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# FACTORS AFFECTING RELIGION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## Introduction

The basic idea behind religion is that the spiritual journey of mankind is essentially progressive. All the future developments of man lie concealed in this basic cell of spiritualism. Religion has always been giving man a definite direction to help his behavioural policy. He accepts the teleological viewpoint towards his life and the world. Thus, man gives a definite meaning to his life under the guidance and direction of religion. But in the twentieth century, human development has taken a new turn where man is influenced and guided more by materialistic and scientific attitudes than by approaches which are religious and teleological. With the rapid development of science and technology, man has marched rapidly from one triumphant conquest to another and as such begun to doubt the validity of spiritual truths. Thus, science has given a new dimension to man's life. Following this path man is also trying to give a rational interpretation of religion and sort out of religious beliefs from superstitious beliefs. This rational interpretation of religion gives rise to two important results in the life of man. Firstly, man's thinking and feelings have become more and more secularised. This means that modern man has opted for a secular world and he is in no need of any religion. Secondly, indifferentism within the religion has entered into the life of almost all the religious men. The result is that man is in his everyday life trying to keep himself aloof from religious truths. My purpose here is to highlight the development of human beings in the light of the above observations.

In dealing with Religion and Human Development I have taken into account some recent developments, scientific, rational, secular and religious indifferentism, which have come into exist-

ence due to the dominance of the religious way of thinking. There was a time when only the religious way of thinking was prevalent. But as a reaction against this religious way of thinking, the above said viewpoints have emerged in the context of human development.

## II

### Religion and the progress of science

It is a commonly accepted belief that the spiritual crisis of twentieth-century man is due to the rapid development of science and technology. The atomic scientists have been responsible for giving a new dimension of the physical universe. In the light of this new dimension of the physical universe the thinking and feeling of twentieth century man has been revolutionised. In addition to this, a new picture of the inner urges which control and direct man's thinking, feeling and doing has emerged. The result is the pattern of man's thinking and behaviour has changed and consequently he is developing on very different lines. Therefore, the following questions arise: Has man completely surrendered to science? Is man in no need of any religion? Is he satisfied with the materialistic explanation of the universe? Does human development necessarily depend on scientific development?

If we analyse the actual position of twentieth-century man, we notice the fact that man is not fully determined by physical or mechanical laws and hence, he has not completely surrendered to science. He is not even fully satisfied with the scientific achievements and so he needs religion all the time in his day to day life. This is so because man is not merely a scientific measuring machine; as a human being his purposes, his volitions are meaningful because man thinks and wills.

This shows that man's purpose is to attain both the truths, internal and external and these are attained through his experiences. These experiences are internal as well as external. Truths gathered from man's internal experience belong to the realm of religion and truths gathered from man's external experience belong to science. Now man's apprehension of truth and his development can be a blending of his experiences in both these world. The internal must bear testimony to the external and the external to the internal. Also the physical or mechanical truth must have its counterpart in the internal world and the internal world must

be verifiable in the external world. This reveals that twentieth-century man has been led by the explorations of the physicists into a new dimension of a physico-spiritual universe. It has dissolved into energy, which cannot be known of itself but only by its effect. Indeed, the universe may be said to have become a spiritual universe. But we may be compelled to go further and declare that while science, as science, must confine itself to its own sphere of truth, it does in fact contain within itself at least an implicit metaphysics and theology. This shows that twentieth-century man has not surrendered completely to science and that he sometimes needs religion too.

Man as a human being is religious by nature. But there are some men who have no religious feelings. This is so because man's nature differs depending on his activity and capacity. But since man has a science, likewise he also has a religion. As regards size, shape, skill, strength and appearance a man becomes considerably transformed over the years. Yet there is a deep and undeniable sense in which we can say that it is the same man who is always changing and, at the same time, there is something in him which is of his very essence and which remains constant throughout his life.

Again, twentieth-century man has developed a peculiar outlook which makes him think that religion is an escape. But this is not an acceptable conclusion. Religion is a realism because it gives man a deeper insight into problems and enables him to face life's challenges. All the time man is confronted with a deeper reality and it is impossible for anyone to escape from religion or to use it as a means of escape. A man may be an agnostic, an atheist or a scientist. It does not therefore, follow that he is irreligious. His religion may assume the form of religious feeling with no invisible symbol to reveal it.

Again, it has been said that twentieth-century man is fully determined by the physical or mechanical laws. In other words, he is fully satisfied with the materialistic explanation of the universe and is not in need of a teleological explanation of the universe. This means that teleological and mechanical explanations in so far as they are opposites in nature are mutually exclusive. This contention is clearly unjustified because it is the result of confusion. This confusion can be removed if we make the distinction between the idea of a purpose and the idea of a goal. For example, the act of climbing a hill indicates a person's goal. But there is also a purpose behind this act i.e., the person

also wants to get a view from the hill. Therefore, the teleological explanation of the act of climbing of man is a part of the mechanical explanation. There is, therefore, no reason to say that the two kinds of explanation are inconsistent with one another. The above example clarifies our stand. It is true that man climbs because he wants to have the view. These plain and simple facts do not contradict each other, and if anyone supposes that they do it can only be the result of some mistake. This shows that twentieth-century man is not fully determined by the physical laws and he is not fully satisfied with the mechanical explanation alone.

Lastly, twentieth-century man has visualised his full development of personality through scientific achievements. This is so because science has influenced the thinking portion of humanity to move in quite a different direction. It has completely destroyed the spiritual faith of a larger part of humanity. At the same time it has served to re-inforce the faith of some in religion or science, this sounds like a paradox. Actually it is not as puzzling as it appears: For both groups have interpreted their facts and observations in accordance with their own innate personal inclinations, tendencies, feelings and behaviour. This difference in personal inclination, tendency, feeling and behaviour does not amount to an opposition between scientific approach and religious approach. Therefore, we can conclude that a full development of the human personality consists in the combination of the scientific and religious viewpoints.

### III

#### Religion and the Rational Development of Man

Religion is said to be closely connected with human feelings and emotions and as such it is a purely subjective and personal aspect of a human being. Taking religion to be subjective and personal, man is able to develop the spiritual side of his personality. But with the rise of modern science man has become more and more rational and thereby tried to give a rational explanation of the religious values. Examining this trend, some people believe that religion is merely an act of fancy or imagination of the human mind and so a rational explanation of religious values is not possible; reason is, after all, objective and impersonal in its import and application. Thus, rationalists are anti-religionists and are opposed to religion on that ground.

A close analysis of this attitude reveals that in the realm of life-pursuits an absolute distinction between 'subjective' and 'objective' cannot be rigidly maintained. Every such pursuit involves inner deliberations and in that state every pursuit is subjective. A scientist or a mathematician moves entirely in the subjective realm when he is deliberating on his problem. Newton, for example, was completely involved in his subjective realm when he saw the apple falling to the ground. If his subjective idea had not been proved scientifically, it would have remained as a piece of his subjective fancy. Only when he arrived at his truth logically and started sharing it with others, it started gaining objectivity till at last it became so very objective that its subjective origin was almost forgotten. Every rational pursuit, therefore, involves an element of subjectivity, and every religious pursuit, in spite of its subjective origin, tends towards objectivity—if, of course, it is genuinely religious.

The truth of this can be proved in a very simple way. Although true religion is primarily the concern of an individual's subjectivity, there has never been such a thing as an 'individual's religion'. True religions tend to be universal. It has been rightly said that in individualising religion we really universalise it. The truths of religion can be genuine only when they are shared. Even the truths revealed to a seer or a prophet are meant for 'others'.

The presence of 'feelings and emotions, which forms the core of religion, far from reducing religion to mere subjectivity, gives to it an objectivity of a unique type. The emotional involvement not only enables an individual to cling to the religious ideal with all his passion, but also enables him to perceive that religious ideal as the seat of all ultimate values. The religious ideal becomes for him the supreme and the ultimate goal towards which all human activities have to be directed.

Such a reference to ultimate values clearly points to the close similarity of the rational and religious pursuits. It is generally believed that all values are somehow rational because they have to be determined rationally. But if we look back at history in order to discover clear, living examples of cases where values have been given their highest and fullest expressions, we invariably come to some form of religion. History bears witness to the fact that religious values have not only been given their due importance, but they have also been put into practice. A rationally determined concept finds its fullest expression in religious pursuits. This shows that religion, in its own way, becomes means or a

factor in the rational life of human development. The ends of the life of reason are best realised in a religious life.

That reason and religion can have a common meeting ground is amply proved by the fact that both serve the function of emancipating man from his personal limitations. In spite of the differences between reason and religion both, somehow, succeed in enabling a man to cultivate such an attitude towards life that it assumes a newer meaning and is thus able to transcend some of the limitations to which it is subjected. Thus, both open up before an individual such vistas and realms that man is able to forget the mortal and limiting aspects of his self and immortalise what is merely rational and human.

This clearly reveals that a human being needs both the rational and religious approaches for the full development of his personality. Either of the two is insufficient. Because the man of reason engaged actively in his rational pursuits would have moments in his life which compel him to reflect not merely on the nature of the physical or the material world but also on his intimate relation with other men and on his own concern for himself. This shows that there are no dividing lines within experience of an individual. The dividing lines within it, if they are at all there, are so thin that one can smoothly pass from the one to the other. We may, for our rational analysis, create divisions but division do not exist in the total life of a human being. Thus, it becomes clear that even when man is guided by a scientific and rational approach religion can play a part in the complete development of his personality.

#### IV

### Religion and the Coming of the Secular Age

Almost all the great religions of the world are facing the challenge posed by science. With the emergence of scientific world-views, man's thinking and feelings have become more and more secularised. The result is that in the minds of many the image of God has faded out. Consequently, modern man is supposed to have opted for a secular world and he is in no need of any religion. Thus human development is guided by the explorations of physicists and psychologists which instal human beings in the new dimension of a physical universe and keep them quite aloof from religion. It has been said that a secular man is one

who keeps himself away from the sense of sacredness, the sense of sanctity of life, and deep religiosity. When a secular man wants to do something he turns to science and not to prayer. This is so because he develops in himself the view that religious beliefs are primarily a matter of great conviction, i.e., religious beliefs are related to 'Supernatural' objects—'eternal life'. The decline of religious institutions is clear proof of a secularising society. Now, it appears that a secular man employs rational procedures and scientific techniques in his life pursuits and he altogether rejects 'the Supernatural'. But an important and pertinent question arises: What is the meaning of life?—And is individual life affected by the demise of 'the Supernatural'?

Some people believe that if an individual rejects 'the Supernatural', it does not mean that his life has no meaning. His life is meaningful because it is quite possible that he may visualise his life playing a role in a purely secular framework. For example, a man may engage himself in some secular cause—the abolition of slavery, the conservation of wild life, the spread of communism. These are examples of projects which have something in common and which are even more important than any single man's life. Again, these common projects constitute a whole of which an individual is just a part. From this point of view an individual life has got some meaning. This shows that an individual life is meaningful without 'the Supernatural'.

It is clear from what has been said above that secularism is closely related to rational and scientific procedures. But as discussed, rational and scientific procedures do not contradict the religious procedures altogether. The ultimate aim of an individual is to acquire some values through which human life becomes meaningful. A scientist or a rationalist adopts scientific or rational procedures to attain these values, and a religionist adopts spiritual procedures to attain them using means in which 'the Supernatural' power, i.e., God, plays an important role. This shows that though the procedures and methods are different both the scientist and the religionist have a common purpose viz. to achieve the same values. Both serve the function of emancipating man from his personal limitations. Both, somehow, succeed in enabling a man to cultivate such an attitude towards life that it assumes a new meaning and helps overcome some of the inherent limitations. Thus, rational and religious values do not contradict each other; they rather help a man in the fuller development of his personality.

Having analysed the attitudes of a secular man I find that a secular man is opposed to 'the Supernatural' but he is not opposed to religion as such. What I mean is, a secular man finds his life meaningful in associating himself with the 'whole'. But religion is not a part; it is itself a 'whole' because we do not find anywhere in the world an individual religion. Again religion, in its wider sense, does not identify itself with 'the Supernatural' alone; it includes in itself the humanistic import as well.

Again, secularisation involves changes, great changes, in our attitude to ourselves and to the world. This means that human development depends on large scale changes and a secular man feels that religion imposes restrictions, puts constraints on the development of an individual because religion, according to him, is static. But I think this is a great mistake on the part of a secular man. I think a secular man has completely misunderstood religion. He does not realise that even religion has changed with the changing times. For example, he might say that religion offers dogmatic and supernatural descriptions of certain aspects of the universe that are scientifically inexplicable. But he does not realise that those accounts were given in the remote past, and they have merely academic and historical interest now. Is there any Christian today who would believe in the Christian account of the creation of species in preference to the scientific account of the evolution of species? When we look at the present day state of religion we notice that it does not have that dogmatic rigidity about it which it used to have in its heyday. There is an element of faith—even dogmatic faith—present still. But that is because the universe is still full of mysteries for mankind. As reason or science or a secular man succeeds in unfolding these mysteries, religious faith would tend to become rational. Thus the opposition that appears to be there between a secular man and a religious man is actually an opposition between the present-state of secularism and the mediaeval state of religion.

## V

### **Religion and the Phenomenon of Religious indifferentism**

In the course of human development, a completely new phenomenon is growing in the minds of human beings and that new phenomenon is religious indifferentism. The word 'indifferentism' is quite different from the word 'indifference'. In a mood of indifference existentialism particularly atheistic existentialism, re-

jects religion altogether. Atheistic existentialism rejects religion because according to this theory religion is of no use for human beings. The basic question before man is how to solve the problem of man's existence. Therefore, according to existentialism, the prime need of man is to engage himself in the problems of daily life and not waste his time in involving himself to transcendental or Supernatural problems. The word 'indifference' has got just this meaning.

But the word 'indifferentism' signifies an attitude of the human mind which is to be found only within the religion and not outside it. This is a tendency among religious men which cannot be denied. It is not just an incidental character that religious men have come to acquire as the result of various factors, viz., development of science and technology, development of rational techniques of judging everything, development of secularism; it has entered into the very veins of the life of religious men and has come to characterise and determine its values.

Now the question arises: Why is this indifferentism within the religion growing in the minds of human beings?

We have witnessed the achievements of science. These achievements are beneficial to man as they give him comfort. But in his larger interests, these achievements have proved a curse to him. Humanistic ideals have been completely forgotten. Therefore, indifferentism within religion is not the outcome of scientific achievements. Again, It may be said that these days man is busy solving the burning problems of life, viz., the problems of food, clothes, and shelter. Food, clothes, and shelter have become the prime needs of existence in place of the Supernatural ideals. This could be one of the basic causes of indifferentism within the religion. But, in my opinion, this also is not the real cause of indifferentism within religion. I think that the basic cause of religious indifferentism is that man is losing confidence in himself. Therefore, there is urgent need to restore man's confidence in his own capacities. Only in this way religious values can be restored, and, only in this way human development can reach its destination.

## VI

### Conclusion

In dealing with Religion and Human Development we have dwelt on various problems, viz., the threat of scientific achieve-

ments, the development of rational procedures, the emergence of a secular society and the growth of religious indifferentism. We have seen that the present day developments are unable to transform man into a better state by keeping religion at a remote distance. Therefore, the prime need is to give religion a new look in the light of rational and technical procedures and also to restore man's confidence in his own capacities in order to promote all round development of human beings. Because when we make a critical analysis of man, we find that man is always poised between science and religion, religion and reason. This description expresses his fundamental nature. From the cradle to the grave man swings continuously like a pendulum between science and religion, reason and religion. This conclusion, taken seriously, will save an individual from becoming only scientific in technique, rational in procedure, secular and indifferent in living.