Editorial

Necessity of Interface between Religion and Philosophy

In popular perception, religion and philosophy are seen as two distinct realities, which in many respects seem to be antithetical to each other. The way these have evolved in human history indicates a divergence in approaches. However, there is a strong trend to consider that despite the differences in approach, religion and philosophy form two sides of the same human quest for ultimate truth. As every human being aspires to seek the truth and to realize it in the best way possible, religion and philosophy continue to play their own roles in the process; it would do good to humanity, if they consciously adopted a complementary approach in their search for truth.

Although both religion and philosophy have evolved their own methods to lead seekers to truth, the religious approach, as it aims at massive mobilization of the faithful, employs comparatively easier and more appealing procedures; it offers more scope for human emotions and practical actions both of which are immediately appealing and perceivable to the ordinary people. In view of retaining the faithful within the fold with lifelong commitment, every religion has serious emphasis on creed, code, cult, and community, all of which have defined patterns and parameters offering clarity to the seekers' minds. Although religion offers complete freedom to the seeker in adopting and adhering to the particular way it offers, in many instances, the seeker is led by the already initiated and, therefore, a lot of aspects are generally handed down to the neophytes in their search for truth, which makes their religious existence easier and more result oriented. Generally speaking, as religions evolve structurally and get more and more institutionalized, there evolves an understanding that the seeker is given a definitive framework the acceptance of which will make things simpler and easier in their forward movement, group identity, and religious realization; here, the assumption is that the neophytes, in faith, adopt the way opened up by their forerunners. Although this is

an easier approach, at least in many instances, the importance laid on personal search and critical approach is largely missing and adjudged to be detrimental to the generation of personal religious convictions, informed responses, and a committed life.

Similarly, philosophy also offers alternate ways of approaching and realizing reality. The critical and creative reflective path opened up by philosophy enables human beings to employ the best of abilities to approach and understand the inner recesses of reality in varied ways. As history of humanity is the history of human thinking as well, it is quite likely that subsequent generations have access to the explorations already undertaken by the earlier ones; this naturally offers an advantageous platform to the neophytes if they would take the trouble to decode and inherit the wisdom of the past generations of philosophers for their own advantage. Despite having access to the bequeathed wisdom of the earlier generations, philosophy insists neither on following the footsteps of the forerunners nor the subsequent generations to follow suit; instead, what generally happens with philosophy is to keep the avenues open for the neophytes to explore further by themselves and to come to their own perspectives, which may be in accord with previous positions, or a new combination of some of the elements from divergent positions, or, still in very rare cases, fashion innovative approaches to open up new vistas in appropriating the reality.

Despite the apparent differences between religious and philosophical approaches, they have many commonalities that can enrich the human quest if they were to operate on a collective platform and adopt a collaborative pattern of action. As both are capable of meaning-giving encounters and engagements within the human domain, they can make human life more coherent and meaningful through their collective endeavours. Further, they could also support each other by way of their closer interactions and mutual influence. For example, philosophical engagements facilitated within the religious spheres will help purification of religious beliefs and practices, which will also give rise to better religious understanding capable of challenging and transforming

the consciousness and conscience of people and societies as they evolve through the vicissitudes of life.

In philosophical engagement with religion, there should evolve an understanding that every informed believer is prepared to critically reflect about religious faith (i.e., tenets of faith such as creed and code) that is subscribed to and practised (i.e., cult and community). Further, philosophy can provide critical tools required for evolving a more comprehensive and consistent framework for religion, which will equip itself address the quests and questions of the new generations by providing them a critical and creative perspective to interact with the new realities of life.

Philosophy as a dialogical exercise can infuse new orientations within the religious sphere to ensure that human religious quest balances between intelligence and emotion, fact and belief, and theory and praxis. While the doctrinal frames of religions may tend to bring in a 'closed' mind-set among the faithful (in order to safeguard purity and definitiveness of doctrine), integrating philosophical approach within the religious sphere would enable the latter to maintain creative openness towards the evolving understanding of truth facilitated by other human endeavours, including science and commerce. Moreover, closer collaboration between religion and philosophy will significantly benefit religion to creatively evolve itself by taking into account the critical perspectives that philosophy can offer.

There are differences in the languages employed by religion and philosophy; however, as both have evolved from the human existential contexts and as both ultimately employ the same human potentials in shaping them, there must be common factors, which need to be identified so that dialogue between religion and philosophy could be made more dynamic, promising, and rewarding. If this should happen, it is imperative that religion learns to understand and respect the language of philosophy while at the same time philosophy also learns to understand and respect the language of religion. For example, religion, while remaining dogmatic in its approach towards its own faith content, has to promote a non-dogmatic dialogue between the in-group members and those who are outside its

precincts; so also philosophy, while it cannot abandon its analytic-synthetic and critical approach in order to gather clarity on the realities approached and the concepts employed, should keep itself open to the religious avenues of seeking and transmitting the same through religious formulations and practices.

Involvement of philosophy in religious affairs can also enable religion to reclaim its lost territories in the contemporary times. Although modern philosophical trends questioned and constrained religion in many of its domains, some of such instances are seen today as having had the power to purify and transform religion from within. A purified religion reinvents its own inner powers and is better equipped to accompany the faithful in their lives and to make them more transformative. Religions that consciously initiate transformation from within are capable of rightfully reclaiming their lost place in the public sphere, which was originally insisted upon in the case of those religions that resisted change and unrealistically claimed impunity from everything detrimental to their status based sometimes on unduly 'claimed' sanctity and respect. The onslaught of Western form of secularism upon the religious sphere – restricting religion almost exclusively to personal sphere, and public sphere being completely 'freed' from the influence of religion – needs to be revisited if philosophy could assist religion in its attempts to reclaim its lost place. This becomes imperative as contemporary societies already face the backlash of pushing genuine religiosity to backseat in the form of fundamentalism, terrorism, etc.

In this context, philosophy could facilitate a dynamic negotiation between religion and polity and lead them to be collaborators than competitors in their endeavours to realize the common good of the society. Although the net result of secular forces trying to push religion out into the private sphere has been subscribed to by polity as advantageous to itself, by and large, it has only impoverished humanity as the good that religion is capable of establishing in the personal and social life of people has been significantly jeopardized. Religions, purified through constant self-critique facilitated by their members adopting

critical and creative philosophical approaches, can do a lot of good for humanity (for example, philosophy has the strength to undertake the purification of polity as well, and, together, it can certainly enhance the realization of common good in leaps and bounds). Instead of settling with the age-old tenets and practices some of which may be unworthy of even human consideration in the present times, such religions will become not only pro-active in their dogmatic approach but also committed to a practical agenda and wellbeing of the people.

Despite the advantages that a collaborative approach between religion and philosophy could bring about, both are in need of evolving further as humanity keeps moving forward. There is a necessity to go beyond the narrow boundaries of religion and philosophy, as they would then restrict their ambit by the traditional definitions imposed upon them by previous generations. It is unfortunate that there is a tendency among a large group of human beings to settle with what is bequeathed from the past. This tendency is very strong especially in the religious domain; it does not mean that philosophy is free from it. In general, we could say that the average approach in both religion and philosophy will comfortably settle with what is readily available as it is safer and easier. In this approach, the whole responsibility for the vision and the ensuing practice will be vested with the bygone generations; the result of their proactive approaches in their living milieu is adopted as the standard for the subsequent generations; in this process, especially if those paradigms are adopted uncritically, the ingenuity and sagacity of the later generations will be easily dismissed for the detriment of an evolving religious and philosophical consciousness. However, those who are really intelligent and courageous will not be ready to follow suit, but will courageously ready themselves to explore new modes of existence and to establish new patterns and procedures of life which, according to them, would make life more meaningful and relevant in their living milieu. Instead of being slavish followers of the past patterns, they would surge ahead with newer understanding and avenues that they would lay out through their

creative understanding and interactions with the reality. This indicates that there is a necessity to equip religion and philosophy to respond to socio-political realities that affect human wellbeing, and to evolve their doctrines and practices (namely, creed, code, cult, and community) to meaningfully address the existential realities of the faithful.

It is in this dynamic environment that *Journal of Dharma* comes up with this issue on "Religion and Philosophy," especially trying to analyse and cherish the interface between these two important domains of human life. In the first article by Peter Tyler, "Philosopher as a Therapist: Learning from Wittgenstein," the author convincingly explores the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein to show that he is as much as a therapist as a logician or theoretician. There is a move in his philosophy from thinking to seeing to acting, which suggests that a Wittgensteinian approach to learning could be categorised as 'astonishment'. Along this line, Vinoy Paikkattu, in his article "Dismantling the Dichotomy between Secular and Sacred: A Wittgensteinian Way," offers to understand the question of the sacred and the secular in a deeper way, neither by excluding one over the other nor by endorsing a compromise between the two, but by seeing the meaning of both from the point of view of human person who discovers the meaning of a 'lived life in the world'.

"Secularisation and Violence: Opening the World" by Erik Meganck explores the connection between secularisation and violence. Comparing and contrasting the positions of Gianni Vattimo and René Girard, the analysis oscillates between the need to consider secularisation as having an ethical appeal that needs to be radicalised and to be suspended if it carries no historical or theological imperative for our society. Philosophy, according to him, leaves the absolute primacy of planning and becomes hope, faith, and charity, and allows to 're-connect' in a mutually friendly way with theology, which suggests 'desecularisation' as a critique of (radical) secularisation that is capable of resisting the violence of enclosure of the world. George Karuvelil's article, "Epistemological Explorations in the Context of Religious Diversity," confronts the question as to why religion has been on

the defensive when epistemology took to centre stage with its scientistic orientation and foundationalist structure. Briefly looking at William Alston's attempt at doing epistemology of religious experience in the changed circumstances, the author explores how epistemology of religious experience could be further fine-tuned by offering an initial exposition of evidential naturalism, which has implications for the justification of beliefs arising from mystical experience that leaves abundant room for diversity of religious experiences.

"*Nostra aetate* and the Call for a Renewed Religion and Humanity" by Saju Chackalackal offers and attempt to recapture and assess the ground-breaking vision of the Vatican Council II, which, for the first time in the history of the Catholic Church, unveiled a new roadmap for the acceptance of religious plurality and a creative coexistence of religions. According to the author, although the Church has not succeeded in proceeding beyond the *Nostra aetate*, she has already laid out a new path of openness, dialogue, and collaboration into which Christians as well as the faithful of other religions should be initiated for the good of all. The entry concludes with the insistence that the way forward in this direction is to educate youngsters in being authentically religious and dynamically interreligious at the same time. Lawrence S. Fernandes, in his article "Mircea Eliade's Philosophy of Religion: The Reality and Relevance Today," taking cue from Eliade's position that religion is the 'experience of the sacred' experienced and manifested through signs, symbols, or rituals at some time in history, undertakes a detailed and critical analysis of the concept of the sacred with the help of field studies of popular religious practices of Catholics in Kalghatgi, Dharward, Karnataka, and shrines near Chennai, India. The study, on the one hand, offers a critical analysis of religion as presented by Eliade and, on the other, tested the applicability of his theory to popular religious practices, shedding light on the sacral character of religion as a whole. Finally, John Peter Vallabadoss, in his article "*Dharmārtha Mārga*: Path of Modern Gurus," analyses the rise of modern gurus in contemporary religious world. He proposes that *Dharmātha*

Mārga is the path conceived by modern gurus to cater to the aspirations of human beings for material growth without compromising spiritual values. The study throws light upon an integrated path paved by modern gurus, emphasizing that anything spiritual need not be devoid of materiality. For, taking the trend of market globalisation and consumerist tendencies of the contemporary world into consideration, these gurus endorse the position that the spiritual can emerge even in and through the physical.

These analyses of interfacing between religion and philosophy in the contemporary times show us the creative path to be adopted if we were to enhance their contributions to human civilization. As we are acutely aware of the havoc that humanity could be subjected to by way of isolating religion and philosophy and in constraining them to their exclusive domains, there is a need for cultivating a new outlook that facilitates mutual enrichment of each other. In other words, religion and philosophy should be brought together in a conscious but lasting embrace so that humanity can surge ahead and benefit the most.

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