

# Free research paper on what can christianity contribute to a pluralistic culture

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Pluralism is the notion that reality is comprised of several components. It basically postulates that there is more than one alternative to any problem. Hence, there is no such thing that is perfect or absolute and everything is relative in terms of the other. Cultural pluralism stands for the validity of diverse cultures. As Slick (n. d.) points out, this idea contradicts the teachings of the Bible that there is one almighty God (Isaiah 43: 10; 44: 6; 45: 5) and that Christianity is the truly revealed religion.

Charles Haynes (1994) had once said, “ How will we live with our deepest differences?” (as cited in Hsieh, Gallien & Lederhouse, 2014). Christ had asked man to love his neighbour as himself. (Mk 12: 31) Christians believe that man has been created in the image of God. Since man receives God’s grace, man cannot be discriminated against, on the basis of race, class or gender. One instance for this is to be found in the scriptures. Paul addresses people of diverse cultures on Mars Hill (Acts 17) because he knew who comprised his audience. He was aware of their backgrounds and sought common ground to make his point. This he did without compromising on the Gospel (Hsieh et al).

As Hall (2003) purports, the question --" Who are you?" has taken the place of the question " Who am I?" as the ‘ other’ becomes more important.

Various disadvantaged groups have become more assertive for e. g. women, children, indigenous people etc. Each system claims the world for itself.

There is no golden mean if we have to choose between exclusive and sometimes contradictory systems. According to Hall, if our neighbour follows an opposing system, it would be practically difficult to love him still.

Christianity has reacted to the changed circumstances by replacing conflict

with dialogue. While the doctrines of Christianity have been retained, the manner of presentation has been according to the audience, which is based on their culture and spirituality. Hence interfaith dialogue rather than new theories is the need of the hour (Hall, 2003).

In the context of pluralism, it must be stated that the Gospel can be propagated irrespective of whether it receives privileges to flourish. A Christian has the same right to practice his faith as a non-Christian has. As Willard (1992) points out, the persecution mentality of non-Christians implies that they can be more assertive than Christians. A Christian would be termed discriminatory for attacks on minorities. The reverse would probably not elicit a similar response. The onus is on us to accept truth and reality, which do not adapt to us. An older tradition need not necessarily be true. Though it has the right to exist in a pluralistic society, it will be of no avail. Inclusivism goes against the grain of Christian belief that Jesus is the true path (Willard). Diversity and pluralism are not the same. Diversity is only the existence of disparate groups. It is when these groups engage with one another that there is pluralism. On the other hand, assimilation is when a place is viewed as a melting pot. All minorities or migrants are expected to leave their cultures or religions behind and accept the dominant faith or culture of the land (From Diversity to Pluralism). However, most foreigners who settle in a particular land, cling to their faith. This leads to ghettoisation or zoning, where they are slotted in particular areas of a place. There is tension as newcomers bring in new practices hitherto unknown to the earlier inhabitants. An outcome of this is violence that is mostly directed at the newcomers. However, diversity does lead to inter-faith dialogue and co-

operation whereby different groups co-ordinate in secular and other common causes (From Diversity to Pluralism).

One can tolerate the other without having any idea about it. Tolerance is not the foundation on which a society can exist peacefully. People fear that pluralism dilutes one's beliefs by acknowledging the other. However, a genuine pluralistic society is committed to differences among groups. We can be ourselves, at the same time acknowledging others. Pluralism is encountering and not hiding differences. What binds different groups is their commitment to dialogue in society. Not everyone agrees in a dialogue, which should nevertheless happen. There is a need for intra- as well as inter-faith dialogue in the contemporary world (From Diversity to Pluralism).

According to Leffel (n. d.), exclusivism in the Christian context is no longer considered politically correct. Pluralism purports that beliefs of one culture hold true only for that culture and not for others with a different perspective. Truth is the product of consensus and is not found in reality that is distinct from our beliefs. Hence, truth is a subjective concept. According to the author, Christianity should acknowledge the sins it committed in the name of Christ, like slavery and savagery in the New World. This is irrespective of the social reform that it has undergone from the days of the Renaissance. The Bible has no place for hypocrisy, which Christians are accused of. However, the idea that truth is a social concept goes against the grain of the Bible. According to post-modernists, what is important is the interpretation and not the reality. Hence, they emphasise narrative and story rather than the reality and truth (Leffel).

Pluralists stress that all religions lead to God. However, universal salvation is

not the end result in every religion. If universalism were true, what one believes in need not be an issue at all. The concept of divine love is reduced to a nought by this concept. If there is no final judgement, the choices of humans do not make any difference whatsoever. Hence, the concepts of heaven and hell cannot be differentiated. Universalism depicts God as to be aloof from cruelty and man's suffering. Justice is intertwined with God's love (Leffel).

Leffel further evaluates the findings of Hick; and according to him, no particular worldview is dominant enough in the words of Hick. Pluralists view religious truth as man's experience in a cultural context. However, Hick ends up speaking for agnosticism i. e. no one can understand God. Hence, in the name of pluralism, he ends up disguising a concept that goes against the concepts of religion. Christianity, in the eyes of other religions is tainted with Western Imperialism. The injustice in the name of imperialism should be condemned. This is true in the context of biblical moorings of various civil rights movements. Similarly, Christianity has been criticised in the name of capitalism. It is necessary to distance the Christian faith from these fallacies. There is a need to take up concepts of cross-cultural dialogue without compromising the tenets of the Bible. One needs to be more flexible in the fight for the Christian cause, given that the majority is overwhelmingly pluralistic (Leffel).

## **Hence, according to The Social Action Commission of the Evangelical**

Fellowship of Canada (1997), one should avoid an overly Christian standpoint in the public space. One should earmark this space for views over which

there is a consensus. However, this is not a practical step to take as there would be issues over which there is no agreement at all. In the name of accommodation, one only adds one more aspect of religion. This is seen from a detached outlook, which denies the distinctions between religions. The absence of Christian language from an argument does not mean that it does not take sides. This also does not mean accommodation. Every statement that a Christian utters should be what he believes in and not what others want to hear. It goes without saying that one cannot use state force to impose Christianity on the people. Sin and crime are not synonymous. The church should not involve in the functions of the state and vice versa (The Social Action Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, pp. 3-4). Christian pluralism is also one of the responses to a pluralistic society. It is plural since it endorses diverse views and Christian since that is the response to society. The flexibility in approach should be based on the situation at hand. Where there is room for disparate standpoints, one should encourage such a response. If there can be only one answer to our question, we should not shy away from such a response.

Liberalism tends to slot all religions in one group. Christian thinkers categorised other religions based on their own ideas of religion. This has coloured the thoughts of non-Christian adherents who have unquestioningly accepted these classifications. Hence, such a categorisation demarcates religion from culture as being mutually exclusive. According to McGrath (1992), siding with Christianity is seen to demean other faiths, which cannot be tolerated in multicultural societies. Rejecting religious pluralism is seen to be the same as intolerance towards other religions. While it is praiseworthy

to respect religions other than our own, it is a different thing to accept all religions as the same. When all religions do not support the concept of God, we cannot say that all of them lead to God. When we allow everyone to be right, truth as a concept no longer has any significance. To claim that western pluralism should be the sole yardstick for measuring religions by itself smacks of imperialism. In the case of justice too, religions have differed significantly. This is also true of social and political issues (Mcgrath).

One must involve in the public arena instead of maintaining a safe distance. When a concept rests on a weak and flimsy ground, there is a need to expose this to the public. Christianity is hurt by liberalism. This needs to be propagated so that issues pertaining to morality will be raised. One should show how morality is based on a worldview. Morality finally boils down to humanity and existence. There is a dispute among worldviews. If we cannot bring converts to our side, we should try to rope in allies. Such allies would remain with us at important points even if we disagree at many other places. Churches should exhibit a benevolent image of themselves to the world. As Mcgrath (1994) points out, the Christian moral vision should be seen as a consequence of love and mutual concern. This can bring back societies that have been alienated from the mainstream. Christian morality is accused of being puritanical. One should prevent the joy of the gospel from being overshadowed by Christian morality. We should use conviction to put forth the point that Christianity provides a vision for human salvation (Mcgrath, pp. 39-40).

Nations have come closer due to globalisation. If different religions co-exist peacefully in a given region, it is because of migration (Pachauu & Jørgensen,

2010). All communities have the daunting task of moving from factual pluralism to a religious one. In some parts of the globe, religion, ethnicity and culture are part and parcel of society. Hence, societies have multiple identities. Though at the basic level, everyone co-exists with those belonging to a different religion, things change when the religious identity becomes a factor that is crucial from a political standpoint (Pachau & Jørgensen). Politicisation of religion or ethnic groups is to be found in various areas of the world. Christianity is not safe in some countries today. Christians are posed with the problem of maintaining their faith among other faiths. This is to happen when they cannot receive new adherents and become publicly visible. There is constant pressure among the Christians to leave regions like Iraq, where the community is fast dwindling. Other communities could view Christian dominated countries in a similar vein. Christians in other countries are often accused of representing the colonial forces.

The global spread of Christianity brings with it the challenges facing the faith. One no longer differentiates between a Christian and a non-Christian world. A century after the Edinburgh conference, there is an impetus to recognise a global world with diversity in the global and local manner in which the faith is expressed (Pachau & Jørgensen). When we recognise that human beings have dignity since they have been created by one God, there is no way in which we can deny the same dignity to others. We must be aware that it is humans, and not religions that interact, fight, and share with one another. Fundamentalism and violence do not serve any purpose if they are done in the name of religion. Instead, we should look at these as being the mood of humans who involve religion to understand themselves in the



power structures. This then forms the basis for further dialogue and action (Pachau & Jørgensen).

There is a broad agreement in terms of morality that keeps society together. If Christians are supposed to bring back those who have strayed from the right path, they would be accused of forcing their morality on others in a pluralistic society. This is a difficult question that has to do with both religion and politics. According to Rogers (2006), how one maintains one's religious persuasion in the context of a pluralistic society is proof of the spiritual strength of a nation.

Hence, in total, it is the duty of the leaders of the Christian faith to come together to meet the challenges posed by changes in society. With a paradigm shift in the outlook towards one's own and others' religion, it becomes imperative to change the time-tested strategies. These have become dated and need to be modified. The strategies have to be flexible in that they encompass a wider audience and get the Christian point of view across. One should understand that pluralism has come to stay. Hence, a new rhetoric is needed to address new and unique problems. The core idea to be kept in mind is that the faith requires novel ways to attract people to the Church. One need not shy away from professing one's faith so that there is no ambiguity regarding the message that goes out to mankind. A healthy respect for one another's faiths is the need of the hour.

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