achieved, the objective of happiness still eludes him. Religion can help man in this quest for happiness, and all the different religions can make their contribution in this behalf, but for this they must be in continuous dialogue with one another and work together. We must

humbly confess that religion has been exploited, in the past as well as in the present, to divide humankind into mutually opposite groups. The cure from this malady ultimately lies in strengthening the sinews of religion, in the right understanding of religion and in the renewed appreciation of all religions.

The beliefs and emotions of people especially in India are profoundly impacted by religion. Consequently, people often find it hard to be objective and dispassionate about the faiths of others. Each religion requires strong commitment, and generally people avoid any serious attempt to understand a religion they do not belong to, without caring that their religious commitment does not necessarily mean that they should be blind to the virtues of the faiths of others. The failure to hear God's Word in religions other than our own and to continue living in the mistaken belief of the superiority of our religion is clinging to falsehood. Such feelings can be and are easily exploited to incite inter-community hatred and violence: Knitter perceives a causal link between the two and says: "When peace-filled religious people proclaim defensively that the militants (either the 'terrorists' or 'imperialists') are misusing and exploiting their religion, they must ask themselves why it is so easy for extremist leaders or politicians to exploit their religion. They must ask themselves whether claims of superiority – claims to have "the only Savior" or the "last revelation" or "the highest enlightenment" - are among the primary reasons why their religion is so easily used as a divine seal of approval for violence."[13]

<div align="center">IV</div>

In sum, we tend to agree that no religion describes ultimate Reality 'truly, in complete detail and with any certanty' and this we feel necessitates the need to share our experiences and insights with others and learn from the experiences and insights of others. This is possible only through dialogue as it is in this process that we learn more about other religions and have more – though not full - knowledge of the ultimate Reality. Since God's voice is not limited to any particular language or religion and no word is God's last word, we must remain in constant genuine dialogue with other religions. Only this can help us comprehend Reality and listen to His message. That is also necessary for our survival in today's religiously plural world.

  The need to bring about peace among religions through inter-religious dialogue deserves to be addressed with added responsibility and urgency in the world today. In the past, the religion of the other was, in practice, the religion of a completely different cultural environment

practiced by people living outside of our own limited world: one communicated with it only on the periphery of one's own history. But the last century or so has changed this wide, big world into a global village wherein different religious communities live like next-door neighbours. Each such community believes in a different faith which has as much spiritual vitality as any other. In such a pluralist society the old missionary exclusivist attitude is not just inexcusable but is surely dangerous.[14] We need to celebrate this plurality of religions, approve it and cherish it and have an 'authentic and genuine' dialogue between religions because there can be no peace among religions so long as each thinks of itself as uniquely superior to others. And, a constructive and meaningful dialogue can take place only when there is acceptance of all religions as different but valid relationships to the Ultimate Reality.

Thus, we need to accept that there is a vital connection between the mutual relationship among different religions and peace in the world, and we need to strengthen the sinews of religion if we want peace in the world. There should be great and meaningful dialogue among religions to ensure amicable and peaceful relationship amongst religions. To continue meaningful inter-religious dialogue, each religion must give up its claim to superiority. The egocentric and aggressive posture, which is sometimes justified by a religion in its earlier stage of evolution when it has to establish its own identity, must be replaced by an attitude of understanding and appreciation: the vision of love and common fellowship inherent in all religions needs be revived and emphasized. We must also realize that all great world religions with their diverse teachings and practices constitute different paths to the supreme good, and they need be accepted and appreciated as such. But all this is possible only through dialogue - greater, meaningful and transformative - among the plurality of religions.

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