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Triple Dialogue as a Pedagogy for Asia: Learning Together with the Other

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Noel Sheth was a Sanskritist and a much sought after Indologist of high repute. Through his teaching and research, the seminars and conferences he participated in, the papers he presented and published, his most significant contribution was in dialogue. It would seem that dialogue was for him really a way of life, both at the personal and the professional level. This paper is meant as an acknowledgement and affirmation of Noel the dialogist. Taking a cue from The Federation of Asian Bishop's (FABC) call for a tripe dialogue, with the poor, with cultures and with religions, the paper indicates the outlines of such a multi-focal, pluri-dimensional dialogue so crucial for our world and particularly in Asia today.

1. Terms of Discourse

Dialogue is readily described as communicative exchange. However, it is more comprehensive than the "communicative rationality" of Habermas, which he defines as: "oriented to achieving, sustaining and reviewing

consensus – and indeed a consensus that rests on the intersubjective recognition of criticisable validity claims”. (Habermas 1984: 17).

The nature of dialogic communication focuses less on rational meaning than on hermeneutical meaningfulness. Moreover, to be credible, dialogue must be sensitive to the differences of local situations, and to be effective it must consider their commonalities as well differences and thus develop an overall architecture for a more universally sustainable dialogue.

The Hermeneutics of Dialogue

For Panikkar ‘dialogue’ is a most fundamental condition of our existence. It is our way of being.

“Dialogue is, fundamentally, opening myself to another so that he might speak and reveal my myth.... Dialogue is a way of knowing myself and of disentangling my own point of view from other viewpoints and from me.” (Panikkar, 1983: 242)

‘Myth’, Panikkar understands as a pre-rational, not an irrational but rather a trans-rational, comprehension, “the horizon of intelligibility” (ibid: 101) that can only be expressed in symbol and metaphor. Once it is rationally articulated, myth is demythicised and then develops into an ‘ideology’, which in this context Panikkar describes as: “the more or less coherent ensemble of ideas that make up critical awareness.” (ibid. 21)

Gadamer explains how “to be in conversation, however, means to be beyond oneself as if to another.” For, as he insisted in 1960 all genuine dialogue must be premised on an

authentic hermeneutic: “to recognise oneself (or one’s own) in the other and find a home abroad-- this is the basic movement of spirit whose being consists in this return to itself from otherness.” (Gadamer 1975: 15) But we would emphasise a further implication of such dialogical hermeneutics: “the challenge to recognise otherness or the alien in oneself (or one’s own)” (Dallmayr 1989: 92).

‘Difference’, then, as Gadamer insists “stands at the beginning of a conversation, not at its end,” (Gadamer 1989: 113) awaiting the moment of coherence, of fulfilment, of a ‘fusion of horizon’ that will complete the hermeneutic circle and set it off again for us – “we who are a conversation”. (ibid.: 110) For we are constructed and deconstructed in dialogue with ourselves and others. Indeed, “the conversation that we are is one that never ends.” (Gadamer 1989: 95) For dialogue and conversation are intrinsic to the human condition, the very language of our existence, the essential hermeneutic of all our experience. For “dialectics is the optimism of reason. Dialogue is the optimism of the heart.” (Panikkar 1983: 243) Thus we can speak of a ‘dialectical dialogue’ which would pertain to the encounter of ideologies, while a ‘dialogical dialogue’ would be more pertinent to the meeting of myths.

We must dare beyond the constraints of dialectical reason, which no doubt has its uses – and limitations. In dialogue the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are both discovered and enriched, the cultural ‘other’ and especially the ‘counter-cultural other’, within my own culture and across other cultures too. For as we unveil our ‘self’ in the ‘other’, and the ‘other’ in our ‘self’, we will find that our deepest identity and bonding transcends all differences in an immanent I-thou communion. It is this that makes a dialogue pedagogic: learning together with and from each other.

However, a dialogue within is an imperative for a dialogue without. An intrapersonal dialogue is the precondition for an interpersonal one: openness within the self so that one is open to other and not locked in a 'walled-in consciousness'. So too is an intracommunity dialogue an imperative for an intercommunity one. It is precisely such openness that overcomes our prejudgments, our prejudices, the unconscious ideologies and mind-sets, which eventually can only bring a 'clash of civilisations'. If dialogue is to be pedagogic then there must be a "fusion of horizons", each side learning from the other, meeting on common ground to journey together to higher ground.

Human beings are meant to be interrelated and interactive, not isolated and alone. Yet, there is always the danger of celebrating our own 'difference' in isolation and seclusion from others, and not in dialogue with them. We find examples of such 'withdrawal', both personal and group, among fundamentalists/radicals of various persuasions: religious communes, utopian communities, even political parties and academic guilds... This 'shades over into the celebration of indifference, non-engagement and indecision' (Gadamer 1989: 90). Such an inwardly turned dialogue eventually becomes a monologue, whether of individuals or groups. This inbreeding can only lead to a genetic decline of the group's cultural and intellectual DNA. It further negates creative pluralism, undermines respectful tolerance and destroys any real possibility of a dialogue across differences with the other.

The Asian Senario

The socio-political trajectories of Asian societies though their various stages of development from agro-

rural to urban industrial societies are spread across a wide spectrum of developmental models and political ideologies. Consequently, there are wide variations in the levels of poverty and deprivation, of civil liberties and democratic rights, of religious and cultural toleration, both in intensity and scope, across societies and within each as well. Consequently, there are multiple modernities unevenly spread: whereas some regions are highly advanced other locales are left behind in an earlier historical age; some strive for a just and decent society, other have settled into authoritarianism and suppression. Most Asians live in several different centuries and different scenarios simultaneously, even within their national boundaries.

Yet there are commonalities in the 'family resemblance' (Wittgenstein 1958: 14) of those Asian cultures and religions which are premised on an understanding of a cosmos beyond or rather outside historical time. These developed locally and spread geographically to other distant Asian civilisations. But they were largely within the continent, at least till 20th century. Abrahamic cultures and religions also have a common 'family resemblance' which is premised on divine revelations within human history. These are at times perceived as 'foreign' to Asia. But this is really a perception coloured by the colonial experience and domination of the West. They are very much Asian, or rather West Asian where they originated and from where they spread over to other parts of the continent and beyond.

All this makes for an intriguing Asian mosaic with positive possibilities for complementarities and exchange, but also real dangers of misunderstanding and conflict. Hence when the Federation of Asian Bishops (FABC) calls for a threefold dialogue, with the poor, with cultures,

with religions, the purpose must be defined in terms of it a liberating, enriching, transformational promise. Such a dialogue must be both inclusively Asian and open to the world, universally global, and concretely local.

The Church in Asia must outgrow its colonial past to evolve into an authentic Asian Church, contributing to and learning from the Church universal in a pedagogic dialogue. In developing a contextual theology for this evolution Peter Hai lists: “five of its major characteristics, which complement and enrich each other: (1) a synthetic contextual character, (2) a similarity between the FABC’s theological methodology and that of Latin American liberation theologies, (3) a faith seeking dialogue, (4) an approach that encourages theological pluralism and aims to achieve harmony, and (5) a development that constitutes a paradigm shift in theology” (Hai 2006).

In its Sixth Plenary in 1995 in Manila, the FABC recognised the specificities of the Asian churches and called for “a movement toward the triple dialogue with other faiths, with the poor and with cultures.” The context for this triple dialogue must necessarily address the Asian situation characterised by three inescapable conditions: economic poverty, cultural diversity and popular religiosity. (Pieris 1988) For in Asia voluntary poverty still has a religious value represented as detachment from earthy goods and desires; popular religiosity runs too deep among our peoples to be easily dismissed and expresses religious values that must not be discounted, rather carefully and empathetically discerned for the genuine faith in which it is embedded; our cultural and religious is an inescapable reality not just to be accepted but to be celebrated in authentic Asian religious traditions.

Most recently two developments have opened new horizons of possibilities for renewal and reform for both the Catholic Church and the Society of Jesus: the election of Pope Francis on 13th March 2013, who has brought a tsunami of change in the Church; and increasing inequality and intolerance across the spectrum. Both events have significant and critical relevance for the Church and the society in Asia. This is the ecclesial context for our pedagogic dialogue in Asia.

The Church in Asia is a very small minority in a very large and enormously complex, and increasingly problematic social situation. It has still not shaken off its colonial past and though Christians are a tiny percent in the population they are still a significant presence there. We must learn in dialogue with the other: the poor, the anawim of the Bible, those culturally and religiously different, the neighbour, the stranger. As Pope Francis said in his address to the conclave before his election: the Church cannot be a ‘self-referential’, ‘worldly Church’ it must be a “Church which evangelizes and comes out of herself, the *Dei Verbum religiose audiens et fidente proclamans*”, hears and proclaims the word of God. (Dei Verbum No.1) In his speech to the pre-conclave general congregation of cardinals, he left us a compelling image of Jesus of this Church-for-the-world, “in which Jesus knocks from within so that we will let him come out” (Vatican Radio 2013).

This makes the call and challenge of a triple dialogue in the Asian Church both distinctive and critical for the Church Universal too and so is pedagogic for both. But it needs to be energised by the Spirit continuously: *ecclesia semper renovanda, ecclesia semper reformanda*, or in Luther’s expression *ecclesia semper purificanda*.

2. Dialogue as Liberation: Learning from the Poor

The Contemporary Crisis

In Asia the transition from tradition to modernity, rural to urban, agriculture to industrialisation has been uneven and inequitable. It has failed to deliver on its promise of a better world for all. The development model pursued has left an unconscionably large and increasing desperate poor population trapped in their deprivation in South Asia. Even those countries that have achieved rapid levels of growth have mounting social and political tensions that could put the gains at serious risk, as in China. And where economic affluence has arrived there was a crippling, lingering stagnation, like Japan. Others are stymied by multiple conflicts and gross inequalities, e.g., India. Rather than tinkering with the present system, we need another more sustainable model of development that is just and egalitarian, participative and solidary, not a top-down neo-liberal globalisation.

The capital intensive model, whether led by the state or private enterprise has resulted in endemic inequalities and polarisation across multiple dimensions. Authoritarian leaders come to power by fair means or foul and precipitate a majoritarianism that marginalises minorities. Not surprisingly those in the lowest strata of society, the most vulnerable and disfranchised people become scapegoats as collective discontents simmers and boils over, and the discontents of modernity are visited on refugees, migrants, minorities, the weak and vulnerable. Consumerist individualism breaks down social solidarity into an atomised mass society where mass leaders find a gullible

following. Defensive communitarianism divides society into impervious and hostile compartments.

The economic inequalities of class in an earlier century precipitated working classes that in places called for a class war. After two devastating world wars this was largely defused by the welfare state. But half a century later, in spite of a remarkable decrease in absolute levels of poverty the world over and in Asia and the in developing countries, relative poverty, that is the differences between the rich and the poor, has jumped to unsustainable levels worldwide, even in poor countries. The evidence for this can be seen in the recent populist, majoritarian mass politics, in rich and poor countries alike that is compounded by nationalism and migration, and internal displacement. And as always it is the poor and minorities that are the worst off.

In a capitalist society where gross inequalities are ingrained over generations, class antagonisms can build up beyond class struggle into class war. The welfare state has helped to mitigate this, but a neoliberal capitalism is dismantling it and once again institutionalising a global free market with disastrous consequences for the vulnerable poor. Asia is seeing the worst of this. Thomas Piketty's monumental work on *Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century* (2014) challenges the conventional wisdom of neoliberal economists. He demonstrates how over centuries the system reproduces itself and grows as it embeds inequality. This is "the fundamental force for divergence $r > g$ " (Piketty 2014: 25): meaning that return on capital is generally higher than economic growth. In such a system class becomes caste, as status is inherited with capital rather than achieved through merit. But he is positive about remedial interventions in the system:

“There are nevertheless ways in which democracy can gain control over capitalism and ensure that the general interest takes precedence over private interest while preserving economic openness and avoiding protectionist and nationalist reactions.” (Piketty 2014: 1)

Pope Francis has been severely indicting the profit driven, free-market system as inhuman and contrary to the Gospel values. His first encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, on the Joy of the Gospel articulated a critique of the present economic systems. It is premised on the basics Catholic social teaching, and his second, *Laudato Si* (Praise be) an even more emphatic rejection of it in the context of the ecological crisis consequent on climate change and consequent environmental degradation.

Thus the inequities of class and caste, precipitate hostilities of ethnicity and religion, negate the life-chances of the weaker sections of our peoples; the violence of religious fundamentalism that traumatises dissenting individuals and minority groups; political extremism hijacks human rights; the individualist consumerism of a market driven economy and money power displaces human concerns; invidious competition has been institutionalised to discount collective cooperation; overt success and public recognition for individuals are valued far more than the silent sacrifice and the unacknowledged contribution of persons;... these are just some of the characteristics of our social situation against which we must build counter-communities of solidarity for justice.

Solidarity for Justice

In this problematic context the individual pursuit of happiness and success displaces the common good and

threatens to sunder our societies. To address this we need another developmental model for liberating the poor: solidarity must stand against alienation. But this will require a counter-culture communitarianism, not a self-centred individualism of the 'me generation', but on an 'other' centred social ethic of persons-for-others; a culture that does not place person and community in contradiction, but is premised on a complementarity of a person-in-community and a community-of-persons. It cannot be a community in which we pursue an illusory 'progress' for the privileged few, while we leave the disinherited masses left behind. All this is even further exacerbated by the contemporary neo-liberal globalization.

We cannot be content to be ruled by the manipulative and elitist politics so current in societies today and the inequalitarian economic models they pursue. Rather we must strive for a more sustainable and equitable economy, a more transparent and participative polity. Together we need to get beyond the individualist consumerism that is corroding our cultures across the continent and exorcise the aggressive religious fundamentalisms and the violent conflicts it generates and then exploits. We need a participative down-up developmental process coordinated by a top-down facilitation.

In other words, we must build a counter-cultural community that will seek 'another development' and an 'alternative politics' for a multicultural, a pluri-religious society, both on the national as well as the international scene. We must believe, as the World Social Forum keeps affirming: "Another World is Possible!": where economic status is not skewed, cultural identities are inclusive and religions traditions are harmonious. But to take such a counter-culture seriously, we need to articulate a value frame of reference in

which we function and evaluate ourselves critically against the vision and inspiration of a counter-cultural community of solidarity, where the personal good of each is the common good of all. This is the only way to decolonise ourselves from the neoliberal capitalism encircling global village.

An authentic contrast faith-community of Christians has much to offer here not just in terms of the vision of the kingdom: a reign of peace and justice, reconciliation and harmony, of beauty and truth. It can also point to a road map to get there: through renunciation and self-denial, with faith and hope, love and joy. This is what the Christian vision must be animated by: the experiences of its mystics and prophets; an articulation of a contextualised theology of liberation for all, yet preferentially for the poor, the last and the least.

Such a vision must have been so evocatively articulated in Dec 4 of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (1974-75), “Our Mission Today” as the “the service of faith and the promotion of Justice”: “If we have the humility and the courage to walk with the poor, we will learn from what they have to teach us what we can do to help them. ...to help themselves: to take charge of their personal and collective destiny.” (G. C. 32 Dec. 4. No. 50)

In practical terms this will demand a pedagogic dialogue with the poor in an action-reflection praxis, a bottom-up process that reaches out to and embraces the whole of society in this movement.

What sets the context for his preferential option for the poor and the promotion of justice, is not clerical bureaucratic administration but the Christian charism of love. Pope Francis is foregrounding once again a vision and mission

for our world that was earlier articulated emphatically at the Latin American Bishops conferences at Medellin in 1968, Puebla in 1979, Santo Domingo in 1992. It was affirmed for the universal Church in World Synod of Bishops in 1971 on “Justice in the World”:

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.” (No. 6)

And again in the *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) reaffirms this in Nos. 25- 39, and rhetorically asks: “how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man?” (No. 31)

This is a vision that still awaits a more comprehensive and convincing expression in the mission of the Church today, to be a truly prophetic Church in a world of “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen 1899: 64) and desperate poverty; of power as the instrument of the privileged few and not at the service of the powerless multitudes; of the pursuit of self-referential individual goals not the common good of all. On 16th March, speaking to the media soon after his election, referring again to his choice of patron, Pope Francis left us a compelling vision for our mission: “Oh, how I wish for a Church that is poor and for the poor” (Reuters 2013).

A pedagogic dialogue with the poor must be premised on an option for the poor that embrace both, faith and justice; a faith that does justice, and a justice premised on Biblical

faith. Our faith in God includes our love of God, but this is authenticated by our love of neighbour, especially the least and the last among them. Our promotion of justice is for all, but it is authenticated by our option for the poor. Biblical faith is not just intellectual consent, *fides qui*, but a total surrender to God, *fides qua*. This is the faith of the anawim of God. Moreover, Biblical justice necessarily includes forgiveness and reconciliation, which lead to peace and harmony. This is the justice of the prophets of God.

The poor have much to teach us about faith because in their life-situation, so vulnerable and always precarious, they have only their God as their one faithful protector. They experience endemic injustices at the bottom of society so their longing for a liberating justice is existential and genuine. Their very presence in our society challenges our lives with the question: Am I my brother's keeper? It confronts us with the affirmation of Jesus: as long as you did this to the least of my brothers you did it to me. It challenges all to learn from the poor even as we try "to help them help themselves". And dialogue is surely the best pedagogy for this. The poor are both, the most prepared to hear the word of God and the best able to witness to it. Surely we have so much to learn from them.

3. Dialogue as Enrichment: Learning from the Cultural Other

Clash of Civilisations or Dialogue of Cultures

There is no denying the historical violence precipitated by collective differences of varying degrees and multiple kinds: political-economic, religio-cultural. Today such collective violence is escalating everywhere. But there has

also been exemplary creative synergy between different peoples, both across and within national borders. For social traditions do change even to the point of evolving into very new and rather different ones. Human identities based on them follow suit, or else there will inevitably be different degrees of dissonance and disorientation, as happens in times of rapid and radical social change when cultural traditions do not follow suit, or even resist the changes. Once we realise that cultures are socially constructed and so can be deconstructed, and we accept that religious affiliation to be a matter of freedom of conscience when this is informed and responsible, then the common concerns that bind the human community together can be brought back to centre stage in our shared lives to reverse the spiralling violence, to heal old wounds, to create a new future.

However, we cannot avoid the grim reality of divisions that mark our societies. For if common human concerns bring us together, different social interests set us apart. We cannot of course wish this away, nor can we impose a uniformity or enforce a consensus on them and remain democratic and free. Too often the way of settling such differences was by confrontation and controversy, wherein each party tries not only to prove its own position, but at the same time to demolish the one or the other of the two in a binary opposition. This age of controversy settled nothing and neither did the religious wars it precipitated. For particularly with matters of personal and collective identity and dignity, human beings cannot be forced, or imposed indefinitely on beyond a point.

Yet there remains the temptation to fall back on inhuman and 'final solutions'! Ethnic cleansing and genocide await us at the end of this road. To escape such a scenario, a dialogue of cultures and religions is imperative, and for this we must

overcome our prejudgments as the necessary precondition to find common ground from which to move to higher ground together. This further demands an acceptance and tolerance of 'the other' without which no dialogue is possible, only debate at best and violence at worst. Globalisation has brought us closer, but it has not helped to make us more accepting of each other. Rather the opposite seems to have happened in the global village.

Celebrating Diversity

Yet diverse social groups coming together in some kind of a more inclusive social order, like a common polity, a common market, shared language and history, can construct an overarching civilisational order over time. Under such an umbrella diverse cultures and sub-cultures can survive and thrive as different "designs for living" (Kluckhohn and Kelly 1945: 97) and "total ways of life". (Linton 1945: 30) In our world today plurality is an inescapable given, whether political-economic or socio-religious or ethnic-linguistic or otherwise. For the complexity an imploding globalisation in our modern world cannot be contained in any single worldview (Rahner 1969: 26), nor can a dominant one be imposed without destroying its freedom and openness.

In Asia, plurality is so deeply and intricately woven into the very fabric, the whoop and waft of our society that any attempt to homogenise it can only be suicidal. Ways of coping with diversity range from indifference and non-engagement, all the way to affirmation and celebration. Given the intricacies of our social interdependence, the first approach can only end with a nihilistic relativism if it does not collapse in annihilating chaos. The second must open into ever deeper levels of tolerance and broader dimensions of engagement.

As an ideological response “pluralism” addresses this plurality with democratic equality and freedom. However, some common basis is necessary for social integration, involving some basic, even if minimal, orientation towards cooperation rather than conflict, lest the common meeting ground becomes the occasion for misunderstanding and hostility. This common basis can be shared histories and values, overlapping identities and interests.

We are now coming to value diversity as something potentially enriching and even uniting at a higher level of union. Such an enriching ‘communion’ or common union must inspire us not just to a ‘unity in diversity’, that accepts and respects differences, but rather to a ‘diversity in unity’, that appreciates and celebrates difference. (Kothari 1988: 20)

The danger is that a majoritarian uniformity marginalises minorities and creates an alienating hostility and even violent conflict between groups and communities. If these identities are exclusive, singular and solidary, rather than inclusive, multiple and fluid, then a resocialisation process will be needed lest fault lines get harden and mutual hostilities embedded. Such a situation must be anticipated and defused with a dialogue of cultures to create a climate of social tolerance and reciprocal acceptance. This is a precondition for a safe and stable, multicultural society.

Sadly, our social traditions of tolerance seems to be increasingly displaced from public life. If the present crisis of intolerance is to be reversed, these need to be revived and extended. We must distinguish levels and dimensions in our understanding of tolerance, lest the ideal of tolerance we aspire to and the limits to intolerance that we set become both impractical and naive.

Ideal of Tolerance

However, tolerance is more than a matter of conflict resolution and emancipation. A constructive and creative response to pluralism cannot mean mere endurance of, and resignation to differences. It must include something more positive: the active acceptance of, and even the celebration of plurality. It must be as multifaceted as the broad spectrum of social pluralities it addresses: from political ideologies to economic systems, intellectual worldviews to ethical values, religious beliefs to cultural patterns, ethnic divisions to geographic regions.

As a response to pluralism we can distinguish progressive levels in our understanding, all deriving from a deepening realisation of the reality, truth, satya, underlying our human situation; a reality that is radically pluralist and ultimately uniting, a truth that is essentially non-violent. These are not exclusive but rather overlapping dimensions and interpenetrating levels that form a continuous progression. This is the common ground we must seek for dialogue.

With Panikkar, we can distinguish several levels of tolerance (Panikkar 1983: 20-36): first, tolerance as a practical necessity: bearing with a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good. But such political pragmatism does not cut deep enough to sustain itself under the stress and strain of rapid social change. A second, further understanding of tolerance is based on the realisation of the essential limitations in any human grasp of truth or expression of reality: it must always be partial, it can never be complete. Such tolerance is but “the homage the finite mind pays to the inexhaustability of the Infinite” (Radhakrishnan 1927: 317). Such an intellectual awareness makes us accepting of what we do not understand and respectful of what we disagree with.

Beyond such acceptance and respect, however, we can still think of tolerance as a more positive and active moral imperative based on the ethics of doing good to others, of loving even our enemies. This is the third level of ethical or religious tolerance based on moral responsibility for the other and is often religiously inspired. But even in such an understanding of tolerance the 'different other' as the object of one's responsibility even love remains 'other'. Such 'objectivisation' of the other can only be transcended in a forth level of tolerance of what can only be called a spiritual or "mystical experience of tolerance," (Panikkar 1983 :23) where "one being exists in another and expresses the radical interdependence of all that exists," (ibid.) where the other is the completion, the enrichment, the extension of oneself; where the other is no longer in definitional opposition to one's self, but where old selves become one new 'self', at one with the Self, *tattvamasi*; where 'I' and 'thou' merge into the 'One I-Thou'!

There is a continuous spectrum across these various levels of tolerance. However, the level of we live is set by the way the 'self' perceives by the 'other': From perceiving the other as practical obstacle, to positive complement, to moral obligation, to mystical-spiritual fulfilment, our perception of the other is always complex and so the levels of tolerance will overlap.

Moreover, using the terms 'myth' and 'ideology' as explained earlier, there are two dimensions of tolerance; consensual ideologies underpin the pragmatic and intellectual tolerance; while

religious and spiritual tolerance is premised on shared myths

Limits of Tolerance

Any understanding that does not consider how limits must be set to tolerance, would be unviable and naïve. If we are to cope with intolerance, we must set the social context within which tolerance functions at any of the levels or in either of the dimensions mentioned earlier. If tolerance is to be a viable social option in a plural society, it must not be high-jacked by a chauvinistic intolerance. For a cynical intolerance can easily and unfairly outmanoeuvre a trusting tolerance. Hence the limits of tolerance must be set within a regime of ethical values and norms, human rights and sensitivities.

However, to be sustainable our tolerance must go beyond legal norms and human rights. It must be founded on positive values and driven in terms of: justice, truth, humanity, compassion, love ... It must be spelt out in behavioural norms that reflect these values: non-violence and respect for life, social solidarity and economic equality, political freedom and ethical truthfulness; and in gender relations in terms of equality and fairness. Our tolerance must express sensitivity to the 'other' in multiple ways in the diverse arenas of inter-personal and social encounter.

But if tolerance must include tolerating the intolerable, how do we set responsible limits to intolerance without abandoning our own tolerance and becoming intolerant ourselves? This brings us to the necessity of dialogue as the sine qua non of tolerance and vice versa. For no dialogue is possible without a common and mutually agreed-upon level of tolerance, which must be reached in dialogue. Often dialogue collapses precisely because levels of tolerance are so different that people talk past, rather than to each other.

A regressive reaction seeking a haven in this heartless world by privileging and romanticising earlier traditional societies and isolating ourselves in that cocoon is an inadequate and defensive response to the multicultural challenges we face today. Yet cultural nationalists do promote such surreal and unviable social and religious traditions so out of sync with our contemporary world. A cultural dialogue requires that we be open and rooted as well. Gandhi's aspiration can provide us with our best starting point here: "I do not want my house to be walled on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any of them" (*Young India*, June 1921: 170).

We are beginning to realise that uniformity is not the only or the most creative response to difference. Nor is mere co-existence a viable answer in an ever shrinking world. We need a dialogue of culture as a prelude to a dialogue of religions. Only then can we experience a *metanoia* in ourselves that will free us from the *paranoia* we have of each other. This is precisely what we can and must learn in inter-cultural dialogue.

4. Dialogue as Transformation: Learning from the Religious Other

Culture and Religion

Pascal wisely counselled: the heart has reasons that reason knows not of. (Pascal 1958: 222) Indeed, a genuine dialogue pertains less to the dialectical mind than to the compassionate heart. We are still coming to terms with the implications of religious freedom and cultural rights for different groups within a single society. Much of the

contemporary collective violence must be read in this context. Both culture and religion are symbol systems that bring meaning and motivation to individual and social life. But of the two, religion is the more fraught with a huge potential for explosive conflict because it is far more charged with emotion and passion than cultural ones.

Clifford Geertz's *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973) distinguishes the two. For him religion is a distinct domain within culture. Thus a culture "denotes an historically transmitted pattern or meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973: 89).

Whereas a religion is: "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seems uniquely realistic." (Geertz 1973: 90).

This explains why politics premised on the one or the other will then be qualitatively different and why religious identities are the more intractable of the two, especially in traditional religious societies. Moreover, when the two identities overlap and even merge, communities constructed on such identities are the more impervious and solidary.

Reason and Passion

Cultural and religious symbol systems are shared in society and across groups and communities in it. As such

they necessarily exist in the public domain. They cannot be isolated in a private one, for the public and private domains are in constant and interpenetrative interaction. As collective identities they find their most appropriate, though not exclusive space in civil society. When collective interest are polarised along the fault lines of sectarian identities, they precipitate an ‘identity politics’, more subject to passion which displace by an ‘interests politics’ more amenable to reason. For interest politics is premised on ideological and/or economic differences among peoples and mobilise people along class divides. A rational politics of compromise will help to defuse this. Identity politics polarises cultural and religious differences and easily fall into a zero-sum game.

Precisely because religious identities are so emotionally charged they are so readily co-opted to this politics of passion. And the more passionate, the more unreasonable and uncompromising this becomes. Far more than addressing the real interests and genuine concerns of people, this advantages group leaders, especially the extremists who claim to be better representatives of their peoples. Whether there is any substance to their exaggerated claims or not, they use them to consolidate their group behind their own leadership. Such negative identity politics readily spills over into violent conflict. Communal riots and civil wars are so often based on such retrograde politics.

Science and Religion

A dichotomy between science and religion results in a dialectic rather than a dialogue between the two. Thinking in such binary opposites is more typical of Western than Eastern thought, where faith and reason are complementary, not opposed ways of seeking the truth. Both must be

included in a more comprehensive understanding that opens to a genuine dialogue, not just between science premised on reason and religion premised on faith, but between religions as well. After all, more than just truth as knowledge, it is truth as reality, satya, that cannot be contradictory.

After a corrosive rationalism of modernity rubbished religion, in a post modernity critical reason has turned in on itself and now undermines our confidence in the older rationalist optimism. Religious revivalisms and fundamentalisms are spreading like inkblots across countries and continents. To address such issues we need to understand the limits of positivist science based on the experimental method, and the horizons of religious faith based on an experiential quest. Each must be able to interrogate the other's truth in a constructive dialogue rather than in an antagonistic debate. However, faith must respect the legitimate domain and methods of reason, which it turn must be sensitive to the belief convictions and value commitments of faith. We must steer ourselves off both a fideism that rejects reason in the domain of faith, and a rationalism which displaces faith with reason.

Beyond the incremental progress with experimentation, science proceeds with a 'paradigm shift' (Kuhn 1970) that is an intuitive leap of imagination to a new model of interpreting data to resolve old contradictions and open new perspectives. This is not based on experimental logic, though it is post factum authenticated by it. The popular use of scientific technology is without much understanding of the theories and techniques that underpin it. It is pragmatically accepted because it works. This is an uncritical use of science quite alien to the scientific mind. Such uncritical pragmatism eventually instrumentalises and dehumanises

science and leads to its misuse, as most obviously in modern warfare.

Religions are founded on the experience of charismatic persons whose teachings are institutionalised and experiences are ritualised into a tradition. This is meant to give later followers access to the original experiences and teachings. But these must be critiqued, interpreted and discerned to contextualise them in changing life-situations. A religious tradition must be renewed thus. This makes for a reasonable faith, not a blind one. Unfortunately, much of popular religiosity gets distanced from such faith and mixed with superstition and magic. People seek assurance and certainty in their insecure and fluid world. Faith experiences no *Cost of Discipleship*. (Bonhoeffer 1970) It easily blinds itself in dogmatism and fundamentalism which eventually consolidate into religious extremism, even fanaticism. When politicised into a religious ideology, this can precipitate horrific violence, especially when religion is put on the defensive, as with a belligerent secularism or rationalism.

Ashis Nandy (Nandy 1992: 80) distinguishes between 'religion as ideology' and 'religion as faith'. All ideologies can help to interpret a social situation, and they can be as dysfunctionally obscurantist: whether as religious fundamentalism or cultural nationalism, liberal capitalism or socialist Marxism. We need liberating and open ideologies, not closed and exploitative ones. Religious faiths too and can be oppressive or liberating, extremist or moderate. We need to recover "religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, and/or Sikhism, rather than wish that ordinary Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs will learn tolerance from the various fashionable secular theories of

statecraft.” (Nandy 1992: 86) Tolerance in both domains of faith and ideology is necessary to make dialogue viable.

Faith and Reason

The dichotomies between scientific reason and religious faith are but an extension of the dialectic between faith and reason. An interreligious dialogue cannot be premised on the one or the other because it must be underpinned by both. To facilitate such a dialogue the relationship between faith and reason must be clarified. Panikkar rightly insists on “Faith as a Constitutive Human Dimension” (Panikkar 1983: 187-229) and the content of faith must fulfil not negate the human, i.e., belief must humanise believers, not dehumanise them or demonise others. Tolerance then becomes the sign of ‘good faith’.

Here in a few sutras is an epigrammatic summary of our query: what does being ‘reasonable’ mean to faith, and again what does being ‘faithful’ to reason require? (cf. Heredia 2002: 41-51).

- Faith and reason are complementary not contradictory ways of seeking the truth;
- What we believe depends on whom we trust;
- A rational methodology transgressing its inherent limitations can never yield ‘rightly reasoned’ knowledge;
- Where we position ourselves influences how we reason;
- Whether or not we believe depends on our self-understanding;
- If to believe is human, then what we believe must make us more human, not less:

- Faith that is ‘blind’ is never truly humanising; faith that is not humanising, is to that extent ‘bad faith’;
- Only a self-reflexive, experiential methodology is meaningful to the discourse of faith; a rationalist-empirical one is alien to it;
- Act of faith is constitutively human it necessarily has a common religious basis across varying cultures and traditions;
- An inclusive humanism must embrace both ‘meaningful faith’, as well as ‘sensitised reason’;
- The dialectic between faith and reason must be pursued in the context of tolerance and dialogue or it will degenerate into a hostile debate across an unbridgeable divide.

Indeed, both faith and reason are imperative to bring a healing wholeness to our bruised, broken world.

Domains in Dialogue

Dialogue is surely more than a verbal exchange. It implies a reciprocity between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ that can take place in various types of encounter and exchange between persons and groups. Hence a complex and more nuanced understanding of dialogue requires a specification of various kinds of involvement of the ‘self’ with the ‘other’. As with tolerance, so too with dialogue, we must distinguish various domains and dimensions of this involvement with one another, for dialogue is surely more than a verbal exchange.

Recently Christians have been urged by the Church to engage in a fourfold dialogue (“Dialogue and Proclamation”,

Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Vatican City, 1991, no.42.):

1. “*The dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.”
2. “*The dialogue of action*”, in which we which we “collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people”.
3. “*The dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for god or the absolute”.
4. “*The dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seeks to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values.”

In our perspective, the dialogue of life is at the level of sharing and encounter of the myths we live by and, which then are deepened in the dialogue of religious experiences. This can be an even deeper level of not just mythic communication but mystical experience. The dialogue of action requires some level of ideological and political consensus, which can then be intensified and sharpened in a theological exchange. Thus life and experience are at the level of ‘myth’ and mysticism, action and theology at that of ‘ideology’ and politics, respectively.

In each of these areas of exchange, corresponding to the levels of tolerance delineated above, one can distinguish degrees of dialogue premised on differing understandings of the self and the other and the encounter between the two. Thus

at the pragmatic level of tolerance the other is perceived as the limitation of the self. Here dialogue becomes a practical way of overcoming differences, rather than by confrontation that could result either in the assimilation or in elimination of the other. At the intellectual level, where the other is seen as complementary to the self, dialogue seeks to overcome the limitations of the self with help of the other, rather than instrumentalise the other in the pursuit of self. At the ethical level the self accepts moral responsibility for the other. In this dialogue the self will reach out to the other to establish relationships of equity and equality. At the spiritual level, the other is perceived beyond a limitation or a complement or an obligation, as the fulfilment of the self. Here dialogue would call for a celebration of one another.

Raimundo Panikkar rightly insists that “dialogue is not a bare methodology but an essential part of the religious act par excellence” (Panikkar 1978: 10) In 1995 the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in Decree 5 gave a particularly relevant mandate for dialogue to the Jesuits: ‘to be religious today is to be inter-religious in the sense that a positive relationship with believers of other faiths is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism. (Dec. 5, No. 130) As Joshua Heschel insists, “No Religion is an Island” (Heschel 1991: pp. 3-22)

The imperative for dialogue can now be summed up in a few pertinent sutras:

***To be a person is to be inter-personal;
To be cultured is to be inter-cultural;
To develop is to participate and exchange;
To be religious is to be inter-religious;***

Psychologists have convinced us of the first; sociologists are trying to teach us the second; political economists are promoting the third; theologians are coming to realize the fourth.

4. Dialogue as Disarmament for Peace

Metanoia for Peace

For all the progress we might congratulate ourselves on, the last century has been perhaps the most violent century in human history. It still continues into the present. Asia has not been exempted from this. Violence is still the final arbitrator to conflicts and divisions that increasing riddles our societies and our world. War and terror is the last recourse when other arguments and appeals fail. A catalogue of the violence of these last years, genocides, atrocities, riots, terrorism, murders, lynchings, rapes, ... are merely the external evidence of the constant social tension between countries, regions, communities, groups, individuals, ... that never to go away but too easily escalate out of control.

Non-violence seems to be an idea whose time has passed. We must reverse the spiral of violence that engulfs us like a cyclonic tidal wave, and reflect together on what peace and harmony today might mean for us. For, while the quest for power remains one of our most insidious human temptations, the longing for peace is part of our deepest human yearnings too.

A sound and stable peace must be founded on such complementarity, not on domination. It must be "the fruit of justice". A just social order necessarily implies freedom if it is to be compatible with human dignity. Moreover, if the dialectical tension between justice and order is effectively

and constructively resolved, then we would have a third element in our understanding of peace that is harmony. This is a treasured Asian value. Each of these three elements, justice, freedom and harmony, can be described, but we still need to put them together in a collective “myth of peace”, (Heredia 1999) pursued both individually and collectively.

Vision and Mission

But for this dream to even begin to become a reality, we must divest ourselves of a great deal of, the presumptions and pre-options we have been, and still are being socialised into. We must not allow our history to control our destiny, we must come to terms with our collective memories and allow our wounded psyche to heal. More importantly for the dialogue among ourselves, and even within our ‘self’, this myth of peace must first be rooted in our hearts and minds, our cultures and religions. This was a most appropriate agenda in Pope Francis’s year of mercy, but it is a continuing enterprise, an always unfinished business.

Tragically modern man with his loss of innocence in a disenchanted world, has no longer any abiding myths. Today more than ever we need such bonding myths to sustain our cosmic vision, our world mission. Now myths are collective, never individual projects, and the ‘myth of peace’ is one in which we can all share. Certainly it is one whose time has now come in our tired and torn, broken and, bruised world. But as yet we have no such common myths. Even the symbols and images we use for peace are quite inadequate or needlessly divisive. The tragedy of modern humanity seems to be that it has too few creative and inspiring myths to live by and too many competing ideologies to die for. And so in

desperation we revive and cling to images and symbols that draw on the darkest recesses of our destructive potential.

If the myth of peace is to redeem us from such a future, it must become the common ground for our dialogues. This is the peace that is reflected in popular greetings, pax, shalom, salaam, shanti, ... that needs to found for us a brave new world. At this profound level of myth, peace can be an end in itself, as in fact so universally expressed by various salvation myths in religious traditions and utopian ideologies.

A Triple Dialogue

Against the background of the historical trajectory of violence in religious traditions, and the alarming escalation of religious and other kinds of terror today, a comprehensive tolerance becomes the sine qua non condition for a multi-dimensional dialogue across political-economic and socio-cultural and religious divides. As our globalising world implodes further, even continents cannot isolate themselves, nor can countries and communities immunise themselves from the escalating violence.

In the bewilderingly plurality of societies in our contemporary world, and some Asian societies, especially those in the middle East and South Asia, are more so than most, violent conflict often reaches an impasse. With the rapid social change and the insecurities it brings, with technologies of mass communication and mass mobilisation, of social media and individual connectivity, in which competing groups and conflicting interests implode, this impasse becomes a point of no return and no advance. National and local communities dig themselves into a kind of trench warfare. In such a war of attrition the one

alternative seems to be to withdraw into isolation, if that were possible at all; in a globalising world this would be dangerous and even unviable. The other is to mobilise for total war and mass destruction; this would be an inhuman price to pay even for the unlucky survivors.

To anticipate such a painful dilemma the viability of radical alternatives needs to be explored. We can surely find alternatives to make another world possible, where sustainable and regenerative technologies, participative and inclusive social systems, for free and equal citizens and communities are not beyond our reach even though not yet within our grasp. If we can disarm ourselves from the prejudgments and prejudices, the fears and hostilities wherein we seek security, we could make a just society a more viable reality, where the personal good of each is subsumed into the common good for all.

However, for this we need to distance ourselves from, and critically examine our vested interests and unconscious ideologies, our exclusive identities and intolerant fundamentalisms, hidden fears and inarticulate apprehensions, to put the old negativities on hold and be open to the new possibilities to set a creative agenda for peace and harmony. This implies a kind of disarmament from all negativities that vitiates this. It will demand a daring, courageous leap of faith, but if not us then who, if not now, then when!

A Pedagogic Dialogue

For a pedagogic dialogue with the poor we must first detach ourselves from our embedded vested interests and political ideologies, when these provide the strong armour against change for a better, more humane world, a more

just and fraternal society. Only when we put off this armour will we find the humility and the courage, the faith and commitment to walk with and learn from the poor to find our personal and collective destinies together. This is the liberation a pedagogic dialogue with the poor teaches us.

In a multicultural society, and Asian societies are more so than most, cultural conflict often becomes endemic. When cultural identities cease to be flexible and fluid but become solidary and exclusive, each cultural community digs itself into a kind of cultural trench warfare and once again a continuing war of attrition undermines our cultures. To defuse this we must cease absolutising our cultures as an ultimate good. Rather we need a “cultural disarmament” (Panikkar 1995), stepping back from our cultural entrenchments, bracketing away negative cultural identities and stereotypes, holding them in abeyance to facilitate a dialogue of cultures and come back to them less exclusive and more understanding, more open to, and appreciative of the cultural other with whom we can celebrate our diversity as a mutual enrichment. This involves seeking common ground in our shared cultural values and loyalties from which to move together to higher ground of a more enriched and creative culture. A pedagogic dialogue with cultures teaches us to find a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cultural other in myself and my cultural self in the other.

Similarly, in a society when a religious tradition is politicised it can explode into violence. Precisely because of its emotional charge of religious identities, such politicised religious violence becomes embedded and exorcising this demon may require a sustained effort over generations. We need to incisively critique our fundamentalist extremes

and inflexible dogmatisms of all hues in our religious traditions, and bracket our differences to open ourselves to finding common ground in our religious beliefs and commitments to move together to the higher ground of a transformed religious tradition, with a renewed spirituality and mysticism. A pedagogic dialogue with religions can teach us to deepen our understanding of other religious traditions and our own as well.

A disarmament of our political-economic ideologies, as well as our religio-cultural prejudgments will demand a radical change of heart, a social metanoia from a history of violence to a commitment to non-violence, from the pursuit of power to the quest for peace, from a pragmatic to a deeper level of tolerance, from a self-righteous monologue with ourselves to a truly open and equal dialogue.

The threefold dialogue, with the poor, with cultures, with religions that the FABC calls for must be premised on the Gospel myth of the kingdom of peace and justice, of equality and fellowship, of freedom and love is not a blue print but a vision, a prophetic critique of our present and a call to build a future with faith and hope together, already now but not fully yet.

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