

HUMAN FRATERNITY

Need of the Hour

Safdar Hasan Siddiqi

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Every individual has a dual relationship with the other; one is human relationship, and the other is the relationship of faith, as majority of the people believe in God and seek His goodwill in their lives. The only difference between the Muslims and Christians, and those belonging to other religions, is that of ways of prayer and religious rite.. Otherwise all have similar needs, equal rights and obligations, and the duties assigned by God to them are the same. If that is true, then why good and fraternal relationship does not exist amongst the different religious groups? Why do they not, while keeping their religious identities intact, work together for mutual benefit and national advancement?

Apparently, there are four reasons for this failure to act positively. The first reason is that leaders of the religious groups do not believe in God the way they should, nor do they have in their practical lives anything to do with human fraternity. Instead of realizing the essence of faith and practicing it truly, they have kept humanity divided into various sect, and have kept it involved merely in the discharge of religious rites and formal prayers. According to their standpoint, salvation can be attained through such practices. For them, any struggle for setting up a political system on the basis of human fraternity and social-economic justice is not necessary. Their only need is to keep their religious authority over the masses intact, and they continue to reap favors and benefits from the rulers and political leaders, while on the other hand, a great majority of the people is afflicted with poverty, starvation, unemployment, fatal

diseases and illiteracy. The religious elite is not prepared to take upon itself any responsibility for national development and prosperity. Thus the politicians having vested interests, with the connivance of the religious elite, succeed in diverting the attention of the masses from their real problems and from effectively participating in the country's political process and the business of the State.

The second reason is that the religious elite have not been able to fully discern the fact that all the prophets were sent by the one Supreme Being, that all of them considered themselves as servants of God and worked for the good of all human beings, that all of them had a similar message of "believing in one God and working for the benefit of all human beings" In other words, while living in a country we should not determine our position as persons belonging to a particular religious group but should dedicate ourselves to working unswervingly for the progress and prosperity of the nation in which we are born, and engage ourselves in social welfare activities. We should work for one another's betterment irrespective of color, race, sect or religion. This is the only way in which we can usefully serve the nation and the humanity at large.

The third reason is that those involved in formation of sectarian or religious groups do not differentiate between the divergent concepts of 'faith' and 'religion'. Faith is a way of life related to the call of various prophets to work for development of the various branches of individual and collective life. Such thinking brings human beings closer to one another and increases cooperation and fraternal relations amongst them. As opposed to this, religions are based on incoherent concepts and were created after the departure of the prophets from this world and, instead of straightening the worldly affairs of the people, they create hurdles in their way.

The fourth reason is that those involved in religious intolerance and sectarianism refuse to accept the truth that the mission of the prophets had essentially been that of "personality building' through which they produced honest and capable national leadership, clean and dynamic societies and progressive states. No clean and fructuous society can be formed without this basic work.

“Faith” is not just any creed but a firm belief in God, His prophets, His books and the Day of Judgment with a new life system. The concept of faith does not countenance any kind of exploitation of man by man, and requires full association with the oppressed against the oppressor; faith has no meaning without this accomplishment. Persons, who believe that they are in possession of wealth of faith without siding with the oppressed and helping out the depressed, are captives of self-deception. The path of faith is adorned with sacrifices of one’s self-interests, of one’s riches and even one’s life, which indicates one’s love for others and one’s preference of the larger collective interest to personal interests,. Such a faith alone enables one to become a {good human being”, take keen interest in worldly affairs and play an effective role in building the society.

It should also be kept in full view that a non-believer has every right to maintain and express his/her belief as much a believer has. According to the teachings of the prophets, faith in a certain form cannot be forced upon anyone. Hence we will have to adopt the culture of religious tolerance and make it a necessary part of the law of the land. The slogan of “human fraternity” would turn out to be a deception and a dream if the principles of “unity of humankind”, “nationhood”, “equal gender rights”, “minority rights” are not adopted honestly and sincerely. Even the right of ruler ship is conditional to its use for the betterment of all those residing in a country irrespective of caste, creed or religion. The moment this condition is violated by those holding the reins of power, the people have every right to replace them without waiting for the completion of their term of office.

Mrs. Annie Besant, a Christian by birth living in India in the nineteenth century, says: “ All men of every faith who surrender themselves to God are true children of Islam. It is not the fault of the Prophet if his followers have narrowed it in later days.” (It should be remembered that all the prophets were prophets of Islam).

She also says: It is important to note that when we dispute with each other we are guided by human ego rather than divine light

and higher purpose. Those who understand and have knowledge will never quarrel on inter-faith differences. They will, on the other hand, live with these differences with proper understanding as human beings. What is wrong is due to human ego and what is right is due to divine light and higher purpose in life”

At a Regional Consultation held at Bangkok (Thailand) in September 1999 arranged by the Christian Conference of Asia, in which six countries – Hong Kong, Bangladesh, India, Srilanka, Phillipines and Pakistan – were represented, I presented a “Code of Conduct for Universal Affirmation” which was adopted unanimously. An “Action Plan” (to which I made a major contribution) was also formulated and approved. Both these drafts are re-produced here for consideration of the two-day consultative meeting in Rawalpindi on 22-23 April, 2006.

CODE OF HUMAN CONDUCT *FOR UNIVERSAL AFFIRMATION*

We affirm that: propose the following Code of Human Conduct for affirmation by all, irrespective of caste, creed or religion:

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- We will look up to each other as fellow human beings having equal rights.
- We will promote pro-existence and will renounce discrimination on the basis of colour, nationality, race, language, religion, gender or any other kind of bias.
- We will seek and promote knowledge, truth and wisdom, and work for building a humane society.
- We will endeavour to raise the level of literacy, educational standards and moral values in order to promote genuine democratic polity and vibrant culture.
- * We will strive to establish an efficient socio-economic system that would prevent exploitation of the masses, and improve their standard of living and state of happiness.

- We will reject fascism, and all kinds of conduct aimed at forcing people to think and act according to the whims and dictates of others, and will advocate rational dialogue for settling differences.
- We recognize the need to develop human fraternity, banish wars and secure peace at the global level. The inherent human faculties of creativity, love and pursuance of beauty, and the productive potential of the human race need to be employed in harmony with and for the protection of nature and environment.
- We consider consumerism (wasteful expenditure on luxurious living) as harmful for positive progression in human relationships. We seek to live frugally and spend our savings for the betterment of society.

Note: This Code of Conduct was unanimously approved in a Conference held in Bangkok by Christian Council of Asia on 7th September, 1998 wherein seven South-East Asian countries were represented.

Action Plan

1. Visits of solidarity: In times of crises such as communal or other tensions, riots and disturbances, interfaith groups will visit the disturbed area (homes etc.) to express solidarity, bring peace and solace, even material help when needed.
2. Planned Action: Planned action will be taken up in slums of whatever faith as a joint-effort of an inter-faith group in order to work towards helping the slum dwellers towards internal transformation and thus put a stop to interventions of vested interests.
3. Advocacy: Collaboration with good political leaders of all political parties and assembly members will be done for providing guarantee to uphold human rights so that our point of view may be promoted on a wider level.
4. Concrete Steps: Concrete steps will be taken to study the textbooks used in our schools and colleges so that sectarian view may be countered.

5. Values: Values drawn from all religions should be taught to our children from a very early age.
6. Peace Movements: Peace movements across the national borders and networking among them should be promoted.
7. Equal Rights: All people living in a country should be given equal rights, and treated as equal citizens of that nation.

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