

UNIVERSAL RELIGION OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY

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Abstract: The presence of many religions in any one community is not unusual. When taken to its logical conclusion, religious pluralism asserts that no faith has privileged access to the truth. Religious pluralism, according to some philosophers, is a declaration that all faiths are genuine, even though the nature of their realisation of the truth of religion and the ways of realisation may vary. However, in this case, as well, the link of unity among adherents is artificial and needs to be more vital to address pre-existing issues.¹

Swami Vivekananda disagreed with the claims of universality made by faiths he believed to be based on illogical, unscientific, and counterproductive dogma and doctrine. The goal of achieving religious peace is to bring people together. This suggests that adhering to a global faith does not mean abandoning one's own. The objective is to improve man's situation. What he meant by "universal religion" was not the establishment of a single philosophical or mythological framework or set of ceremonial practices for everyone to adhere to.

No religion is ultimately true or perfect. All religions are different paths leading to the same reality. The aim and objectives of all religions is to purify the human mind so that God may come to him. If the followers of every religion take their religion in that sense, there will be no conflict among religions, religious sects, and men. This attitude towards religion will establish tolerance, mutual understanding, world fraternity, love, solidarity and finally, world peace.

All religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism or Zoroastrianism, preach morality and good conduct. No religion says that one can kill, steal, cheat, or tell lies. By intelligent use of Heaven and Hell, religions put the fear of God from an early age.

In the 19th Century, when each religion claimed superiority for itself over the other religion, saying that other religionists would go to hell, Vivekananda proclaimed at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago that each religion was a path to salvation. Every religion is equal and entitled to equal respect.

However, the problem of the plurality of religions is a natural phenomenon in human society. We cannot deny that many religious sects exist because of plurality and multiplicity of thoughts. Diversity in religious practices is quite natural. One cannot expect uniform, a stationary and stagnant conditions in religion. Although the idea of one God and one religion may appear to be quite palatable and pleasant, a realistic and dynamic approach in this context inspires us to opt for unity in diversity and not for dull uniformity.²

In this context, we should follow the views of Ramakrishna. He rightly said that '*Yato mat tato path*'. That means there are many religions, so there are many ways to God. The teachings of his master influenced Vivekananda, and he propagated the unique doctrine of universal religion.

Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and others are examples of religious pluralism. However, several faiths proclaim distinct characteristics. Religions like Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity all emphasise different aspects of how to become closer to God. Despite this, all religions ultimately centre on the same Truth: God. Every faith, overtly or covertly, seeks to get to this oneness or God. Pluralists reject the idea that every religion is equally valid because they understand that there are claims made by several faiths that are incompatible with one another.

Remember that religious truths are not experimented on by debates or discussions, nor do scriptural injunctions prove them. Personal experiences can validate them. Religious pluralism can be validated not by long-winded discussions among scholars or believers of different faiths but by dint of the validation of the claim by a person who can claim the same

God experience by applying different ways followed by various religions or movements within the same religion.

According to Swamiji, there is no possibility of religious classes in enlightened religious understanding. Love is the only thing that can turn the whole cosmos into a home. Vivekananda advocated for India to have an Islamic exterior with a Vedic soul. He saw this form of agreement as the only long-term solution to the religious tensions in India between the Hindu and Muslim communities. He wanted to create a new order of humanity which sincerely believed in God and the brotherhood of humanity.

"Do not damage," Swamiji asserted as his guiding principle. Iconoclastic reformers, he says, are wrong for society as a whole. Do not destroy anything; instead, construct. If you can help, great; if not, watch helplessly as things unfold. If you cannot help, do not hurt.³

Several times, Swamiji reminds us that in order to achieve freedom, each of us must first make apparent the divinity within via labour, devotion, mental control, or philosophy. This sums up everything about religious belief. Everything else, including doctrines, dogmas, rituals, texts, and temples, is tertiary. Rather than focusing on what one reads or the ideology one adheres to, one should focus on what one comes to understand. All life and move in God. It is religions that create literature, according to Vivekananda. That is something we cannot ignore. God was not written about, yet He inspired many great works of literature.

Moreover, no soul was ever made by reading a book. Never lose sight of the fact that the realisation that God is the soul ends all faiths. That belief system is accepted everywhere. In my opinion, this is where all faiths converge: on the need to come to terms with God. That is the main idea, even if the means and goals vary. Even though there are a thousand distinct radii, they all converge on the same point: the knowledge of God.⁴ The message of one religion for all people is one that Vedanta has delivered.

According to the commoner, the term "Universal Religion" conjures up many diverse mental pictures, like that of a bouquet adorned with various types of food. In other words, "Universal

Religion" refers to a belief system incorporating the most positive aspects of all existing faiths.⁵

Vivekananda does not mean a religion with a single global philosophy, mythology, or ritual when he refers to "universal religion." Religion is universal, yet its manifestations vary from sect to sect and even from person to person.

Acceptance and Tolerance are the two essential parts of universal religion.

Vivekananda's call for a global religion is not just a call for tolerant secularism, however. Toleration was a term he detested since it implied acceptance of wrongdoing. Regarding religion, Vivekananda argues that tolerance is the only watchword that matters. Tolerance is not the same thing as acceptance. He does not advocate universal religious tolerance. Thus he said that tolerance and universal acceptance are essential for man's spiritual development. His forthright declaration, "Our watchword, then, will be acceptance, and not exclusion," acknowledges the validity of all faiths. Not only tolerance; I reject the principle because "tolerance" sometimes masks itself as heresy. Acceptance is key. I believe in God and all the other faiths that have ever existed, regardless of how they express their devotion to the Almighty. I will seek sanctuary in the mosque of a Muslim, the church of a Christian, and the temple of a Buddhist to learn more about their respective faiths and laws. I plan on joining the Hindu in the woods while he meditates, seeking the Light that shines in everyone's heart.⁶ Therefore, a universalist must have an open mind and heart and be willing to gain insight from the sacred texts of all faiths.

According to Vivekananda, religions are not contradictory but supplementary to each other. The difference is only in thought. So no religion should be neglected. All the things that seem dissimilar may have some essential features. Men and women have their differences, yet they have the same humanity. Humans, animals, and plants are all in the same living community. This indicates that all religions refer to the same thing, even if they accentuate somewhat different aspects of the Truth. Because all faiths share some common truth, they all must be accepted.

Change is evidence of life and integral to the natural order. If there is to be one religion for all people, time, and everywhere, Swamiji says it must be open to those who believe in other faiths or no religion. Furthermore, it should not be a religion that condones persecution or bigotry but rather one that affirms the inherent divinity of every individual and encourages them to express it fully.⁷

A man of genuine faith would see that there are viable paths to God through every major religion. Respect for those of other religions is a moral imperative. Maintain a firm faith, but avoid bigotry and hate at all costs.⁸ After the last session of the Parliament of Religions on September 27, 1893, Swami Vivekananda boldly proclaimed: "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian." However, everyone must take on the character of the others while maintaining his own identity and developing by his own development rule.⁹

Vivekananda's following remarks from his speech "The Way to the Realization of Universal Religion" are essential. He claims, "The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are, but so many pages and infinite pages remain yet to be unfolded. It would be open to anybody. Although rooted in the here and now, we look forward to an endless horizon. We drink in the memories of the past, bask in the glow of the present, and throw open the doors of our hearts to the possibilities of the future."¹⁰ A toast to the great prophets of old, the even greater ones of today, and the prophets yet to come. All faiths agree that one may only reach the ultimate truth by purifying their thoughts and heart.

These days, everyone is looking for calm. Regardless of socioeconomic status or age, everyone is searching for relief from stress and fulfilment in life. There is no doubt that the message of Vivekananda is essential and relevant in India and the world in the present-day Indian context of the contemporary world. The spirit of mutual tolerance and respect for all religions is bound to change this world. It will arouse all people from their dogmatic slumber of misconceptions and superstitions. It will protect the young generation from moral degradation and spiritual crisis and change a man with the supreme qualities of fearlessness,

compassion, love, tolerance and service to humanity. The spirit of mutual tolerance and respect for Swamiji's message will be a distinct gain to humanity.

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