God and People of All Faiths

September 15, 2019, Sunday

OT Amos. 9:1-12 Psalm 66 Epistle Rom.2:17- 29
Gospel John 10:14-18

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Key Verse: I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd (John 10: 16).

We live in a pluralistic multi-religious culture, a society with multi-faceted contradictions of various faiths and rituals. India is a secular country. For millennia, religious diversity has been a defining feature of the people of India. Through ceremonies, festivals, pilgrimages, religious traditions of the family, and the like, religion plays a key role in Indian daily life. While Hinduism has been the dominant religion, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, and Sikhism have also flourished.

Man's quest for God refers to man's search for God. Different people search for God in different ways and with different determination depending on their upbringing, experiences. The development of tiny and large religions has appeared over the centuries with the quest for God.

According to some estimates, there are roughly 4,200 **religions** in the **world**. The 7 major religions are JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, HINDUISM, BUDDHISM, SIKHISM, ANIMISM. According to Pew Research Center survey, within the next four decades, Christians **will** remain the world's **largest religion**; if current trends continue, by **2050** the number of Christians **will** reach 2.9 billion (or 31.4%). By **2050**, the Christian population is expected to exceed 3 billion. In **India**, a Hindu **majority will** be retained, but **India will** also 'have the **largest** Muslim population of any country in the world'.

Religions are made not by God but by man. Scripture says, God bears divine authority over all, He is **omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent.** God is Holy, impartial i.e. He treats all people as one. God is all-seeing and there's no place out of His eyes' reach. He is all-hearing, even to the lowest of voices of all tribe, nation, language, and class. Jesus did not come to create a religion. Rather, He came to reveal God through his life and death. Jesus wanted to change the thinking and traditions which claimed, 'God belonged to us alone'.

God is gracious and loving i.e. He does good things to people even when they don't deserve them (Jn 3.16).

 # People of all faiths 'Delivered' - Amos 9: 1- 12: v. 7 Notice the very intense language God is using when this verse describe Him moving into actual battle for others. This verse is a major, whopper, power verse. They are specifically telling us that God can be a **Man of War for others too** if He needs to be and that He can actually be stirred up to go into battle for others if He has to. Our God is a mighty, powerful and awesome God – especially when you see Him go into major battle to protect people of other faiths just like one of His own.

 # People of all faiths 'Embraced' - John 10: 14-18: v. 16 Who are the 'other sheep that are not of this sheep pen'? Clearly, these are sheep that are not found in Judaism, but Gentiles who will come to faith in the future. Jesus not only presents himself as the good shepherd who knows his sheep, cares for them and lays down his life for them. But Jesus as an exponent of the truth, an embodiment of God's unconditional love and mercy, **He loves others too just like one of His own.** As the Lord told Paul in Corinth about future converts: 'I have many people in this city' (Acts 18:10). Verse 16b is a plea for unity between Jewish and Gentile believers (cf. Ephesians 2:14-15; 3: 3-6; Genesis 20: 1- 18; Genesis 41: 1; Numbers 22; Daniel 2; Jonah 3: 4; Matthew 27: 19). Jesus, the good shepherd keeps His sheep in view, regarding them and seeing beyond them. Jesus' stand against *fundamentalism and exclusivism* is clear in this passage.

 # People of all faiths 'Redeemed' - Romans 2: 17-29: v. **26** 'Those who are not Jews are not circumcised. But if they do what the law says, it is as if they were circumcised.' **God has no partiality** (Acts 10: 34; Hebrews 13: 5; Galatians 3: 27). Paul argued that there is no specialty for a Jew because a Jew who is outwardly a Jew alone is not a Jew at all. 'God will not reward fruitfulness, he will reward faithfulness.' **A transformation of the heart is what is needed.**

True circumcision is not outward and physical (Romans 2: 28). Man's basic issue is inward. The truth is: Sin is the problem in the human race. And Paul wanted to be very clear that not just the Gentiles, but likewise the Jews were guilty of sin. **Sin is a universal problem, crossing all lines of blood, genetics, and race.**

Now the destination of this argument is: Everybody needs the gospel of Christ because people of all faiths and other people of faith all are suffering from/with the same problem. **People of all faiths and other people of faith all need a redeemer and redemption.**

Points for our Reflection:

1. The main issue is Not . . What We Call Ourselves, The issue is not - What We Claim, - What We Approve, The matter is not about - What We Learn, - What We Teach, etc. When we use the Bible to understand the fundamental issue between people of all faiths and God - that is, between humanity and deity - let's not get caught up in things that miss the point! Between God and humanity, the fundamental issue is 1. How We Live!, 2. Content Of Heart! and 3. God's Approval! Is there something you need to do about all of this?

2. At a time when social media allows us to curate feeds and surround ourselves with individuals who agree with us and confirm our biases, we are obviously encircled by individuals who look, speak and worship just like us when we go to churches that suit us (how we look, speak and worship). However, homogeneity is not the biblical ideal. The power of the gospel is that of unifying diverse groups of people, breaking down the walls of hostility that naturally divide us (gender divide, race, class, politics, culture, personal preference, whatever).

3. Christian witness in a pluralistic world includes engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and cultures (cf. Acts 17:22-28). Mission belongs to the very being of the church, church council, and mission agencies. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings. The example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for the Christian mission.

4. Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect, promoting together justice, peace, and the common good. Interreligious cooperation is an essential dimension of such a commitment. Christians recognize that the gospel both challenges and enriches cultures. Even when the gospel challenges certain aspects of cultures, Christians are called to respect all people.

5. Where any religion is instrumentalized for personal and political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions. Christians should continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation, and cooperation for the common good.

Let us not forget, Jesus once marveled at the faith he found in a Roman Soldier (Matthew 8:5-13). He was a living illustration that 'many [would] come from the east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 8:11).

By the advent of Jesus, grace overthrows law. Chances of persecutions, hardships, tests and trials will increase. In the midst of all these we have a special revelation to all through **Jesus' compassionate inclusive grace.**