

OPEN ACCESS: “EPISTEMOLOGY”

eISSN: 2663-5828;pISSN: 2519-6480

Vol.8 Issue 9 June 2021

RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO THE PERSPECTIVES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

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Abstract: A lot has changed after two major developments in the world; globalization and September 11 attacks. Intelligentsia of the world from all walks of life starts thinking how to face contemporary challenges by incorporating different nations and religions of the world. Religious discourses remained at the top in all corners of the world, addressing the issues that threaten peace of the world. Interreligious or interfaith dialogue got attention of all religions' adherents especially Christians and Muslims around the world. There are different models of interfaith dialogue emanating from theological, social and mission perspectives of religions and contemporary challenges of the modern world. Nature of theological perspective makes a difference in dealing with the followers of other religions, hence it is important to analyze theological factors involved in interfaith dialogue in both Muslim and Christian worlds. Concept of salvation is the major doctrine of theology that needs to be discussed in detail with reference to the perspectives of interfaith dialogue. In this paper an attempt will be made to study critically theological perspectives of interfaith dialogue with reference to Quranic principles of da'wah and salvation.

Keywords: interfaith dialogue, exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, religious identity, da'wah, salvation.

Defining Interfaith Dialogue

Charles A. Kimball defines Interfaith Dialogue as, “it is a conversation in which two or more parties seek to express their views accurately and to listen respectfully to their counterparts”¹, without hidden agendas or motives.² The purpose is to change and grow³ oneself and it is a virtue and a way of life.⁴ In order to do Interfaith Dialogue properly, a deep understanding of one's own faith along with an understanding and appreciation of the faith of the dialogue partner is a must.⁵ Hence a possibility of mutual learning⁶ in a respectful way through seeking similarities and differences in search of truth and constructive development rather than just an inconsequential end, otherwise it would lead more confusions.⁷

Isma‘īl Rājī al-Fārūqī⁸ (1921-1986) defines it as, “Dialogue is the removal of all barriers between men for a free intercourse of ideas, where the categorical imperative is to let the sounder claim to the truth win. The final effect of dialogue should be the establishment of truth and its serious free candid and conscious acceptance by all men.”⁹ Such a dialogue needs conviction, courage, and commitment. Keeping in view the above definitions, we may conclude them as, interfaith dialogue deals, to change or grow oneself, to transform oneself, to have a deep understanding of one's own religion and religion of the other, to discover or explore the truth, partner is considered different but equal, mutual respect and mutual learning and understanding, in obedience to truth, an opportunity, a channel of communication. These various aspects will help in understanding the issues at length. And in all this activity “the search for truth, however, must be carried out in a manner that is appropriate to the dignity of the human person and his social nature, namely by free inquiry with the help of teaching or instruction, communication and dialogue... Moreover, it is by personal assent that men must adhere to the truth they have discovered.”¹⁰

Objectives and Attributes of Dialogue

Objectives of Interfaith Dialogue are harmony and peacebuilding amongst people of different faiths,¹¹ increase mutual understanding, and good relations, and to remove misunderstanding and misconceptions, and “try to understand *others* as they want to be understood.”¹²

Catherine Cornille examines different models of dialogue and laments that most of them happen but go in vain, she analysis reasons and concludes in her book, ‘The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue’, that five attributes are necessary for the participants to observe to make the dialogue successful Humility, Conviction, Interconnection, Empathy, and Generosity.

Perspectives of Interfaith Dialogue

Since Interfaith Dialogue primarily deals with faith and theology, so it is pertinent to discuss three major perspectives of faith and theology with reference to interfaith dialogue, exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, and

these are the challenges in advocating and practicing interfaith dialogue. The first one is exclusivism, means no one can enter into the bliss of God unless he be a witness to Christ.¹³ The second is inclusivism which means other faith traditions have but a partial truth whereas Christianity has the full.¹⁴ This approach is related to Karl Rahner¹⁵ (1904-1984) who calls it 'Anonymous Christianity which means Christian in the making' and Raimondo Panikkar calls it 'Unknown Christ'. It means adherents of different religious traditions can be saved through this unknown ways of God, and this way is actually there in their tradition which they do not know or confess. But as a matter of fact this is not a simple issue, inclusivists do not say that being Muslims they may be saved but being Anonymous Christians they would be saved. He further says non-Christians may be saved not because of their own faith tradition but because they are, 'Anonymous Christians'.¹⁶ But the question is whether people of other faiths want to obtain salvation through some other tradition, a challenging issue while dealing Interfaith Dialogue. The third perspective is pluralism, according to this all religions are equally valid to claim salvation and if there are different religions they are because of their cultural values.¹⁷ These three perspectives have a direct relation to that of mission; missionary activities stand where the other is absolutely wrong, and hence mission and dialogue are incompatible way of approaching faiths because dialogue needs openness on both sides and hence mission is not suitable in interfaith dialogue. Similarly, without pluralism interfaith dialogue is not possible and with pluralism mission is not even required. John Azumah remarks that mission is basically to change the other and dialogue is to change the perception about the other.¹⁸

Exclusivism – a Critique

Exclusivists quote the Bible, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."¹⁹ And "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."²⁰ Most often Exclusivists do not participate in the process of interfaith dialogue and those who participate have a strong and invincible belief that others are absolutely wrong and only they hold the truth required for salvation. All the religions of the world are exclusivist in their traditional and historical perspectives. Evangelicals, fundamentalists, conservatives and mainstream Christians have no room for other religions. They would call them heretics, heresies, and hence, they do not go for dialogue, they intend to convert them rather. Thus, salvation is only for believers and hence not for non-believers.²¹ Therefore, if proponents of Interfaith Dialogue stand with classical stance of religion which means truth is one, then possibility of dialogue stands no more; whereas if they believe in postmodern perspective of reality or religion then the choice of Interfaith occurs. As Pratt analyzes that postmodernist does not accept any single mode of reality, or reality based on

some tradition, and they support plurality.²² Carl E. Braaten writes about exclusivism and Interfaith Dialogue as, "if Jesus is the unique and universal Savior, how can there be a dialogue with other religions?"²³ Milko Youroukov explains exclusivists with respect to interfaith dialogue, that they ignore even reject other faith tradition, they believe their interpretation matters in determining the truth rather than the truth itself matters, that is why they do not endorse dialogue and just believe in mission and proselytizing.²⁴

Inclusivism – a Critique

The inclusivists position is to have a dialogue because in this position *the other* is either anonymous or unknown, meaning thereby, able to have salvation but through Christ, for example Karl Rahner's concept of 'Anonymous Christians' which means, the possibility that non-Christians can find in their own religious structures an implicit faith in Christ, and Raimon Panikkar's 'Unknown Christ of Hinduism'. This idea then clearly demonstrates that it is not the individual but God through Christ Himself reaches to the individual to give him His mercy. That is why it is Anonymous. But again the salvation will definitely be on the basis of or through Christ, as well as, it is God who wished that the humanity may be saved.

Inclusivism – an Inside or Outside Phenomenon

The question arises whether the position of inclusivism emerged from the religion itself or it is the demand that imposed from the outside, from the trends of modern or postmodern era, from the challenges of globalization etc. and the answer we find in Vatican II council documents, *Nostra Aetate*, which accepts inclusive approach at an institutional level and in the same vein says Interfaith Dialogue is the need of the time, and hence it would be important to analyze the relationship of postmodernism and Interfaith Dialogue. Pope Paul VI in 1964 declares, *Ecclesiam Suam*, no 78, "dialogue is demanded nowadays...every individual, be he religious or not, his secular education has enabled him to think and speak, and to conduct a dialogue with dignity."²⁵ Jeffrey A. Trumbower also points out that after Vatican II, the possibility of salvation in other tradition was primarily due to enlightenment and globalization, to this extent that posthumous salvation and infants salvation are plausible.²⁶ Faith and salvation are interrelated terms; every faith has a specific way of salvation. And when through inclusivism it is promulgated to other religious adherents that they may be saved too through Christ, knowingly or unknowingly, anonymously or through invisible church, other religions' adherents do hold as well their own specific way of salvation, and thus they are not looking for salvation outside their own tradition. Hence any such offer may create a sense of repulsion rather than dialogue.

Roger Boase puts final remarks as that though inclusivist acknowledges truth in other tradition and believes in mutual respect and cooperation but see others

, “in some way inferior, incomplete, or deficient.”²⁷ Milko Youroukov says, Inclusivists primarily consider their own religion the true one and then consider other according to their own perspective. though they show a level of tolerance to others but actually they consider others as inferior.²⁸ This way there lies no fundamental difference between exclusivism and inclusivism.

Pluralism

Christine Amjad Ali elaborates pluralism in these words in her article entitled *The Apostle Paul and other Faiths* “the pluralist approach to other religions argues that all religions are different paths to the same transcendent reality which we call God. Jesus is the way for Christians, but other religions have other ways which are equally valid”²⁹ And Dr Phillip says “a power to reject both the victory of one religion over all other religions and the unity of all religions within one system.”³⁰ Hence, salvation is possible in all religions regardless of their differences. John Hick is the proponent of religious pluralism.

This way John Hick repudiates the historic version of the Christianity which means ‘Christianity is the one and the only way of salvation’, but he says that Christianity is the one way among many ways. In this way Christianity cannot claim to be *unique, absolute and the way to God*. He disagrees with this concept that Christ is the center or criterion to judge all religions rather it is God who is the center of all religions. Hence the differences lie in apparent look of religions and not in the essence of religions. Therefore, salvation is equally possible in all religions.

Religious pluralism is not a traditional stance but a modern stance as Tom F. Driver puts that it would be wise to admit “‘religious pluralism’ belongs to western liberal religious thought at the present time.”³¹

Pluralism – a Critique

There is no difference between God and Christ in Christian scriptures and understanding. Christian theologians explained it in different styles like Triune, or three in one or one in three. But when John Hick takes a paradigm shift called ‘Copernican Revolution’, he makes Him into two, meaning thereby, from Christocentric approach to Theocentric approach. As remarked by Glory E. Dharmaraj and Jacob S. Dharmaraj “the pluralist theory divides the Christian understanding of God into two separate entities: God and Christ. The Christian scriptures inform that God in Jesus Christ has totally revealed Himself, and God and Jesus are the one and the same.”³² This way the Christian concept of God and Jesus come closer to Monotheism, where God and Prophet are two distinct beings. The second critique is, “if other religions have equal, if not superior, revelation, why would a God choose to send his own Son to die on the cross?”³³ And then if all religions are equal as propagated by Pluralist then the purpose of Church and Mission stand nowhere. They say “the pluralist theory strongly discourages Christian church

faith from engaging in mission evangelism and conversion of the adherents of other faiths.”³⁴

A very strong criticism that goes against Pluralism which is an integral part of interfaith dialogue. Kajsa Ahlstrand in her book criticizes pluralist stance vividly, that only for niceties with people of other religions pluralists reduced the Christ just a person who may be source of unification in this world to make the world peaceful, who in the Bible and in Christian tradition was God the incarnate, crucified for man's original sin and the way to heaven alone and alone. Pluralists compromise their self-respect, which is prior to the respect of the other.³⁵

Pluralism and Identity

Alister E. McGrath³⁶ (b. 1953) explains, it is difficult to maintain religious identity in religious pluralism, and hence, in interfaith dialogue where commonalities are found to this extent that the distinctions stand nowhere. And the question is on which grounds commonalities may be found. Both the Bible and the Quran do have their own particular identities and they cannot be simply vanished through some dialogue conferences or in books. The world needs to learn distinctions and distinctiveness.³⁷

There are many faith-based differences in all religions, and on the basis of which they claim that the truth is contained by them. According to pluralist theory, the right to claim any difference from the other loses its grounds. They say “the Christian doctrine is founded on the historic event of the death and resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit after his ascension into heaven. Islam denies this essential doctrine of Christianity and states that the coming of the Muhammad was foretold by Jesus himself, which in turn, is denied by Christianity.”³⁸

Pluralism – its Kinds

Mohd Yaseen Gada differentiates the concept of pluralism and says that political and social pluralism is altogether acceptable in Islamic discourse but religious pluralism is not, due to its implications and because it does not correspond to the verses of the holy Quran. He says further that diversity in religions in postmodern era is not a new phenomenon rather it existed already.³⁹

This also refutes the notion that religion is the main cause of instability in the society. According to him Islam in all ages presented a legacy of tolerance towards all religions but in western academia it is not understood as due to their preoccupied notion of religions in their own history.⁴⁰ Keeping in view this definition of pluralism it remains not a significant problem for the Muslims to accept pluralism where pluralism means social and cultural pluralism and not religious pluralism. One may define pluralism as that one should give respect to everyone, *the other*, as well as ensure *the others'* right to be different. It is an acceptable definition to Islamic theology but when it

crosses the limit and enters into the domain of religious identity and salvation, then it is difficult to handle both religiously and academically.

Stefan Wild understands pluralism as a social living “early and medieval Muslim societies enjoyed a living experience of pluralism.”⁴¹ This is a strange phenomenon when one word is used in entirely different context, pluralism is discussed as a theological term in most of the cases. When Muslims talk about pluralism they understand it as a social interaction in a multi-religious society where respect of the other is ensured and not simply tolerated and remain ignorant to other person.⁴² Such a description of pluralism is not theological but at a social level.

Four Options and Interfaith Dialogue

Hence the only thing left to discuss in interfaith dialogue is to devise methods that people of different faiths should respect each other. There may be four possibilities about the validity of religion that may be helpful in the discourse of interfaith dialogue as analyzed by Veli-Matti Karkkainen, “1. No religion is true. 2. Only one religion is true. 3. Every religion is true. 4. One religion is true in whose truth all other religions participate.”⁴³ So far as the first category is concerned the need for interfaith or interreligious dialogue stands nowhere, because dialogue needs faith on both sides. The other categories may be categorized as exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism respectively. And as far as the exclusivism is concerned, again, no dialogue is possible because both participants believe that they possess the truth firmly. And when both participants believe that all religions are true, again, no dialogue is required, since dialogue is required in case of some gaps, or some misconceptions or misunderstandings. The only category left is inclusivism for the dialogue. Though the person does not express his inclination towards Jesus Christ but in implied and implicit way he is looking for the grace and the grace is Jesus Christ. Again in this category, the other is offered grace, which is definitely not acceptable because the other too have his own doctrine of salvation, he needs not any sanction from the other.

Muslim Response to Religious Pluralism

Ayatollah Murtadha Mutahhari criticizes the concept of pluralism as explained by John Hick and says such a religious pluralism has nothing to do in Islam. Islam, according to him, is the religion revealed on Prophet Muhammad pbAh and this is the religion acceptable to Allah Almighty for the salvation. He quotes this verse of the Holy Quran, “Surely the religion with Allah is al-Islam”, and says some scholars interpret this verse as a verb but it is a noun. He asks the reader to read the whole verse in its complete context in order to get the right interpretation of the verse which is, surely, about Muslims and not about other religions like Judaism, Christianity, etc. The complete verse is,

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ وَمَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَغْيًا
بَيْنَهُمْ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ .⁴⁴

“The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will): Nor did the People of the Book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of Allah, Allah is swift in calling to account.”

He explains the verse highlighting the following point that this verse revealed to Muhammad pbAh so everyone should come to God through him.⁴⁵ He quotes a verse of the Quran:

وَمَنْ يُشَاقِقِ الرَّسُولَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ الْهُدَىٰ وَيَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ سَبِيلِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ نُوَلِّهِ مَا تَوَلَّىٰ
وَنُصَلِّهِ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا⁴⁶

“If anyone contends with the Messenger even after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows a path other than that becoming to men of Faith, We shall leave him in the path he has chosen, and land him in Hell,- what an evil refuge!”

Muslim scholars, like Adnan Aslan, opine that the salvation method employed by John Hick is complicated when he says from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. In Islam, the salvation is simple to understand and hence uncomplicated. There is nothing like exclusivism in Islam. As pointed out by Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, “Islam is unique. For no religion in the world has yet made belief in the truth of other religions a necessary condition of its own faith and witness.”⁴⁷

Following verses from the Quran are often quoted in the debate of religious pluralism. As,

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ
جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ⁴⁸

“If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah. it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.”

And,

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَىٰ وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا
فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ .⁴⁹

“Those who believe (in the Qur'an), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians,- any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve..”

Egyptian scholar *Sayyid Qutb* (1906-1966) comments when the final Testament has been revealed in a preserved form then according to Muslim interpreters of the Quran the final authority of reward from the God rest with the Quran.⁵⁰ *Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi* (1904-1997), a renowned scholar of Pakistan also elaborates that this includes all articles of faith including faith on

prophet Muhammad pbAh. Similarly, Dr Shahzad Saleem⁵¹ said that there is an Old Testament and then New Testament and then a Final Testament (the Quran), so in order to appreciate the previous testament it is important to believe in the final testament.⁵²

Similarly commenting on the above cited verse *Mufti Muhammad Shafi* (1897-1976) interprets this verse, it is not possible to have faith in Allah and the Day of Judgement until and unless one has faith in the angels, in the Books of Allah and in the prophets.⁵³ Maulana Maudoodi (1903-1979) writes in the interpretation of the above quoted verse that this verse does not elaborate all the article of Islam, other parts of the Quran manifests it very clearly that believe in Prophets and the Books are equally necessary.⁵⁴ There are also some other scholars of Islam who hold the same interpretation, like *Maulana Idrees Kandhlvi* (1899-1974), he is very clear in the interpretation of this verse and says that here belief in Allah means as told by Islam and this verse includes belief in angels, revealed books, and all prophets, otherwise one will be Kafir (infidel). *Ibn Kathir* too writes that believe in prophet Muhammad pbAh is a must without which no belief system or deeds may be accepted.

Muslims' Stance on Dialogue

Khuram Murad (1932-1996) a renowned religious scholar, a follower of Maulana Maudoodi, wrote extensively both in Urdu and English. He wrote an article on the clash between Islam and the West and expressed his point of view very clearly that the real and decisive issue is the Prophethood of Muhammad pbAh between the both. According to him, right from the first day of revelation mankind was divided into two camps, those who followed him and those who chose another path. Hence, even these days the issue is not on the material grounds but the revival of Islam. Historically speaking missionaries and other Christian rulers tried their best to prevent Islam from its reaching in the world both strategically and in wars both in medieval period and during enlightenment age. Murad wrote about these scholars of Christianity whose works were adopted by later day scholars against Islam and Muslims, like, saint John of Damascus (d. 753), Abdul Maseeh al Kindi (d. 870). He talked about Prof. Montgomery Watt, Kenneth Craig and church authorities in mid-20th centuries who were apparently in favour of interfaith dialogue but actually were against Islam and Muslims, only the language they used became soft and civilized but the message remained intolerable for the Muslims. So a proper dialogue is possible only when an environment of mutual respect is developed on both sides of the table.⁵⁵

In an interview, as quoted by Siddique, Murad explains the nature of dialogue that dialogue is supposed to minimize areas which reflect conflicts and contradictions, and focus more on similarities.⁵⁶ Definitely the differences will be minimized only when the partners share their genuine convictions and with the intention of real dialogue which according to Murad is Da'wah. He

believes that through Da'wah it is possible for the partners to share what they believe in reality. And he also allows Christians to come to the field with the intention of Da'wah but this does not mean to convert forcefully or through exploitation. Siddique quotes him, "da'wah is and should be a part of dialogue. This is true for both the parties."⁵⁷ This way both partners have the opportunity to transform themselves in their own tradition or in the tradition of the other. Talking about Christian missionaries, then, he explains, his objection is not their activities, but the way they convert Muslims by exploiting their genuine needs and criticize Islamic Shariah in a wrong way and obstruct Muslims to live by Shariah.⁵⁸ Similarly, Seyyed Hossein Nasr remarks that better economic conditions and political hegemony of the west give a superior position to it "Christians' missionary zeal, remains a powerful source of discord between us."⁵⁹ This relates missionaries activities are done under the umbrella of various other economic and political benefits to the less privileged. There are, hence, some suspicion on the part of Muslims that Christian Missionaries do dialogue with the intention of mission, as Jacques Waardenburg remarks in this regard, that in the Muslims' perspective, missionaries activities create suspicion amidst dialogue both from the catholic and protestant churches "time to time rumors emerge of large-scale strategies of converting Muslims into Christians."⁶⁰

The difference is Obvious

The reality is, and it will remain so, as Andreas D'Souza points out in a succinct way that "the fact remains that Islam is not Christianity."⁶¹ And neither Christianity is Islam, both have, by all means, distinct positions based on theology and epistemology, and history approves this distinction in all aspects. If through dialogue, it is tried to bridge them, reconcile them, or merge them, then either a new religion will emerge or one religion will lose its identity, or both have to compromise from the basics. And for this, adherents of religions have to withdraw the text, history, interpretation of the text that has been made in the past. Therefore, instead of removing their differences, the better option is, that adherents of religions should respect each other so that peace and harmony could be observed in the society while living with each other, which is the purpose of interfaith dialogue. On the similar grounds, Glory E. Dharmaraj⁶² and Jacob S.Dharmaraj⁶³ very succinctly elaborate it as in *Christianity and Islam: A Missiological Encounter*:

Islam repudiates the Jewish and Christian scriptures, their religious ceremonies, and liturgical practices. Islam also disclaims the Christian notions of the Incarnation, the view of the Trinity, the doctrine of the Justification of believers by faith, the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the Christian notion of the church and its administration of the Sacraments.⁶⁴

Theologically speaking, keeping in view the above quotation it is impossible to have an interfaith dialogue amongst theologically different religions. Angela West analyses the views of Soloveitchik⁶⁵, and writes that there is a real difference between Jews and Christians in their theology, so better engage in social dialogue.⁶⁶ She further writes that faith oriented people should not go in interfaith dialogue otherwise they would be responsible of 'martyrdom of the millions of the ancestors in faith.'⁶⁷ Writer further says that despite of the promulgation of Nostra Aetate, still a number of scholars find no way to dialogue but they are involved in mission.⁶⁸ There is no reconciliation possible in theological matters, hence no interfaith dialogue.

Catherine Cornille explains that no two religions may be compatible to each other, even Catholic and Protestant do not interpret Christian faith equally.⁶⁹ Hence, theological differences are even fundamental to sub sects of religions. This is an evident proof, and also we have discussed at length at various places in this dissertation that only the modernists or those who are less concerned with religions, are of the view that interfaith dialogue is possible, despite of the differences whereas a number of practicing scholars do not approve it due to the concept of salvation and the meaning of revelation etc. Therefore, everyone will understand his religion according to his own ways of interpretation.

Dialogue and Salvation

In interfaith dialogue the most significant question that need to be addressed very seriously is the question of salvation or *Naja'at*. Glory E. Dharmaraj raises a very pertinent question amidst the discussion of mission and salvation in his book *Christianity and Islam: A Missiological Encounter*. He puts "are people of other faiths being saved in their own religions? If yes, why did we send missionaries for hundreds of years to establish churches around the world?"⁷⁰

An important debate on preaching and accountability in the life hereafter, those who could not receive the truth due to any reason may be reduced to nothing in the life hereafter or have to face fire but for a short time. *Imam Ghazali* a well reputed figure in Islamic history states in his *Faysal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqa* as,

Nay more I would say: Most of the Christians among the Byzantines (Greeks) and Turks in this time of ours will be embraced by the same mercy, if God the Most High wills. I mean those who are among the remote Byzantines and Turks whom the Call (to Islam) has not reached.⁷¹

Similarly, Adnan Aslan made this argument very clear in these words, the foremost duty of every individual is to act upon the guidance in his own faith tradition and if in this course of action, he comes to know

that the truth lies elsewhere then he should embrace that truth wholeheartedly and consciously and not feel any social burden at that time.⁷² This signifies clearly if the salvation is possible in all traditions then what would be the purpose of dialogue, and if it is not, then simply conveying others the truth would be an obligatory duty upon those who hold the truth. Maulana Manazar Ahsan Gilani holds the same opinion in his book *Addinul Qayam*, that those of mankind who could not receive the message of prophet and died, they would be treated with an exclusive relaxation in the life hereafter and may be according to the fate of animals in the life hereafter as described by Sheikh Ahmad Sirhandi in his *Maktobat*.⁷³

Da'wah/Mission Matters

Fr James Channan clearly indicates that both Christianity and Islam are missionary religions, he is a responsible and well-known authority on Christian-Muslim relationship in the world, and he advocates dialogue in the presence of mission. He is in favour of evangelization and supports the idea that both Christians and Muslims should invite others in a good way without compelling anyone.⁷⁴ But this does not mean to convert others forcefully, by coercion, or by other ulterior means and conspiracies. As Francis X. Kriengsak Kovithavanij says, "we can offer the occasion for dialogue, but we cannot force our neighbor into dialogue."⁷⁵ Sun Myung Moon⁷⁶ (1920-2012) says in Assembly of the World's Religions⁷⁷ that even the non-religious elements these days trying to unite themselves, it is urgent for the religious bodies to come close to each other.⁷⁸ It is important to note that in this assembly which was planned to unite all religions on the basis of dialogue, the recitation that was made by Christians and Muslim from their scriptures give us a plain reality, that where there is a religion, there is a religious identity. A Christian recites "and Jesus came and said to them, 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'⁷⁹ And Muslim recites from the Holy Quran,

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ.⁸⁰

"Behold, Luqman said to his son by way of instruction: "O my son! join not in worship (others) with Allah. for false worship is indeed the highest wrong-doing."

keeping in view these two recitations which were definitely from their scriptures and no one can say that these are some of the interpretations of any scholar, there is no possibility to go then for dialogue as per the very definition of dialogue, hence we observe through this it is mission or preaching and not dialogue. Religions are based on their exclusive claims in terms of the truth and the way. And if they disown such claims their significance will be no

more. Diana L. Eck explains this in her article *Is our God is listening? Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism*

Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Similarly, Muslims affirm the finality of the One God's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. The *Shahadah*... 'There is no God but God and Muhammad is God's messenger.' There is nothing that can be likened to or compared to God – no image, no icon, no partner, no incarnation. The human response to this message of God is 'the straight path': Islam.⁸¹

The problem with the interfaith dialogue is, if I believe that there is some degree of imperfection or my belief system is erroneous then my position in dialogue process would be very weak because I do not have a conviction to my own faith, and on the other hand, if I firmly believe in my faith's 'uniqueness' and authenticity, then the possibility of interfaith dialogue stands nowhere.

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