

Religious pluralism and the interfaith movements

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At the onset, religious pluralism is inherent in the basic rights of the individual under the provision of human rights, which is one of the basic components of democracy. In the democracy, the individual's right and freedom are guaranteed and is embedded in every democratic society; the freedom of the individual to choose his or her own religion as well as to express his or her belief. However, the common view of religious pluralism is that it is seen as something that has " enormous potential to wreak havoc on human relationship" (Arthur, p. 3).

It is viewed as something that creates a wall of division among humanity, which are sometimes tragic and ugly enmity between sections of the society such as the tragic stories of interdenominational hatred in Northern Ireland, the inter-religious conflict in the Middle East, the murderous tensions between Moslems and Hindus on the subcontinent of India. Citing Dr. Wangari Maathai, leader of the Green Belt Movement, Mary Pat Fisher wrote, " all religions meditate on the same Source, and yet strangely, religion is one of our greatest divides" (Fisher, p. 429).

Fisher viewed religious pluralism as the only point from which true dialogue can take ways and it is an opportunity from which " through cooperation and through relationship can happen" (Fisher, p. 426). Fisher noted that the goal the human society should not be uniformity and agreement but " to collaborate and to combine our differing strength for the common good" (p. 426). She emphasized that to attain this goal, there is a need for " pluralistic dialogue which requires an openness to the possibility of discovering sacred truth in other religion" (p. 426).

The Interfaith Movement The humanity has been aware of this religious division that often creates tragic partitions among many societies worldwide. Fisher further cited that the first major effort to foster unit and cooperation was held in India in 1974; since then an interfaith meeting had been convened yearly for the general public by various spiritual groups. The most prominent was in 1986 when Pope John Paul II invited one hundred sixty representatives of all religions to Assisi, in honor of Saint Francis “ to pray together for world peace” (Fisher, p. 429).

The efforts of interfaith movement towards world peace proved to be successful that it generated responses from various government leaders. Responses to Other Faith and Religious World The responses of other faith towards the interfaith movement are outstanding as it attracts government leaders, scientists, artists, business leaders, and religious specialists. The astonishing assembly of all leaders of all faiths in 1990 proved that leaders of other faiths were willing to unite in an effort to achieve world peace through unity, cooperation, and collaboration.

Today’s ecumenical movements, the unity and cooperation, and the collaboration of various leaders of different faiths towards a common goal are a clear evidence of their positive responses towards interfaith movement. Fisher is therefore right in asserting that it is through religious pluralism that true dialogue and true relationship can take place. Therefore, although, it is true that the greatest divides between humanity is religion, yet it cannot be denied that this division can be also a great source of unity, cooperation, and collaboration among different societies worldwide.