**HUMAN RIGHTS, JUSTICE AND PEACE – CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

***V. B. Hans***

**Abstract**

The premise of this paper is that the enormity and complexity of the present eco-socio-politico-religious concerns necessitate interfaith initiatives: a partnership theology bringing forth the public meaning of theology partnership of world church with world civil society. In today’s South Asian context discussions and debates about religion and faith need to go beyond crusades and conversions to touch civil society’s role and responsibilities in dismantling erroneous premises that threaten amity and prosperity of humanity. Drawing from Durkheim’s view that religion is an important factor of social cohesion and integration, this paper attempts to examine how with and through Christ and Church resources we could form faith bridges so as to build a responsible society towards justice, peace and well-being.

*Keywords*: Christian, civil society, justice, interfaith, peace

1. **Introduction**

Social justice can be achieved only from a perspective based on the anthropological centrality of the value of human dignity.

**- Pope John Paul II in Centisimus Annus**

“...no God can be mine unless God also can be God for others”.

**- Gabriel Vahania**

Religious studies both in theology and social sciences like sociology, political science, economics, ethics etc. engage in perennial questions about religion and human society.[[2]](#footnote-2) When such questions come to be addressed we generally adopt an interdisciplinary approach and a normative approach as well. This exercise may make the study of comparative religious ethics a complicated scholarly endeavour. But it is imperative that in the current scenario of turmoil and disharmony the text and context of multi-religions and inter-faiths dimensions and dialogue be renewed in order to strengthen the edifices of democracy and development. It should bring to focus the human responsibilities in terms of justice, peace and development making it possible to reinterpret ‘faith’ and ‘fellowship’ within human rights paradigm. This could be an attempt of all believers or of the entire humanity to formulate a ‘response’ to the growing humanitarian crisis of values, across nations and communities, may be a religion of peace.[[3]](#footnote-3) In today’s South Asian context conversations about religion and faith need to go beyond crusades and conversions to touch civil society’s role and responsibilities in dismantling erroneous premises that put amity and prosperity in danger (Hans, 2012a).

Here I take into account Durkheim’s view that religion is an important factor of social cohesion and integration (D’Souza, 1992). The attempt is to engage in this exercise from a Christian perspective. I would like to discuss how with and through Christ and Church resources we could form faith bridges so as to build a responsible society towards justice, peace and well-being. The premise is that of “One Christ One Body” – the unity of life, life in its fullness and inclusivity. Church as ecclesia – assembly of citizens – shares in today’s crisis of identity in its mission and witness. Its members are called from the world and sent into the world: the world of joys and sorrows, of unity and diversity of dissent and consent, of anxieties, agonies, sobs and songs (Kalliath, 2009).

1. **Dialogue between Religions**

**2.1 Inter-faith Dialogue – what and why**

We’re living in a tumultuous and confused era when human’s need for moderation and ethics can be felt more than ever. The self-alienated mankind is being immersed in a quagmire of immorality, depravity and corruption as a result of his enchantment with modernity and globalisation. Traditional values are being lost and people behave toward each other dishonestly, deceitfully. In such a turbulent time, it seems that religions can come to the help of sinking man to be rescued from the ocean of moral decadence and decline. At the same time, the followers of different religions or enterprises need to interact with each other effectively so as to settle the redundant disputes and come to a comprehensive and lasting understanding. As argued by Jathanna (2015), this is a methodological position that has been followed for the missionary discourse in India for instance, between the missionary (‘self’) and the native (‘other’).

In order to probe into some of the most essential issues of religion, including the proofs to the existence of God, the position of Christianity on the other divine religions and the necessity of establishing interfaith dialogue between divine religions become useful (Ziabari, 2012).

Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and co-operate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. ‘faiths’) at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to its own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely.

Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and in our places of work – it can take place in both formal and informal settings.  In Ireland, Muslims and Christians live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools.[[4]](#footnote-4) Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.

A healthy dialogue therefore, seeks to:

* Increase mutual understanding and good relations.
* Identify causes of tension in Christian Muslim relations. These are often economic, social or political rather than religious.
* Build understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent tensions.
* Break down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion and bigotry.

At the same time, interfaith dialogue is not:

* About talking away or brushing aside differences. It does not aim at coming to a common belief.
* A way of converting the other; not intimidating but accommodating. In dialogue each party remains true to their own faith. Going near without creating fear (GOD OF LOVE).
* A space for arguing, attacking or disproving the beliefs of the other. It is about increasing mutual understanding and trust.

The Gospels and especially the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) teach that the call to love our neighbour does not just mean loving the person next door or a member of our own particular group or community. Reflecting this Gospel message, Church teaching regarding interreligious dialogue is very positive. For instance –

*“The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator; in the first place among them are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day”* (Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 16).

The Second Vatican Council’s Statement on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, commonly called Nostra Aetate (right) portrays the positive attitude towards dialogue with Muslims that is reflected in most Christian denominations. The document urges *Christians and Muslims –*

*“to strive sincerely for mutual understanding”* and *“to make common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.”*

In 1971 the World Council of Churches (WCC) representing Anglican, Protestant, and Orthodox churches, established an Office for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. Since then both the WCC and the Vatican have sponsored many meetings between Christians and Muslims. Unlike in the past, there is now, among most Christian denominations, a wish to promote mutual respect, understanding and cooperation between Muslims and Christians. This openness to interaction and co-operation reflects the Gospel call to “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13.34).  All Christians therefore, have a part to play in creating a just society in which they can, faithful to their beliefs, live as good neighbours with people of other religions.

* 1. **What interfaith makes possible**

Interfaith is inductive and productive. It is not just getting bad news about each other’s religion, but something good, cheerful and productive, peaceful. It ensures united response to societal and spiritual issues otherwise inconceivable. It is a clear way to peace and to preserve perseverance. Patience is the pre-condition to pure pursuits of peace and prosperity. There will be no instant results and hence one must keep going in multi-faith co-existence (Baker, 2013). However, there cannot be interfaith without faith.

Interfaith works between and among people as when “two are in love”. In it people try to minimise their differences. They need not run away from the conflicts but face the issues head on. They can clarify each other’s cultural code – even if it means separating religion and culture. Interfaith also makes clarity of identity possible. Faith journey also helps journaling one’s responses as one grows in experience. Unbiased experimentation helps greater understanding of our partners and to take ‘relationships’ seriously without necessarily being converted to the others practice or programme (Tartakovsky, 2011).

1. **Christianity and Interfaith**

 As faith-fellowship there is what is called a “Christian Positive-Pragmatic Paradigm”. Christians have the celebrated 10 Commandments, and the call of one God paving the way for one Assembly of Believers.

Jesus summarises the commandments or rather translates that into a mission statement: “Love thy neighbour – serve the other.” “Love and do what you want". Love is the guarantee for the positive. Love transcends the interdiction, because retribution is no longer sanctioning negative, but positive for salvation. A pragmatic Christian could be seen as serving the other. Dimensions of Christian love at first level concern forgiveness, acceptance and devotion. The social expression of the Christian mentioned ethical values takes the forms of not only philanthropy and charity (Sandu and Caras, 2013) but also of justice, peace and harmony.

**3.1** **Wider Ecumenism – A Dialogue**

What is the position of Christianity on the authenticity and veracity of the message of other divine religions, especially Islam that emerged after Christianity? Does Christianity accept the plurality and numerousness of religions? Does it recommend its followers to respect and venerate other religions and their prophets?

Oliver Davies[[5]](#footnote-5) opines that it is generally very hospitable in well worked out ways among educated Christians, I would say, and more instinctively so among the less well educated. But there are other options it is possible to take, and these often get the headlines. They tend not to be particularly theologically literate. It is important to recall however that Christianity also has had an important long-term dialogue within itself, between Catholic and Protestant. These denominations exist side by side to a much higher degree than Sunni and Shiite. It is also the case that they not only confront each other in many ways but are also clearly complementary in key respects. Protestantism is the expression of the modern world, in which Catholics also live, though as an ancient form of Christianity. Interfaith issues tend to be deeply influenced by positions already taken in the internal ecumenism between Christian denominations.

A meaningful dialogue is possible only when people have a deep conviction that their faith has something to offer to the wider society in which they live. In dialogue, mutual understanding cannot be strengthened unless both convergence and divergence are held in a creative relationship. Christians must come out with their best offer to the society (their universal motto being, “To shine and enkindle”). Interfaith dialogue is a pluralistic attempt to find common ground in the values and goals of various religions.

In the Christian church, the term “interfaith dialogue” often referred to evangelism programmes created to reach out to other cultures with the gospel message. Today, however, the term is a bit more pluralistic in nature, and suggests embracing members of other religions for the purpose of finding common ground in the values and goals we share.

Interfaith dialogue isn’t actually new. In the 16th century A.D. Emperor Akbar the Great for example, encouraged tolerance in Mughal India, a diverse nation with people of various faith backgrounds. In the early 20th century interfaith dialogue started to take place between the Abrahamic faiths: Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Bahai. And in 1965, the Roman Catholic Church issued the Vatican II document, *Nostra Aetate*, instituting major policy changes in the Catholic Church's policy towards non-Christian religions. The Inter Faith Conference of Metropolitan Washington was created in 1978, bringing together 11 historic faith communities to promote dialogue, understanding and a sense of community among persons of diverse faiths. And most recently, a group called [The Interfaith Youth Core](http://www.ifyc.org/), formed by Eboo Patel, a proclaimed Muslim, introduces relationships based on mutual respect and religious pluralism. The Karnataka Christian Educational Society (KACES) in Mangalore established ‘*Sahaya*’, an institution for peace initiatives and practices, community helpline and action programmes etc. In February 2014 there was an international level dialogue between Christians and Shia Muslims at Tehran under the theme “Modernity and Spirituality”. "What can we, as people of faith, do to respond and to overcome the pressing challenges of our time, such as violence and conflict, and build together mutually accountable societies based on respect and cooperation?" This is the question that 30 young Christians, Muslims and Jews from around the world were mobilised to explore during a summer seminar at the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland during 4-22 August 2014. On 13 February 2017 the WCC participated in the UN panel discussion on climate ethics. This is a proof that religious discourses can take us beyond our rituals and regions for responding to global issues of eco-justice and ethics even on a spiritual plane. Similarly In order to strengthen the voice of the churches with regards to global economics, a group of up to 15 current and future leaders representing the churches will have the opportunity to attend the Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management (GEM) for an Economy of Life in Lusaka, Zambia from 21 August to 01 September 2017.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Convergence makes faith and theology heal communities. This form of interfaith dialogue is also finding its way into some Christian churches, as those congregations work side by side with other religions on community projects and relief programs for the poor. The National Council of Churches in Australia formed the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims, and Jews: launched in March 2013.

According to Pastor Ken Silva, Vice President of [Evangelism Explosion North America](http://66.132.242.132/pages/page.asp?page_id=23717), a ministry that trains people how to share their faith in Christ, this could be a great opportunity for sharing the gospel (not simply carrying the gospel). Further, as Thomson (2008) says, “We need to bless others and that includes all mankind who are created in God’s image, there is god-stuff in everyone. We all need common ground. In the context of interfaith dialogue, love people, show an interest and ask permission to share. Not from the standpoint of confrontation, but sharing ‘why I believe’, more as personal disclosure and not debate”.

Such healthy debates in our democracy fortunately, are still alive, although some fundamentalist groups shun them. These intolerant groups are often manipulated by extremist political forces. They go to the extent of banning or burning books if what they get to read is not in their ‘taste’. Freedom of expression continues to be compromised. Book pulping, cancelling of plays, thwarting the release of films etc., are becoming new ways of expressing counter views This trend is a not an ignorable challenge to those who practice more inclusive forms of ecumenism. It is part of the development of the *oikoumene* (Abraham, 2010). As G. K. John says, unfortunately legal process is also slow in dealing with “controversial” books or plays, and no one wants to be the person to uphold the law in such sensitive matters. Waiting becomes a punishment. Such critics could have taken the parallel route: if you don’t agree with a book, write a book countering your criticism (Varma, 2014). How can we forget the simple truth that synthesis is the culmination of thesis and antithesis?

**3.2 From an evangelical church to an emerging and engulfing Church**

The transformational changes in the way Christians practice their faith as a tradition, usually originates from the grassroots of both laity and clergy in mainline Protestant denominations. There is now a visible trend – a change from wave-like Cycle (stage) of Faith to Circle of Faith: Truth is the centre of all religions. The truth is proclaimed through programmes by the Church and the civil society. This is interfaith in action; action by which we go beyond the usual communal lines.

Interfaith is a faith that embraces the teachings of all spiritual paths that lead us to seek a life of compassionate action.  Interfaith, as a faith, does not seek to discover which religion or spiritual path is ‘right’. Rather, it recognises that we are all brothers and sisters, and that at different times and different places we have encountered the sacred differently. Interfaith celebrates our differing spiritual paths, recognising it is our actions in this world that count; that we are called to engage the world, and to do so with compassion and with love.

In the past, “interfaith” has usually meant people of good will from differing spiritual paths getting together briefly for a project and then simply going home.  That was worthwhile and hugely important.  But today the world needs more. Interfaith, as a spiritual practice, can serve as a model for how we deal with each other, live with others.

Living interfaith means more than participating in the occasional interfaith service or an interfaith project a couple of times a year, or even once a month. We can live interfaith by coming together regularly to be nourished by and celebrate the wisdom and love of our varying spiritual paths. And that is but the beginning (not end: Amen is not concluding but including, (affirming and accommodating). Christians need to transform from “Church goers” to “Church growers”.

Living interfaith also means embracing the gift of interfaith within our lives, and sharing that gift with the world: sharing it without arrogance, sharing it without orthodoxy, and sharing it while respecting those whose spiritual paths may differ from our own.  We share Interfaith not as THE right way, but rather a viable way to live in love and in peace; with respect for our shared humanity and the varied spiritual paths that we take.

It is not an easy road ahead. True paradigm shifts are never easy – and humanity has lived shackled for a very long time by a view of the world that insists that there can be but one ‘right’ belief about God (including the “right belief” that there is no God), and that our spiritual communities should be centred around that one “right” belief.  Interfaith as a spiritual practice involves a major shift in that foundational assumption and world view.

Why is the paradigm shift desirable?  A living interfaith, an active acknowledgement, respect and honouring of humanity’s differing beliefs, can be a powerful and positive influence not only on our own generation but for generations to follow.  We can raise our children to respect the beliefs of others.

Christians are coming of age. They are making theology as discernment of the significance of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ in and for the world: discipleship, community and involvement in the struggle for peace and justice.

1. **Christianity, Peace and Human Rights**

**4.1 Interfaith and Peace**

Peace is the much sought after asset today, given the contextual problems of violence, terrorism, fundamentalism and communalism. Chaos and disorder are what communalism gives to society, polity and economy. Hate campaign and violence rampage is neither Godliness nor neighbourliness (Hans, 2007). We need –

* Peace, not piece meal efforts; peace for integration not subjugation, fighting modern forms of slavery
* Peace in families, communities, society: building up of just, harmonious and peaceable communities by equipping them for ministries of justice and peace from an inter-religious perspective
* Peace that promotes a vision of a nation aiming to achieve higher pedestals in industry, science and technology without hampering its cultural diversity and religious plurality
* Peace of context – accepting current reality – tensions, conflicts, hatred, violence loss of harmony and threats to solidarity in various fields: social, political, cultural, sports etc.
* Peace of knowledge – acknowledging the need for peace education: preparing individuals for peace on earth, creating public opinion, mass base for peace

Morality has no divisibility. Interfaith joins divided parts. The traditional peace education includes peace-keeping and peace-making. The contemporary thinking favours even peace building i.e. motivating students to want to be peaceful, helping them fight violence, non-violently for the sake of faithful relationships.

**4.2 Christianity and Human Rights**

Closely related to the idea of human rights is the claim that all people have the same right to be treated as persons - whatever race, religion, sex, political persuasion or social or economic status they may be. What is the basis of human equality, if not the fact that all were equally created by God? Thus, a Christian argument for human rights must begin with the biblical account of Creation, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:26-27). The fact that Man was created in the image of God plays a major role in the relationships of human beings to each other. Genesis 9:16, for example, requires murder to be punished, for it injures the image of God (Schirrmacher, 2002). Denial of human rights or discrimination in the exercise of rights is what interfaith dialogues should take into consideration.

Interfaith living and working enables human rights obligations, not merely in the politico-legal sense but also in the ethical sense. Progressive society today accepts that faster and more inclusive growth is possible by applying concrete human rights standards, principles and practices in the interdependent areas of gender, civil, political, economic and cultural rights. Therefore, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)[[7]](#footnote-7) were a declaration of collective responsibility for fighting poverty and vulnerability and a test of our ingenuity and legitimacy of aspirations and action. The time has come to introduce Interfaith Development Rights – sharing lived experiences, wisdom[[8]](#footnote-8), and dialogues between religious leaders, political leaders, rights advocates and activists.

1. **Purpose of Interfaith movements**

It could be to provide opportunity for the national bodies of each faith to come together to build understanding and harmony in the national/global/local context.

**5.1 Objectives**

* To be a model of how different faiths can live harmoniously together in the society/nation
* To build understanding, good will and a sense of community between people of different faiths
* To explore and learn about each other and our faith traditions
* To share our knowledge and insights with others
* To work together to achieve common goals
* To support each other in times of difficulty

**5.3 Proposed Strategies**

* To inform our respective faith communities of the work and understandings that we reach
* To use meetings to increase knowledge and awareness of the issues that face each of the faith communities
* To report back to our respective national bodies
* To address community issues together where possible
* To encourage common projects among the faith communities
* To use our meetings to inform the wider community of our commitment to each other
* To encourage interfaith dialogue at all levels

**5.4 Possible Actions**

* Regular meetings
* Media releases
* News stories for our own communities
* Public forums
* Creation of educational resources

**5.5 From the Bible**

 A few references (quotations) from the Bible may not be out of place here. “Working together” is the essence participative or partnership theology. Work is not without its rewards, based on productivity and performance. A follower is Christ will be ‘rewarded’ on the basis of cooperative discipleship. How you follow Christ is seen in how you treat your fellow human being, particularly the poor and the sojourner. This is the focus of the passages in Leviticus 19:1-18. Similarly, the Bible indicates –

* **Faith-based companionship**. This enkindles mobility even in a minority (because staying is decaying whereas moving is growing): “*Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?”* (Amos 3:3); *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the* *Lord* *require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8); and He (Jesus) said: *“I must preach* *the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I have been sent for this purpose”* (Luke 4:43). This underlines the permissive as well as compulsive character of the gospel.[[9]](#footnote-9)
* **Blessings/Gifs: respect and recognitions received, here and in heaven**. “*For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise* (Galatians 3: 26-29); and *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the* ***kingdom*** *of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be* ***comfort****ed. Blessed are the meek, for they will* ***inherit*** *the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be* ***filled****. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive* ***mercy****. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they* ***will see God****. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be* ***called children of God****…Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your* ***reward is great in heaven****, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the* ***salt of the earth****…the* ***light of the world****…cannot be hid”* (Matthew 5: 3-14).
* **God’s Impartiality**. “Yo*u have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'  But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous” (*Matthew: 5:43).

The interfaith reading of these texts falls on the faithfulness and compassion of God.  God commands us to love our enemies, to see their point of view, to be willing to forgive them, even to do good to them.  The demand for this attitude finds its grounding in the nature of God. God treats all the same.  There is no difference is God's treatment of friend or foe, companion or enemy.  God causes ‘the sun to rise on the evil and the good’ and send ‘rain on the just and the unjust’.  Even minimum life depends upon water and light, without which all living things will perish.

* **God’s call to us to be not just hearers but doers too**. “*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!”* (Matthew 7:24-26).
* **Faith avails wherever found**. The impartiality of God and the willingness of God to accept all who show faith are explicitly illustrated in Jesus affirmation of a Roman Centurion.  The story is found in Matthew 8:5-13[healing of his paralysed servant].
* **Discernment**: A tree is known by the fruit: “*Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree bad, and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”* (Matthew: 12: 33-37).
* **Interfaith can bring Good News**. Freedom from oppression: the Messianic message as narrated by St Luke in 4:18. Also, *seek first the kingdom and justice, rest will be given to you as well* (Matthew 6:33).
* **The Child metaphor**: *Jesus called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea”*(Matthew 18: 2-6).

The “Child” as a metaphor holds rich possibilities.  In this child we see a symbol of innocence, trust, dependence and beauty.  Also, the child represents the character of people of the kingdom of God and as such is of great value.  For this reason declares that it is better to be drowned with millstone tied around your neck than to mislead a child. A child comes into the world without conscious values, without prejudice, and without feelings of superiority or inferiority.  All of these are learned responses to life. Unfortunately, parents, families and society influence children to adopt false values, embrace prejudices, and succumb to feelings inferiority. When Jesus declares that we must become as little children, he is pointing to the necessity of getting rid of learned values that separate us from our fellow human beings.  Many of us need to renounce the false values of money and power to embrace love, forgiveness, and compassion.  We need to erase our prejudices by the acceptance of every person as a fellow member of God's kingdom and in a relationship of love to find our common ground.  Inferiority and superiority are constructs of our present reality that provide nothing of value to us.  To own ourselves: to live in the present moment, to see life through clear lenses, to recognise that the ground is level: will place us all on the common journey where it is possible to live together in peace and harmony.

1. **Conclusion**

Christianity must bring in a spiritual revolution, not limiting interfaith to marriage but wider knowledge and participative growth. In the city of Mangalore – soon to become a “smart city” – interfaith Christian ministries are vibrant – care for the retired people, senior citizens; peace initiatives; technical and vocational training for people of all sections; collaboration with government as well secular universities for R&D; sports, music and other cultural events for heterogeneous groups and so on. This means service of humanity is not by just money medium (charity) but as the medium of message (a new heart foundation: heart-to-heart foundation[[10]](#footnote-10)) or a new avenue of expression and action, making religion tangible (see [Luke 10:25-37](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke%2010.25-37)).

Interfaith groups can inspire, educate, and mobilise people to unite across differences and to act from their shared ethical and spiritual values in pursuit of peace with social and environmental justice. God’s people are asked to go to the world and serve and not to confine themselves to worship at the traditional brick and mortar Church, and show that they can be ‘non-denominational yet devotional’. Interfaith means not being complacent defending one’s faith and depending on one’s faith but developing the faith with interdependence for mutual development.

However, the deed should not undermine the creed. A Christian organisation is free to partner with other groups to accomplish a God-honouring project. Our goal must always be to love God and love others. If a partnership can help in this mission, then there is no reason not to at least consider it. No single group can do all things, but together much good can be accomplished. In certain social issues, such as fighting poverty and providing disaster relief, there are many opportunities to co-operate with other groups to help those in need. When we do, we honour our Lord, show love to others, and make a meaningful difference in the lives of many. As Jesus said, “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” ([Matthew 5:16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matthew%205.16)). Interfaith is for today’s life, converging spirituality and spatiality: without a vision nations perish (Proverbs 29:18). The Church’s vision and mission must increasingly blend with the numerous liberative movements functioning in civic space. No one can walk the path alone. The Church’s responsibility is to develop the art and raft of wedding her mission with secular fora and movements of social justice and human promotion. The enormity and complexity of the present eco-socio-politico-religious concerns necessitate interfaith initiatives: a partnership theology bringing forth the public meaning of theology partnership of world church with world civil society. Let us care for the other, not despising as nonentity.

Yahweh gave rightful identity, dignity and selfhood to the Israelites who were till then ‘non-people’. Jesus and the apostles later acted and advocated for the restoration of the marginalised. After all it was at the margins that Christianity was born. Deprivation and violence were found to become potent agent of social change and cohesion. Such praxis may help the Church to eventually become the very matrix of giving birth to real communion of communities (identities) grounded in human solidarity, equitable justice, peace and unity (Kalliath, 2009). Interfaith dialogues such as these can bring religious revolution through faith reflection – taking theology outside of the Church to the world, making Christians responsible to what happens in the world, i.e. worldly responsibility with the person of Jesus: carry the cross, unmask the hidden Jesus. Church has to identify with the struggles of the marginalised, said K. C. Abraham the famous Indian Christian theologian. Every religion has some traces of the idea of revelation.

 We need to understand Christianity in the given Indian socio-cultural situation to the world. Faith in Christ is not an interpretation of the word but it is participation in the event. Amalgamation of revelation and salvation (see Matthew 16: 15; and I Corinthians: 1: 17**).**

It is indeed a beautifully moving experience when/where people came together in unity, support, wonder and gratitude. A simple cultural get-together too can be another interfaith example of how much the religion(s) and people of the world have in common. There is no doubt that we are all of the Divine, but we need to combine. How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard,….robe….It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion were falling on Mount Zion (Psalm 133:1). While friendship is an individual thing, it also brings new meanings when we see in it group relations. How is the work of friendship performed by those engaged in the difficult process of stitching together relations in the wake of ethnic violence? The notion of friendship is to be understood as being based on an ethic of obligation in a moral economy in which each is dependent on the other (Robinson, 2013). Meanwhile, Christians – calling themselves as messengers of peace – must keep doing what they do to move from the culture of violence which has defined the past century and the beginning of this new century, to a culture of peace which must define the rest of this century so there can be a safe, peaceful and just future for our children and grandchildren and theirs. Such a peace begins with the 3Rs of Christian literacy: reconciliation, recovery and respect (Hans, 2012). Then peace becomes both a means and an end.

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1. \* Dr V. B. Hans is Hon. Visiting Professor at the Karnataka Theological College, Balmatta, Mangaluru specialising in socio-economic perspective of theology. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Questions with reference to Church and State, Church and Women, Church and Environment are not unheard of. See, for example, Mary Carlson, “Can the Church Be a Virtuous Hearer of Women?” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 32*(1), 21–36. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The religion of peace is a [political neologism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_neologism) used as a description of [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam). After the [September 11, 2001 attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11%2C_2001_attacks), some politicians described Islam as a "religion of peace" in an effort to differentiate between [Islamic terrorists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_terrorism), [Islamism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamism), and non-violent [Muslims](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim). In South Africa Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world’s great religions dedicated to promoting peace. The purpose is, respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity. “Religions for Peace” is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty, and protecting the earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Similarly there is a great deal of received wisdom and perhaps some amount of wishful thinking on subject of Muslims and Hindus living in amity as neighbours, torn apart only due to external political forces over which they have little control. See Naata, Nyaya – Friendship and/or Justice on the Border, in Vinod Jairath (Ed.), *Frontiers of Embedded Muslim Communities in India*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 242-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Oliver Davies is Professor of Christian Doctrine at the Kings College, London. His recent publication is *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom and the Christian Act*, Oxford University Press, 2013. Davies discusses the significant advances in science that bring new understandings of the human as a unity of mind, body and world.  The book is a work of contemporary and global Christological promise in Fundamental Theology, and is addressed to all those who are concerned, from whichever denomination, with the continuing vitality of Christianity in a changing world. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See for details, World Council of Churches, http://www.oikoumene.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. We now have the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for the period 2016-2030. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This refers not only to religious wisdom but equally to man’s secular wisdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Cf. “For when I preach the gospel…I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Taiwanese theologian C.S. Song says that God must be working to recover the lost heart in the socio-political, cultural and religious turmoil in Asia. This has to be, in his view discerned with a ‘Third Eye’. His theology begins with humanity rather than with divinity. For details see his work, *The Compassionate God*, SCM Press Ltd., London, 1982. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)