

MAN'S DIALOGICAL NATURE AND THE DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS*

John B. Chethimattam

This can be called an era of dialogue. Scientific and technological progress has made our globe rather small and brought men closer together. Communications explosion has made our earth a global village where news even from the remotest corners are communicated all over the world via satellites in matter of seconds. In such a situation man cannot remain isolated from other men, nor hermetically insulated against their ideas and aspirations. The two great world wars accelerated the progress by throwing peoples for centuries kept apart by geography, religion and culture into the laps of each other during a catastrophic dislocation of normal living. Dialogue among Christian churches in the West started when Catholics were forced by circumstances to accommodate Protestant refugees in their churches and vice versa Protestant had to show hospitality to Catholic refugees. The long forgotten religions of the East came fully into the picture when nations of the East gained their political independence and asserted their identity in the world body of nations. But this spontaneously growing dialogue among religions only brings out a long neglected dimension of man; his dialogal physis structure, which contemporary philosophical thinking and religious experience have brought into focus.

Dialogue in Antiquity

The word and idea of dialogue has come down to us from classical Greek philosophy. Socrates was one of those who initiated and popularized it and Plato made it into a real philosophical art. To counteract the baneful influence of the Sophists who claimed to be able to prove anything and confound any one by their art of oratory, Socrates started engaging people in dialogical conversation to make them see truth by themselves. When people like Protagoras and Gorgias went about giving long harangues, "like brazen vessels which when struck continue to sound"¹ and displaying their ability in the art², Socrates approached people as a humble seeker of truth, interested

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¹Protagoras 329 A

²Euthydemus 274 D

only "in bringing the truth to light, not in winning an argument."³ Socrates come as a prophet among a people that had not even a word to indicate "inwardness" and "self-consciousness". When about to die he stated his mission thus: "Going about in the world, obedient to the God, I seek and make inquiry into the wisdom of citizens and strangers, whether any one of them appears wise. And when he is not wise, then in vindication of the oracle I show that he is not wise."⁴

Socrates' and for that matter Plato's, dialogical principle was that man is basically good, and has in himself all the sound principles, and so has no need to import them from the outside. Education is not like filling pipes and vessels with water, that "runs from the full to the empty."⁵ It is rather depth calling to the deep, fullness challenging fullness. People can be made to be their authentic selves by "bringing the whole, discourse back to its basic foundations" in the heart of human consciousness.⁶

When Christian apologist writers took over the dialogical form from the Greeks for their encounters with their religious adversaries, whether Jews, Gnostics or members of other Graeco-Roman religions, Plato's philosophy of dialogue seems to have been somewhat forgotten. It became a simple polemical device to make their adversaries look silly and totally mistaken, as is seen in the dialogue of Justin, Ariston of Pella and Evagrius. Or it was used merely as a mode of dogmatic instruction as seen in the dialogical writings of Augustine, Boetius, Cyril of Alexandria and Origen, or even as a literary form without any particular significance, as in the Conferences of John Cassian.

Contemporary Philosophical Thinking on Dialogue

But the contemporary philosophical consciousness of man's dialogical make up was in a way forced upon him by a precarious and threatening socio-philosophical situation. In the era of political instability and lack of clear and secure external leadership in the continental Europe, Emmanuel Kant and F.W. Hegel gave the basic philosophical insights into dialogue. In the face of an imminent universal threat of scepticism launched by the Empiricists Kant

³*Gorgias* 457 E

⁴*Apology* 23 B

⁵*Symposium* 175 D

⁶Xenophon. *Memorabili* IV, 6, 13

sought absolute and secure truth in reason's dialogue with itself.⁷ According to his transcendental dialectics, God, soul and world were postulated and posited by the self-questioning subject that needed these as the unifying principles of pure reason, which would be the most secure law of truth. But Kant's dialectics, thought it showed the basic need for dialogue, ended in a denial of all true dialogue with the phenomenal world and other men as well.

But Hegel found the need for dialogue in the very world of violence and conflict in which he lived.⁸ According to him, man begins with a personal opinion more or less coherent, which he calls myth. This is the stage of monologue. The idea of truth is not present in this or at least it is not explicit there. But soon opinions clash, myth encounters other myths and the monologues are opposed to each other. In this conflict there is violence when each one tries to impose his myth on others. But there is a way out from this monological violence when people start to discuss these opinions. This is the transition from myth to science, from monologue to dialogue, and from barbarity to philosophy. But, for Hegel this is also a transition from individuality to universality, from true personal dialogue of discussion to impersonal dialectics. Hence, his philosophy ended up as one of pure essence and universal will, falling far short of the existential situation of human beings in flesh and blood encountering each other as persons in an ever continuous tension between the individual and the universal.

The contemporary situation clearer guidelines were given to philosophy to carry out its reflection. The two world wars were not purely negative in their consequences. They brought man closer to man and set him concrete and definite tasks to achieve. To avoid future world wars merely the prospect of a nuclear holocaust is not enough. There is need to achieve mutual understanding between individuals and communities. In a situation where secular ideologies are motivating people that tackle world problems, some way must be found to bring about an understanding between them. Since persons from different cultures and backgrounds are coming together today for various purposes more frequently than ever before, greater need is felt to create an understanding between persons, and not merely between belief

⁷*Critique of Pure Reason* I, Part II, Division II

⁸George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trns., J. Sibree, (New York: Dover Publ. 1956), pp. 150 ff.

systems, and also a mode of behaviour both charitable and rational that allows both critical and appreciative approaches.

Besides these human social needs there are also economic pressures that call for sharing among all men, of science, of technology, and of the limited available resources. Besides, men need also critical guidance from each other concerning value judgements in planning and formulating policies. Above all these, today people are called upon to make contributions to community building, building up morale that will inspire people to work and build up a national perspective with a wider vision, and create an atmosphere and common language of spiritual and religious discourse. All these specific, social, economic, moral and religious needs have made a deeper analysis and closer understanding of human conversation and its inner dynamics really vital.

This is the reason why philosophy has left behind the Greek concern for objective nature, with man as a mere part of it, and has come to concentrate its attention on human consciousness. At the beginning of the 17th century, Rene Descartes made a definite break with the Greek and Medieval philosophical traditions when he came forward with his 'cogito', I think, and rivetted attention on the human self. With a deeper understanding of the human consciousness today, Western philosophy is affirming its openness not merely to the individual human subject, but to intersubjectivity, the communion of subjects or selves. The focus of philosophical thinking today is the "we", the realm of dialogue. To reach this point Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and other Phenomenologists had to make an impartial analysis of human consciousness, which is not a mere object, nor purely an isolated subject, constantly growing and expanding in a process of continuous experiencing. Gabriel Marcel and other personalist thinkers showed that on the one hand man has to affirm his subjectivity in order to establish the individual in his own right, but on the other, complement it by affirming the universal character of private experience, calling for sharing and dialogue with others. Man's self is essentially intersubjective.⁹

Finally, Martin Buber has shifted emphasis from the intersubjective openness of human nature to the existential process of dialogue itself. According to him man's nature makes him an 'it', a thing among things, but his existence itself is dialogical. One has to go beyond universal human nature

⁹Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Vitator*; *Creative Fidelity* etc.

and face the other in his concrete existence accepting him as he is and impart oneself to him as one actually is. The essence of dialogue is to confirm one's partner as this existing being and allow him to partake of his own being.¹⁰

Psychology of Dialogue:¹¹

Psychologically the human self is dialogal, all authentic human activity is dialogue: Poetry is dialogue with the world; love is dialogue with others, and prayer is dialogue with God. But the strange fact is that man has a strong temptation for isolating himself in monologue, to close himself in his own system even in the realm of thought and reject others. This monological tendency is seen in various aspects of human behaviour.

Boredom and Monologue: The general phenomenon of being bored is a sign of a person being left to himself with a certain inner emptiness and lack of content in himself. Schopenhauer found in boredom a motive for sociability, since a person can be led by dissatisfaction with himself to enter into dialogue with others. But, in fact, when one starts looking for others out of a personal emptiness, there is a possibility that he may get bored with others as well; true dialogue can come only from interior fullness.

Irony and Humour indicate another aspect of monological behaviour. They show an attitude of disagreement with the world and the others. The ironic holds himself aloof and disdains what he criticizes. The humorist, however, mixes a certain sympathy with his detached criticism and shows some complicity with what he is laughing at. Both may show a certain healthy detachment from the particularity of the world they are facing. But there is need to get beyond the phase of self isolation, if one should not lose the sense of reality itself. The ironist has no sense of being; he empties the world of all substance.

Pride and Vanity: Pride is the principle root of monologue, since it isolates the individual in himself with a sense of self-sufficiency. Vanity, on the other hand, shows a certain openness to others with a concern for their approval and recognition. But this too is self-centred and seeks to

¹⁰Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*. I and Thou etc.

¹¹Cf. Jean Lacroix, *Le sens du dialogue* (Neuchatel: Ed. de la Baconnier, 1965). The whole book is a physiological analysis of dialogue in the philosophical sense.

instrumentalize other for one's own self satisfaction. Both vanity and pride seek self-glorification, but pride does this by force, while vanity wants to achieve it by the good opinion and cooperation of others. But, both equally hurt true dialogue. The superficial sociability created by vanity is far different from the communion of friendship built upon reason. Vanity rules in a world of imagination, and there the units do not belong together as in the real world, but remain loosely connected as in a dream. Hence, it creates a certain anonymity of individuals. In true friendship, on the other hand, because it is based on truth, reason is a common good that units closely and firmly those who possess it, without denying the identity and rights of each one. Vanity creates a society of falsehood. The vain man lacks substance, cannot discover himself and cannot be transformed in encountering others. The proud sins by his self-sufficiency, the vain by its lack; the former refuses to be, preferring himself to Being, while the latter seeks to be in the other's opinion, in the ephemeral world of appearances. Never attaining reality, the vain is in danger of asphyxiating himself. Only the realism of humanity can create the openness necessary for dialogue.

Duplicity: Duplicity is yet another block to true dialogue. The basis for duplicity is in man himself, his dual nature of spirit and matter. The very sign of intelligence is that instead of helplessly facing in wishful thinking an object that cannot be directly attained, it can go the round about way of temporarily removing oneself from the object and have recourse to appropriate means that will eventually take him to the desire goal. Instinctive nature and rationality create a certain duality in man: instinct which is an expression of man's animality has to wear a mask of noble values to be accepted by reason. In life a person has to play several roles, of the family man, the business executive, friend to his equals and the like. But all this do not by themselves constitute duplicity: it will be the same person conscious of himself that plays all these roles. There is a certain integrity of the person in all the personalities he assumes. But duplicity is when he identifies himself with the role he plays. The duplicity can be purely exterior when he pretends to other that he is not what he really is or that he is what he really is not. This is the case of the spy, the cheat and the villain. Worse still is the duplicity if the person identifies himself also interiorly with his external appearance. For example the coward, who thinks that the obstacles are insurmountable, isolates himself from the real world and constructs a little world of his own with the grapes-are-sour attitude.

True dialogue can take place only in an atmosphere of sincerity with oneself and with others. This requires equality of the participants in dialogue. In situation where this equality does not exist dialogue becomes impossible, and duplicity may be the only safeguard for personality. All situations of violence and fear foster duplicity. In master-salve and superior-inferior relationships the salve and inferior often take refuge in duplicity. Similarly in a purely spiritualistic morality that condemns man's bodily existence, sexuality seeks liberation through duplicity. Man is not a simple being, but rather the dialectics of being and appearances. An atmosphere of openness to oneself and others can be created only when man's complexity, his multiplicity of roles and appearance is recognized and in all that his single personal being accepted.

Person, the Basis of Dialogue

Openness to other men in dialogue should be based on the wholeness and integrity of the person. Person unifies in himself to complementary tendencies, one directed towards the concentration and mastery of self, and other to expansion and gift of self to others. Individual and person are not the same, and yet biopsychological individuality and self-identity are essential to personality. Person, in a sense, breaks open the barriers and restrictions of the individual to become more universal, to be more and more what the others are, in order to be more authentically oneself. Self-possession and self-gift constitute the rhythm of personal life.

Here the Western and Eastern emphases are slightly different. In the Western rational and objective thought, self is only the immediate principle of a man's activities and provides a certain unifying point for the diverse factors that constitute his existence. Person appears as a higher comprehensive principle that establishes him as a responsible and free subject over against the others, especially the wholly Other, God.¹² In the Eastern thought on the other hand, person is only an external facade of a man's existence. Its root and ground is in the *Atman*, the Self; the ultimate Self and ground is God, in whom he should discover himself more authentically. Hence in meeting the

¹²Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom* (Yale, 1960) pp. 45 ff. "The man who attains true awareness of his freedom gains certainty of God. ... This I know: in my freedom I am not through myself, but am given to myself... Where I am automatically myself, I am certain that I am not through myself".

others he is not meeting something wholly other, but rather partial manifestations of what he is authentically in himself.¹³

In both conceptions, however, dialogue is the basic dimension of what one is. In both, human psychology is tied to a moral character, a faith to which he can be faithful. This is the source of his strength when he encounters another and communicates what he is to the other. This communication is a witnessing. There was a time in the recent past when witnessing was conceived as not anything more than an external narrative of the event with no personal involvement of the witness. What was expected of him was fidelity to the event, external correspondence between the event and the recital. But today with deeper understanding of human psychology, the moral character and faith of the witness appear vital in witnessing. What is looked for in witnessing is the personality of the witness. He cannot be merely externally faithful. If the witnessing is authentic, it will engage the whole being of the witness. A fact is an external happening that can be perceived, registered, explained and ascertained as an object. But an experienced event is an act, a personal happening, which can only be comprehended and attested to by the witness. He is so much involved in the event, that to deny the witnessing will be to deny his own self. People meet in dialogue not in the drawing room style of superficial comments on persons and news items, but in a deeper kind of personal witnessing. Hence it cannot be explained in terms of purely psychological and social nature of man, but only in terms of the participants' relation to a higher reality in which they have faith and to which they owe fidelity.

Meaning of Dialogue

Dialogue is conversation. In conversation we discuss certain things or persons. But this discussion has to break away from the Cartesian subjective-objective dichotomy. A friendly conversation is not a study in depth of a particular subject or theme, analyzing it, using expository, exegetical, **explicitatory** techniques ending up with evaluative statements.¹⁴ In such and analytic and evaluative discussion emphasis will be on the object of

¹³Cf. The great Upanishadic statements: "Brahman is consciousness"; "this is one alone without a second"; "This Self is Brahman"; "My Self is Brahman"; "That art thou" etc.

¹⁴Cf. Martin G. Plattel, *Social Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 64-67.

discussion and on the information imparted. In conversation, however, the persons conversing remain the focus. But it is not the communication of subjective reactions and emotive evaluations either. In this case the focus will be the subject that exposes his individual emotions. As regards the objects, the conversation may the best be an "introduction": the listener already knows something about the matter and wants to know more, and his partner is sharing with him his own knowledge about it. If such sharing becomes too critically analytic or evaluative, conversation itself will be killed.¹⁵

The purpose of dialogue is that men should draw close to each other. For this, religion, philosophy and culture should be bonds and links enabling people to share experience, ideas and ideals instead of being dividing fences between classes and groups. But there are two types of people, essence men and image men. The former seek authenticity in themselves so that they can find satisfaction in themselves, while the latter are constantly concerned about the impression they make on others and search to create attractive images of themselves for others. Essence men are liable to close themselves in themselves narcissistically, while image men tend to wear masks that hide their identity. Man needs confirmation from his fellowmen for what he is. The difficulty of securing this confirmation makes people hide either within their individuality or within artificial hideouts. Mere individuation cannot bring fulfillment to man. Only a discovery of the meaning of existence can bring him fulfillment. This is the scope and end of dialogue. Only one who is open to truth can find this meaningful fulfillment. Truth judges all men, Plato affirms clearly this basic principle of dialogue when he makes Socrates say in *Gorgias*: "I am one of those who are willing to be refuted if I say anything that is not true, and willing to refute any one else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute."¹⁶

So, dialogue means confirming one's partner as this existing being and legitimizing him over against oneself as a partner. Both are recognized as finite and individual, but the meaning is not found in the individuality itself, but rather in the common situation open to the fullness of truth, to the attainment of which mutual help is needed. An act of genuine fantasy is needed, in the words of Martin Buber, in order to go beyond the offending

¹⁵John J. Mood, "Conversation and Interpretation," *Philosophy Today*, 15 (1971), 181-185.

¹⁶*Gorgias* 458 A.

limitations of the other and make him present as whole and one. Any artist can paint a woman before him. But only a greater artist can visualize in the same picture at the same time the title girl she was as well as the old woman she will be. Only a true artist of the spirit can break the tendency towards appearances and arrive at the fullness of reality in dialogue.

Speech is not the most important factor in dialogue.¹⁷ Presence in silence to each other can be an eloquent form of dialogue. Whether one should speak or not depends on the legitimacy of what one has to say. One's effect as a speaker should not outweigh the thought of what one has to say. When several people are engaged in a dialogue not every one present has to speak. But one cannot be there as a mere observer. Each one must be ready to share with others, and have in mind the other or the others in their present and particular being and strive to establish a living and mutual relation between himself and them. It is seeing the other or experiencing the other side. In opposition to this dialogical attitude may be indicated dully tempered disagreeableness, obstinacy or contrariness.

Structure of Dialogue

Dialogue is relationship. It is the mutual relatedness of partners open in their concrete existences. It is not mere "empathy", by which one experiences the other to the exclusion of one's own concreteness. In empathy the actual life situation is extinguished. Dialogue demands distinction and also the maintenance of the identity of each partner. It is not a collective self-seeking either. In selfishness, the "eros" of monologue there is no sharing, but only a display or enjoyment of subjective feelings. As Martin Buber says, love without dialogue is Lucifer.¹⁸ In encountering the others it only seeks to exploit them for its own sake.

Dialogue does not take place to provide for a need or to remedy a deficiency. Though it accepts the existence of the partners as they are, including their material limitations and restrictions, it arises from the positive wealth and abundance of the spirit. Its attitude is best exemplified in gift giving, which is the expression of an intersubjective giving. The gift is entirely at the disposal of the recipient, yet continues to be that of the giver.

¹⁷M. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. R.C. Smith (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), p. 14.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 25.

The gift I accepted from you is mine precisely because I am yours, and it is ours because we are each others. Hence it is not the giving of **some thing**, but the giving of **oneself**.

Similarly, dialogue is not syncretism, which seeks to take the best ideas from every school of thought, lifting them out of their original context to make a composite out of them. The partners in dialogue keep their identity and the ideas contributed by each one is kept in the perspective of his own thought structure. But, at the same time, his contributions are at the disposal of his partners helping them to deepen their own identity and discover the same values hidden away in some corner of their own traditions. Thus it becomes a common search for truth, that transcends all particular traditions.

Here true dialogue differs from economic transactions, in which there is a certain opposition and mathematical equality between giving and receiving, service and compensation. Debt contracted by receiving is immediately paid off by the giving. But in the intersubjective communication my acceptance of the others' self-surrender is precisely my own loving surrender to him. I receive the other's self-communication only by giving myself. This is the dominant attitude in dialogue. A mathematical calculation of the ideas proffered and their value for the listener are not the primary considerations. Sincerity and openness of the partners is the important factor. So they are not worried about making a wrong statement or of being misunderstood, since the attitude of openness provides the possibility of being corrected by others and of correcting them without personal offence or loss of face. Hence, a dialogue session is not a super-market of ideas, a universal giving and receiving. It is basically the expression of men being together as "I" and "Thou" in their original togetherness as persons in the same human nature. Exchange of ideas is only one aspect of this togetherness in distinction. The value of dialogue is not, therefore, judged primarily by the importance of the ideas communicated. Human togetherness is fostered by a lot of trivial gestures, like passing salt or sugar at table even though one may easily reach out and take them by oneself, or communicating personally a new that the other may have already received through other sources. These simple gestures serve to confirm one's personal presence to another.

Conditions of Dialogue

From this intersubjective structure of dialogue follow a number of consequences that stand for necessary conditions for a successful dialogue between religions today.

1) Dialogue should start with a sense of the concrete situation in which the partners meet, a recognition of the present historical context and of the historical responsibility of man today. One has to resist the easy temptation of immunizing oneself from the tensions of the actual world. Dialogue should not start from an urge "to confront and 'contain' the other as part of one's theological existence." Dialogue is not sought for its own sake as an intellectual **pastime**, but for the sake of man, who has to discover his own identity, weaknesses and strong points, and recover his religious sense in the modern world against the anti-religious forces.

2) Dialogical attitude demands a certain sense of one's own identity, and firmness in one's own faith. But this does not mean immobility or obstinacy in one's position. A sense of incompleteness in oneself and willingness to be corrected and converted is intrinsic to it. A claim for a monopoly of truth closes the door to real dialogue. This does not mean that one has no confidence in the adequacy of his position. A confidence in the adequacy of one's theological position and soundness of faith at the same time also imply that one cannot fully comprehend or appreciate all their implications and attain the depth of the mystery. A mystery that can be exhausted in conceptual categories is no mystery.

3) From this it follows that religious dialogue, and any dialogue for that matter, should not be restricted to the academic or conceptual level. It must, to be adequate, take place on all levels of human experience and social intercourse.

4) Similarly a dialogue that is carried out within the semantic framework of the terminology peculiar to one religious tradition may defeat its own purpose and end up as one or several monologues. The same reality may be approached from several angles, and the problems framed differently. Restriction to any one frame work may obstruct intersubjective communion between persons of different traditions. Only in an atmosphere of respectful tolerance of other opinions and other approaches may one gain an enriching experience of truth itself. Though individuals engage in dialogue, they too are part of institutional self-interests and actually represent systems of thought that are cultural "empires". So, only by consciously breaking defence mechanism proper to those self-interests and repudiating negativism and aggression may they enter into authentic dialogue.

5) Another basic fact of dialogue is that each one of the partners may be already in possession of a part-truth of the other's insight or error. Even error is not a total negation. It lives only by reason of the element of truth captivated in it. But the obstacle to true dialogue is that the part-truth from the other is kept within one's own preconceived framework with an implicit rejection of its wholeness as built up by the other. But, honest dialogue which accepts and legitimizes the other in his authenticity must take seriously his development of the part-truth. This positive approach to the wholeness of the other will make us "see faiths-in-relation as the deep test of faith itself." This contrast of faiths, which may be a paradox or a transcendental unity, will be the arena of the integrity of dialogue.¹⁹

6) Dialogue should not take one's own authentic identity for granted. The other's presence throws a brilliant beam of light into my own identity often revealing tensions between my faith and the non-essential cultural milieu. A partisan attachment to a time space bound cultural framework may affect the authenticity of faith itself. If culture may, on the one hand, strengthen faith, it can on the other, also particularize and restrict it. Hence, dialogue demands a constant willingness to view one's own existence critically to break open such restrictive barriers. The same evaluative self analysis is needed to bridge the gap between the abstract and universalist conception of faith and the real, symbolically charged, and concrete situation of personal encounter in dialogue.

Theological Perspectives of Dialogue

But this openness to the other in authentic dialogue accepting and legitimizing his existence can be exercised only in the presence of the Eternal Thou. The very reason for the dialogue is that one does not have one's fullness in oneself. The basic invitation for dialogue is in the awareness of the 'signs' that continually address us in all that happens. Whenever we look for meaning in things and happenings they appear as signs and invitations of an Eternal Thou in whom alone one can find totality. Man's individual existence is encased in an armour of selfishness that tends to ward off the "signs" that come to him from "the others", since they present a threat to his individuality. Individual's tendency is to dominate the world and to use it as he likes. But by

¹⁹Cf. Statement of the Ajaltoun Consultation: "Between Men of Living Faiths" *Dialogue*, spec. number, 1971.

shutting out the signs he is shutting off his orientation to the infinite, his awareness of God who speaks in signs. As Martin Buber says, every man has a tendency to hide like Adam from the face of God: "To escape responsibility for his life he turns existence into a system of hide-outs" and "enmeshes himself more and more deeply in perversity".²⁰ The external conflict between man and man is rooted in this inner conflict that separates man from his eternal source. So true dialogue with men can come only from an inner openness to God.

Buddhist Contribution to Religious Dialogue

Buddhism was the first missionary religion in the world, and so it was also the one to emphasize the importance of religious dialogue. Two basic social virtues preached by Buddhism are **karuna** and **maitri**, compassion and friendliness. One who has attained final illumination like Gautama Buddha fully realizes the misery of life and of worldly existence and looks upon all things with compassion. But in the midst of this misery, ignorance and bondage he also discovers light and consciousness, at the sight of which he shows friendliness and joy. Only in the light of the final enlightenment do other men and life itself have any meaning.

But the one who formulated the principles of religious dialogue²¹ in the spirit of Buddhism was Asoka, the emperor. In his rock edicts, he pleads for the peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding of different religions. The point of departure for dialogue according to him is that "all seek mastery of the senses and purity of mind", though men are "different in their inclinations and passions" and all cannot "make lavish gifts", but can only seek virtues of mind and heart. On account of this actual "unity in diversity" King Priyadarsi (Asoka) honours men of all faiths, and places the emphasis on "growth in the qualities essential to religion in men of all faiths". According to him, modesty should persuade religious men not to extol their own faith or disparage the faiths of other people; for, by honouring the faiths of others "one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a service to the faith of others." Only in harmony and concord may one profit by the **Dharma** presented by the others. So an earnest effort should be made to go beyond one's particular faith and to gain a clear understanding of the doctrines of other faiths. Only in this

²⁰M. Buber, *Between Man and Man*, pp. 14 F.

²¹*The Edicts of Asoka*, ed., N.S. Nikam and R. McKeon (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1959), Rock Edicts VII & XII, pp. 51-52

way, according to Asoka, can each man's faith be properly promoted and the glorification of **Dharma** itself attained.

Role of Dialogue in Religious Experience

Asoka's insistence on religious dialogue brings out the role of dialogue both from the point of view of faith and religious experience and from the consideration of the sociological condition of religious men. Though religion is the experience of the ineffable divine reality it is still man's experience. No individual's experience is complete without the cumulative experience of others. This was the basic insight of world religions. The Rgvedic sage in calling gods and men to the ritual of sacrifice insists on the unity of counsel, mind, thoughts, purpose, resolve and hearts so that the desired fruits of the offering may be achieved.²² Similarly, the greatness of wisdom is not merely in an individual's experience of the Word, even in the heart of the **Rishi**, but in its sharing in the assembly of true Brahmins who respect their friends and bring them honour and wealth. All do not have the same capacity to understand the Word nor the same function towards it. One may recite the hymns, another may pronounce the sacrificial formulas, a third may propound the niceties of ritual, while a fourth can interpret the deeper metaphysical implications. But all share in the experience of the word.²³ Though all have to attain the realization of reality in God, it is not granted to all at the same time and in the same manner. The ministry of Gurus, prophets and teachers is needed so that all may arrive at a certain realization of the ultimate reality. In Hinduism realization of the authentic self may be reached only through a long discipleship under a competent Guru, who alone can pronounce the liberating **tattvamasi**, your authentic Self is that.

In Christianity the central point of religious experience is the Christ Event, the historical suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, through which humanity is liberated from sin. But the disciples who were the immediate witnesses of that event had to communicate through their preaching their liberating experience in faith to other communities, and through them to yet others down the centuries in history. Church itself is this community of experience focused on the Christ event, which points on the one hand to the inner reality of God and on the other to the building up of men into the

²²*RgVeda* X, 191

²³*RgVeda* X, 71

authentic human family. God himself is not an impersonal entity, but the dialogal community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In order that men may be constituted into the true people of God they have to accept a relationship of mutual understanding and love modelled upon the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian community. The role and the meaning of Church in the communication of the Gospel of salvation to all men is to function as the true community of Christ's disciples united in the knowledge and wisdom of the Son, and the love of the Holy Spirit.

Today, more than ever, this dialogal structure of religious experience has been paradoxically expressed by Marxism. According to Marx, Feuerbach resolved the religious essence into the human essence, and the human reality into the ensemble of social relations.²⁴ Opposed to dialogue is alienation and this alienation is basically the biblical idea of sin. According to Marx, man's present existence is marked by alienation, alienation from the object of his labour, alienation of labour from the act of production, and alienation of man from man.²⁵ According to the Bible also, man's sin is his failure to live up to the divine likeness in which he was created, his submitting himself to the slavery of nature rather than dominating it and making it fruitful, his hatred of man, his own brother. According to both Marx and the Bible, this alienation has to be annulled by a collective achievement of dominating nature and overcoming all obstacles to free conscious activity and of creating true brotherhood among all men. But Marx thought that religion was an obstacle to this revolutionary freedom since it offered man a "pie in the sky when you die", thus rendering him lazy and apathetic in the face of his present slavery.

²⁴Selection in *Feuerbach* p. 224, Martin Buber considers this discovery of the real being of man as the most significant contribution of Feuerbach: "The individual man for himself does not have man's being in himself, either as a moral being or a thinking being. Man's being is contained only in community, in the unity of man with man—a unity which rests, however, only in the reality of the difference between I and thou." (*Between Man and Man*, pp. 147-148). Marx says in his *Das Kapital* that man "first recognizes himself as reflected in other men". Peter recognizes his relation to himself as man only by first becoming aware of his relation to the man Paul as a being of like mind with himself (P. 23).

²⁵Cf. Lynn de Silva, "Holy Worldliness," *Dialogue*, new series 2 (1975) 1-6

Theology of the social situation

What makes dialogue more urgently necessary is the theology of the social situation. Every religion is called upon today to carry on within itself "an inner dialogue, with a view to adjust and readjust itself to the challenges of reality presented by other cultures, religions and ideologies and to the demands of an emerging world society."²⁶ No religion has come down to us entirely unchanged in the course of history. What each religion is today is the end result of a long process of interaction with other religions and cultures. What was unconsciously happening through centuries in the past, we are called upon today to accomplish consciously and deliberately. Today the religious man is challenged by a fast developing temporal field, by the inadequacy of outdated modes of social organization and patterns of thought and expression, and by the phenomenon of religious pluralism and secularism.²⁷ Widespread poverty in the world and the everwidening gap in the standard of life between the people of the developed countries and of the underdeveloped third world has shifted the emphasis from purely religious issues to the total liberation of man through the modernization of the means of production. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru remarked at the dawn of India's independence, the stage when people could sit discussing what they were is today superseded by a stage that asks what they can do.²⁸ All religious men have to enter into a dialogue with their fellow countrymen in this common search for the total liberation of man.

Even for realizing and communicating the religious message the old and especially imported modes of thought and patterns of expression are found to be inadequate. Theology as communitarian reflection on faith cannot be

²⁶*Religion and society*, 12 (1965), p. 2 editorial on "Interfaith Dialogue". The whole number is significant in the analysis of the problem of religious dialogue ten years ago.

²⁷P.D. Devanadan, *Preparation for Dialogue* (Bangalore: CISRS, 1965), pp. 174-178. Devanadan's preoccupation ten years ago was with Christianity's need to enter into dialogue with the resurgent religions of India. Today all religions have come to realize this need for interfaith dialogue.

²⁸Speech at the Aligarh Muslim University, 1948. Later in life he realized the need to affirm the value of one's being too. "Apart from material development that is imperative, I believe that the human mind is hungry for something deeper in terms of moral and spiritual development." R.K. Karanjia. *The Mind of Mr. Nehru*. P. 35.

borrowed from abroad, but has to grow out of the shared experience of people conscious of their living problems. This calls for an ongoing dialogue among believers of different traditions who face the same situation and have to resolve the same living problems of human life.

But above everything else, the phenomenon of religious pluralism calls for dialogal cooperation. Those who live together in a community are necessarily also neighbours in faith, though they have their roots in different traditions, and some of them have been uprooted from a particular religious loyalty on account of their new commitment to certain ways of thought and life. Dialogue alone can establish an understanding among these people living and working together, and this dialogue must reach a certain religious depth if it should bring them together as persons open to each other. Besides, clashes between different religions competing for the allegiance of the same people were the greatest scandals in human history, since religion, as the one factor that can unite the minds and hearts of men, became the source of division and conflict. But today, that stage is apparently past, and there is a general realization that all religions in one way or another belong to an integral plan of salvation for all men. To achieve this common task continues dialogue and sharing of experience among the followers of different religions is necessary. Even secular and apparently antireligious movements like Marxism concentrate their attention on certain burning problems of humanity, to which no religious man can be indifferent. Hence, in working for the integral liberation of all men there is a need to maintain an ongoing dialogue with such movements also.

God's Word and Religious Dialogue

But the basic objection to religious dialogue is often drawn not from the part of human experience and sociology but from the definitive character of the word of God contained in each religion. In Hinduism Veda is the definitive Scripture and who ever did not accept its authority were called **nastikas**, non-believers; even each school of Hinduism was intolerant of any interpretation of the Veda other than the one given by its teachers. For Christianity the revelation of God is definitive and complete in Jesus Christ, who through his sacrifice of the Cross and resurrection from the dead definitively saved the human race from sin and thus became the focal point of human history. Islam considers Koran as the definitive revelation of God given to Mohammed for all humanity. With this definitive and ultimate truth in one's possession why should one go seeking for truth in other religions?

But, on the other hand, this affirmation of the definitive divine word for humanity claimed by each religion is the most compelling reason for entering into dialogue with other religious traditions and religious men of other faiths. For, though the Veda, the Bible and the Koran are claimed to be the divine word, all admit that they are presented to us in and through human experience in the limited and dated language of man. All the cultural forms, idioms and modes of understanding of all religions will not enable us to exhaust or even to sound the depths of the ineffable mystery presented in them. Only the concentrated effort of the different religious traditions can make the divine message adequately intelligible in the complex situations of human existence. Indeed, from the Christian point of view, a privileged position is claimed by Jesus Christ, who by his work of redemption became the unique turning point of human history as a whole. But, the humanity of Christ was the sacrament of God and the instrument of the divine Logos in achieving this. The same Logos is active in other religions also so that each religion may play its role in its own way in the total economy of human salvation. Those who accept the presence of the Logos in Jesus of Nazareth cannot reject him and his Spirit when they are active elsewhere in human history. Besides, the acceptance by God of the work of the created and history-bound human nature of Jesus Christ was also at the same time the acceptance in and with him of all that is genuinely human and authentic in human history. Hence, the genuine religious contributions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam, of Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed and others can no longer be termed purely human, but must be taken as integral to the one economy of human salvation.

Conclusion

Thus dialogue is a basic dimension of contemporary human experience as a whole and of theological reflection in particular. Though the global village of humanity progressively shrinking with communications explosion and the growing social needs of man crying for total liberation are the two factors that emphasize the urgency of dialogue, in it humanity is discovering a long forgotten aspect of its existence: Man is not an object, but a conscious subject not an isolated "I" but an intersubjective "We", which can attain self-realization only through dialogue. In dialogue he has to fight the inborn obstacles of boredom, irony, pride and duplicity and consciously open his soul to others and to the eternal Thou of God, who is also the deepest Self. On the religious plane dialogue is not a concession or a luxury. A purely individualistic religious experience only imprisons man in his own self

alienation from the world and others. The definitive saving message of salvation enshrined in and recognized by the different religious traditions point to God's saving word to humanity that can be properly understood only with the total past religious history of humanity in view and with all the help that religion can provide us with towards the understanding of the ineffable mystery of God. The sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ is not the exclusive property of any particular group or tradition, but it is the clear and definitive word of God that humanity's religious future is one, that in him all that is genuinely human and religious is accepted and taken up into the one universal plan of salvation of all men.