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## Global Perspectives : Spiritualities in Interaction

I shall plunge into the topic without any introduction, offering some personal reflections which I would like to present in contrast and confrontation.

### 1. **There is no Global Perspective**

First of all I wish to state emphatically that there is no single global perspective. To speak of a global perspective is reminiscent of the colonialist thinking: "that which is good for me is good for everybody; we have one view of things and because we are not fanatic or provincial, we want to universalize our views. So our perspective becomes global."

There is certainly an inherent tendency for universalization in human thinking, since we have to recognize that truth is beyond us: "We want to be in the truth, and truth is universal", this is what such an attitude affirms. But the colonialist attitude—a phrase, which I use without any pejorative sense—objectifies this tendency for universalization and assumes what I call the monoforphism of culture. It contains the crypto-heresy—couched of course in the "we" of my culture—that I am infinite and what I understand is uniformly true for all: one God, one Empire, one culture, or at least one civilization, one common market and the like.

But a global perspective is simply impossible. I am saying this not merely out of sociological concerns, but for two deeper reasons, one anthropological and the other more metaphysical or ontological.

The anthropological reason is that the moment we open our mouths, even with the claim of being universal we are not. With all

our pretence we make of including everybody in a single perspective, in fact, we are not. To give just one example from a revered and admired thinker:

In the space of a few years what we call modern civilization has suddenly spread like a veil over the entire surface of the inhabited earth. In every country in the world men know the same things, think on the same lines.

Surely this levelling up of human beings on a higher plane is a definite guarantee of stability. I would be quite prepared to think so. Unfortunately, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin can have his point Omega by just choosing one phylum of the human traditions and construct something that just bulldozes everything that comes against his own concept of evolution.

Let me add a further short footnote of a far more significant nature to show why a single global perspective is not possible. It is not just that three hundred and sixty degrees is no perspective at all, but also on account of what I think is the most serious challenge from South East Asia to the entire Abrahamic traditions, Jew, Christian, Bahai, Marxist and others. This radical challenge questions the monotheistic belief that reality is totally intelligible to itself *svayamprakasha*, self-refulgent of the Vedantins, *noesis noeseos* of the Greeks which Hegel would translate as absolute reflection, that there can be a total knowledge of the Knowledge, pure consciousness of itself, that ultimate reality is transparent at least to itself, that we cannot but declare that the transcendent real knows itself. This is challenged by a major part of the human traditions. I am not questioning the logical consistency of monotheism. But to make a long story short, I repeat that I am skipping many steps when I say that we have in monotheism the ultimate justification of totalitarianisms of all kinds: if truth is one and ultimately all things are reducible to one single point or symbol, then those who believe in "Gott mit uns" or "In God we trust" can consider themselves apostles of such absolute Power and let it reign over the earth. Monotheistic religions are aware of this danger. They warn against idolatry as the highest sin. This amounts to an attempt to manipulate or to come to grips with that one or God by adoring something short of the nameless, infinite and ineffable mystery. Without contesting the legitimacy of monotheism and monisms

of all kinds we can see that there is a dichotomy between them and the global perspective syndrome. Most of the human traditions of the world would deny that even on the highest level there is such total intelligibility of reality to itself. They would deny that even 'God' possesses a/the global perspective.

## **2. There are Perspectives in Interaction**

We have therefore to proceed fully aware of the limitations of our assumptions and presuppositions and only then enter into open dialogical—not dialectical—dialogue with others for mutual fecundation and enrichment. Pluralism is at the very basis of the structure of reality and I am prepared to defend, but not propose to reveal here my philosophical secret, that even truth is pluralistic. To allay the fears of Christians I must say that the Trinity should be rescued from a unique understanding as a more or less profound or qualified monotheism. Trinity is not the kind of – “visishta” – qualified monotheism but a radically different thing and one has to accept the anger of many Jewish Theologians when they get the feeling that Christians consider themselves more or less owners of the Bible and use it for their own purposes. I am more and more convinced that the Sanhedrin did the proper, though painful and tragic thing of condemning to death that young Rabbi who betrayed the core of that religion. When we deal with ultimate questions, we have to be prepared for death, for the Cross and the Resurrection. We have to be loyal to ourselves and be prepared for the tragedies that may follow on both sides if that is the means by which life may ultimately come from both sides. The only way one does not rise again is when one hopes to rise again and manipulates already the resurrection. Then death is unauthentic and the resurrection mystified. In sum our perspectives have to be conscious of their own limitations and only then enter into dialogue with other points of view. A global perspective could only be unique. The different perspectives are set into motion when one “single issue” is focussed, seen at least from two different perspectives and each angle of vision gives a different picture.

## **3. The Awareness of a ‘Single Issue’ is Part of the Problem Itself**

Now I wish to apply the foregoing considerations to what I understand is the central issue under discussion. Awareness of the whole

question as a single issue is part of the problem itself. The issue is not a thing in itself, independent of the awareness of it, nor is the problem defined by the single approach to it. Of course, many people will say: "facts are facts!" But facts are facts because of the interpretations. There is no naked fact: fact is already an interpretation which we call fact. There is no naked fact independent of my interpretation or your interpretation and if you deny that, you are giving just another interpretation. It is the interpretation which gives meaning—even to a fact *qua* fact. There is no possibility of touching or pointing out the thing in itself which appears as a fact precisely because it has become a fact of consciousness—in my consciousness.

So a cross-cultural approach to our overall issue is that there are no world problems, not only because we are part of the problem, but because the problem itself is problematic. Against this it may be argued that to one and the same thing everybody seems to react in the same way: to everyone hunger is hunger. But this is not true. As it has been said speaking about Japan, for some death is beautiful and death and life are the same. Though some may smile at this, that attitude is nevertheless a fact and belongs to reality, nonsensical as some may interpret that to be. So, to affirm, for instance, that all religions are the same is naive; because the ways that lead to that same thing are part and parcel of the same thing and even the metaphor here holds: if you explore all the ways that lead to the mountain the mountain collapses. The relation is of another type altogether. There is not one thing in itself, and different approaches to that only separate thing. The approaches are part and parcel of that one reality. Awareness of the problem belongs to the problem and the difference of awareness is itself a problem: we can neither say it is the same or that it is different. Hence it is still part of the colonialistic approach to say that there are world problems and that we have to be aware of them existing together as world problems. That in my opinion is already a monocul-cultural approach to reality. I do not deny at all that we may have a pluralistic understanding of a problem and that the problem is multifaceted in itself so that no one person or agency has the right to set the rules in order to solve the problem. I am not denying, for instance, that there is an atomic danger menacing the human race and the planet. I am only saying that even this impending catastrophe is seen differently by different cultures and thus the problem itself, let alone the remedies, may be different.

Let me take here an example which seems to be somewhat extreme: hunger. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad has those extraordinary texts on hunger as a cosmic reality, which is not something owing to lack of proteins or only a psychological problem, but of another dimension altogether. Then we proceed to integrate the different awarenesses of the problems to the problem itself. To objectify the problem and then to invite the Buddhists, the Marxists and others to solve the problem by concentrating on food production—obviously by technology—is already methodologically a wrong approach. It destroys the polarities of the cosmic and the human, freedom and necessity, male and female, yin and yang and the like which are integral to a more transcultural understanding of the question. Completeness is the criterion to surmise what universality may be. Hunger may be a political problem, a technical issue, a disorder of nature, a human sin, a divine punishment, a cosmic state and also a real symbol of the beginning of Being, and a revelation of the primordial chaos etc.

#### **4. The Main Problem Facing Spiritually Today is the Man-made Universe**

The main issue facing the spiritualities of the world today is the Man-made universe. That is something I wish to develop very briefly, but thus entails in my opinion, a mutation in the very understanding of what a religious issue is. The traditional object of religion was the divine, the sacred, in whatever sense you may like to interpret it. The human being had to know it in order to adore it, obey it and glorify it, and so to reach one's own destiny. Religions dealt with that mysterious reality so that you are not crushed, so that you become free, and reach your destiny however differently this destiny may be seen by the different religious traditions of the world. The divine, the mysterious, the sacred, the supernatural, the eternal, and the like was the traditional object of religion. Not without some deeper reason than the mere ruffles of history, the greatest antagonist of religion as conceived not only in the Western traditions but in others as well, yet in the Western tradition in the most blatant way, was science. We may recall the famous statement by Goethe: "He who has science and art does not need any religion at all; but he who does not, must have religion," Religion was the first answer of man confronted with the Divine. But soon the great confrontation was not the God, perhaps hidden in nature, but Nature itself. Science here

is the guide and true religion. The conflict between science and religion seen in this light shows that in the present world view the modern substitute for religion is science: science deals with Nature, with reality. Man had to know God in order to have a peaceful human life. Later on—in kairological, not strictly chronological sequence—he had to know Nature in order to fulfil his role as Man. He had to appease Nature, had to know the laws of Nature in order to overcome the thunder, the earthquake and the enormous amounts of energy hidden in the atom and the like. In the same way as you had to know the will of God in order to subsist, to be, you have to know the laws of Nature in order to subsist and to be. Contemporary man has undergone another kairological mutation the ultimate object for reaching human destiny is not the will of God, not the laws of Nature, but the whims of Man. The most immediate reality, the highly effective one, the reality that matters, is the Man-made universe. It is not thunder, not the God with his wrath, or the by now domesticated Nature, but the Man-made universe, the megalopolis, the atom bomb, the frantic accumulation of arms, the chemical warfare, the capacity for killing and destroying and in a word, the entire technocratic complex. The greatest problems that face Man to day and the spiritualities that direct Man to reach his destiny, are Man-made problems in a Man-made universe. What is threatening is not God, what is threatening is not Nature, but the blackout that may come and then we may not survive: the whims of Man!

### **5. The Impact of Secularity**

It is in this way that Man's temporal concerns have become the subject matter of spirituality, and this is because of the impact of secularity.

I shall have to define what I mean by secularity. But let me first say this: Contemporary spirituality has to deal with the temporal destiny of the human being not because contemporary spirituality has abandoned its concern for the ultimate but because Man's temporal fate has become in some sense ultimate. Not because the religions have abandoned the sacred and are now dealing with the profane, but because the secular has become the sacred. And here we should make a fundamental distinction between the sacred, which is always defined over against the profane, and the secular. The sacred and

the profane by definition are antagonistic. The secular can be as sacred as anything else. But what is secularity? Let me distinguish first of all secularity from secularization and secularism.

Secularization is an historical process mainly alive in the last (few) centuries in European history but also existing in Buddhist countries and in other cultures of the world. It is the process of dispossessing religious organizations of the secular power they had accumulated.

Secularism is an ideology which denies transcendence and evaluates all events exclusively in the light of their own empirical givenness.

Secularity as distinguished from these two other concepts expresses the conviction that the triad of space, time and matter represents an ultimate dimension of reality. If this is so, the secular order, i.e., the world, cannot be treated as fleeting, passing, secondary, for the time being only, and which may later be overcome and disappear, and therefore things concerning the body, temporal affairs and spatial things do not at all ultimately matter. Secularity is that conviction that has spread in recent times both in the East and in the West. I am not interested in its origins. Secularity does not exclude transcendence but it affirms that the spatio-temporal structures of the material beings are ultimately real and thus irreducible to anything superior, beyond or prior. Hence being and time are not to be disentangled in spite of all the distinctions we may make. This vision leads to the insight that the spatio-temporal situation of human beings has a lasting definitive value so that the great problems of secular humankind today all have become religious problems—understanding religion as dealing with ultimate issues wherever they may lie or whatever they may be. Issues like hunger, Capitalism, Marxism, World Market are not just technical questions; they carry the ultimate destiny of the human being and as such they belong to the central concern of religion and have a religious facet, though the relationship between the two is a complex one. My ultimate human happiness depends also on socio-economic, scientific and psychological factors. We can no longer ignore this fact as if it were only a question of just leaving the soul for a time in the body in the cosmic and temporal environment. Words like liberation and salvation are not disconnected from those other eco-socio-economic-psychological and genetic conditions and factors that shape Man and his destiny. The relation between human

happiness, salvation, *moksha*, *nirvana* and all these other conditions is complex indeed. In an asylum, in a concentration camp it may be possible to have the fullest of life; but this has limits and when one human life is crushed because of Man-made structures and structures it is hell. This hell remains and remains for ever. If any unfulfilled life is due to those injustices this fact is not only for the moment: that particular human reality has been denied for ever of the chance of fulfilment of its potentiality. If this is not a religious concern I do not know what religion is. So, all these sets of problems are not just technical problems. I am not interested in politics as such but I am interested in discovering the religious dimension of politics: the organization of the city of Man belongs also to the organization of the city of God.

Let us proceed a step further: I certainly affirm that religions are at the service of Man. Sabbath has been made for Man. But so long as religions do not degenerate into ideologies they convey precisely the message that the individual human being—notwithstanding his inalienable dignity—is not the centre of reality so that the individual has to overcome its empirical condition. In other words, religions are at the service of Man, but the empirical human being is not the centre of religions. This balance has to be maintained. Religions are sources and resources and we should guard against manipulating them as means for solving the specific problems of the human being as we see them. Some religions may prefer to dissolve the problems instead of solving them. Some religions may not see the problems the way others see them, i.e. they may explore the problem as a pseudo-issue instead of giving a satisfactory answer. Some other religions will reject the manipulation by Man in order to utilize religions for mundane purposes. Religions degenerate into mere humanisms, they will say, if we lose sight of the glory of God, the sense of adoration, the total surrender of Man to God and the theocentric attitude. In spite of all the good intentions to safeguard the transcendence of the divine, the fact that some people constitute themselves or are set up as guardians of it makes the danger of utilization of religion for immediate non-religious purposes quite apparent. Take for example President Reagan's reference, in a recent speech to "the struggle between right and wrong, good and evil..." and then characterizing the Soviet Union as "the focus of evil in the modern world", he said: "We are enjoined by Scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it (evil) with all our might". This is surely manipulation of spiritual resources! Religions are



at the service of Man, but only if men act religiously. Of course, there is the opposite danger of alienation and the rest is done by the professionals of organized religion. But between the Scylla and the Charybdis there may be a small path, a spiritual path leading the human being to his destiny and it is here that the spiritual dialogue comes in.

#### **6. The Great Problems of the Secular World Have a Religious Dimension**

The most important element in the dialogue between spiritualities is not made up of the fine points of doctrinal discussions, but consists in the existential confrontation concerning the fulfilment of the task they set before themselves. This implies obviously practical as well as theoretical questions, but the locus for the dialogue of spirituality is spirituality itself and not the mere doctrinal arena. The most urgent subject matter of their dialogue is not the content of their respective perspectives, important as they are. The subject matter of dialogue is the means by which they confront the human predicament. By human predicament I understand the more or less insightful consciousness of the human condition. The predicament is not the human condition itself but our consciousness of it and this predicament should not be seen from one single perspective. So we should not fall into the trap of extrapolating the anguish of the average citizen of the First World and consider the nuclear weapon syndrome, for instance, as a universal phenomenon. So the dialogue among spiritualities includes the different perspectives through which the very issues are seen and yet the dialogue concerns today these many issues which contemporary men have to face.

Here we should help one another to discover our own assumptions and go deeper still into our own presuppositions. An assumption is something which I posit as a starting point upon deep reflection in order to say what I say. But I shall never be able to discover my own presuppositions. For this someone else has to point them out to me. My presuppositions are absolutely invisible to me, for I take them for granted and base myself on them; it needs another to tell me on what I am being based without my knowing it. For that I need the collaboration of the other not so much to solve the problem but to deepen and sharpen my own vision of the thing.

So the dialogue should not be carried out on the terms of one of the participants alone. On that score we should be extremely sensitive. Let me give an example. We are all in this part of the world facing that syndrome of being excited about the twenty-first century unaware that for a Muslim, for a Buddhist, for a Telugu, for a Chinese the Western calculation is not relevant. We had absolutized one time reckoning and expressed it as an absolute pattern of something which may not have that universal significance. Of course we may humbly state that this is the time-reckoning which for the Christians is very meaningful and which allows us to say many things about history. But at the same time it blinds us to the fact that we absolutize history and that is more serious.

One more example may help us here to be brief and precise. There is hunger in the world today. Certainly within one single myth the most urgent thing is to put ourselves immediately to work in order to get rid of the evil; and that is the gist of the famous Buddhist parable of the man wounded by an arrow—that if we play the academician and ask who shot the arrow, for what reason the man was hated and so on, the poor man will simply lose his blood and die. But the problem now is much more complex and perhaps even tragic. In our cross-cultural present situation in which we do not have a unifying myth this procedure would be wrong. For example, since there is hunger today we go for a loan from the World Bank to remove hunger. A wrong solution, because we have not stopped to ponder over the issues. Dialogue of spiritualities does not allow such simple solutions. It could very well be that by simply pulling out the arrow we may kill the patient. It may be better to cut the arrow in the middle, or perform an operation or do some other thing. Similarly, it may not be good to borrow money to feed the hungry and thus make the religions still more dependent in the long run. If we just try to hurry to produce more food we may lack the means. If we go elsewhere to borrow we may worsen the situation. If we do not study the present system and its alternatives we do not solve the problems and it is here we have to think carefully. Some may say that to die sooner or later is just immaterial. Others may say that the more important thing is to conquer despair, others to remove pain, others that it is to die fighting the system that brought that hunger, be it the gods, the rich, the state, the neighbours etc. So even on such an elementary situation of hunger, the universal phenomenon

of evil, there are many different approaches, which envisage the problem itself in different lights. The opposite extreme would be just to become academicians and simply do nothing or just indulge in speculation about other people's distress. Here we have the question of the relation between theory and praxis, and this is the greatest challenge to a real dialogue of spiritualities in constant contact with the existential problems of humankind today. Not a single religion today can solve the problems of humanity, not a single country today can boast about being self-sufficient, not a single culture can claim to have the answer to the human predicament. We need one another for survival right now. To discover the meaning of hunger is not going to dissipate it nor is detailing its deleterious effects any consolation for the undernourished. But we shall know that hunger is not a simple lack of proteins or a physical or psychological sensation, but a complex and even divine phenomenon, like death a multifaceted reality.

### 7. Interaction of Spiritualities is Itself a Spiritual Quest

The dialogue of spiritualities is not intended just to win, to have my way, even to solve the problem, but it is meant to be a spiritual quest in the same sense in which I face the problems of my own intimate life. It is a spiritual discipline. I wish to illustrate this with two stories.

Here is the first story: 17th century Kyoto. Two Japanese Christians are walking along and, lo and behold, there come against them two people: the Emperor and Jesus Christ. The Emperor is the representation of the Divine and veneration to him is the first duty of any Japanese and the fundamental factor of national stability. Jesus Christ is their and the world's Saviour. To whom shall they bow first? One says to the other: "Let us bow to the Emperor first. Jesus Christ will understand!" They were Christians and they understood the dialogue of spiritualities. I presume that if they had have been two Japanese Shintos they would have bowed first to Jesus Christ "The Emperor will understand." But if instead of being two Japanese Christians or two Japanese Shintos they were two Japanese scientists they would have committed *hirakiri*: there is no other solution to the dilemma. Forgiveness, compassion, empathy, . . . are not scientific categories. The dialogue of spiritualities is a common search trusting

the other more than oneself. "Jesus will understand!" Not that I do not care, but that I as a Christian am more ready to risk the wrath of Jesus than the anger of the Emperor, and vice versa for the Shintoist. Putting the resources together shows that the divergences themselves belong to the structure of reality. One is not preoccupied with finding solutions, not worried about the means which dominates the 90% of what we do in the technological society.

My second story is based in China, in Mao's China. Comrade Chao meets Comrade Hsi on the way and says: "My comrade Hsi come and have a glass of wine with us." Hsi looks offended and answers: "No. I have no time. I have to go and make the revolution." Comrade Chao asks: "What for?" This is the end of the story. I add, what for do you make this revolution if it is not just for having the leisure of drinking a glass of wine with your friends? What for do you make the revolution? To substitute the Mandarins with another clique? That is not a true revolution! If the dialogue of spiritualities is not a spiritual quest then it is a boring piece of entertainment. It is not a solution. Dialogue of spiritualities has to be itself a spiritual quest. For this very many conditions should be fulfilled: Certainly the first is that he who is free from sin should throw the first stone. As Confucius said, "only the most absolute sincerity in the world can effect any change." Unless we are a hundred percent sincere, totally innocent, all the change we may bring about will have a counter effect. Is it not the greatest of all challenges to find the truth? What is truth? The greatest one who knew kept silent precisely because He would not put that knowledge into words. Dialogue of spiritualities is of a similar nature. It is something that one realizes perhaps in silence, in love, in embrace, and, in a more down to earth way, it is in drinking a glass of wine together. Life is tempiternal because it does not go away, when we learn in our interaction with one another.