

RELIGION AND PEACE

Some Reflections^{*}

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December 1986

One suitable point of departure for discussing this extremely important subject, made even more prominent in our contemporary world by the impressive meetings organized by the World Conference on Religion and Peace,¹ would be the word religion itself. As often pointed out it means re-ligio which can be interpreted as meaning re-linking. But with what? The word evidently stands for some kind of union, some kind of "integration" as social scientists would say. But with what? With the only one God the adherents of the monotheistic religions of the Occident would say, be that Yahweh, God or Allah. With tat twam asi, with that which is, out there, the hindus would say, or with Brahman when they are in a more monotheistic mood; or with the whole pantheon of hindu deities when they are more polytheistically inclined; or with the big soul, Atman when they put on a more pantheistic stance. The latter I think they share with the buddhists, with that which is, in us, and above us all. But then there is also the answer of daoists, with dao, with that which is and is not.² A reminder, a warning not to be too concrete, not to think we have grasped it all.

And then, on the other side, is the rest of the world, us human beings, a concept sometimes expanded to all sentient beings, to all life, perhaps even to all nature. A union comprising that which is, and that which the atheist would say is not and others would insist simply is, in need of no further justification.

At that point Gandhi enters and includes even the atheist as religious. Gandhi's supreme principle was Satya,³ which he inter-

preted variously as God, Love and Truth. To grasp the unity of these three aspects of the supreme principle (not "Being") was essential, I think, in Gandhi's approach to religion. But in so doing you could start in any corner of the triangle and work towards the other two. Thus, God is also the atheism of the atheist, the supreme principle guiding and steering his and her life. "You have a principle, clothe it with life, that your God".⁴

So far, so good. There is a supreme principle and there is a union of all that is, with or within that principle. To be religious means to re-link, implying with that word that the unity may have been lost, that it is not to be taken for granted, that re-linking may be an everlasting process, always becoming, never being. But it does matter how this linkage or union is envisaged, and it matters particularly much, even to the point of becoming an existential problem, if our concern is not only with religion but also with peace. For religion is a major factor; for peace and for war.

At this point I want to introduce a distinction which certainly is heavily value-loaded and I am not going to be apologetic about that. As a peace researcher it is certainly my experience that some religions make human beings more peaceful than others. However, all of us have the capacity in us for any religion, a capacity which is made use of when we are raised in one religion, convert to one religion, maybe convert to another, maybe feel attracted by more than one and even succeed in combining more than one. This is so often the case in the Orient,⁵ but almost never in the

Occident--the Occident is governed by a strict rule of either-or whereas the Orient seems to have both-and inscribed on its banner. But some religions are more peaceful than others, and the distinction I want to make use of is between what I should call genuine and distorted religion, or soft and hard aspects of religion.

Genuine religion unites. There is a principle of god-in-man; god is seen as immanent. And then there is a principle of man-in-nature, man is simply seen as a part of nature, meaning that nature is not that different from man, with various types of animals providing a continuum from man, via animate to inanimate matter.

Then, there is God in nature. We may arrive at that conclusion combining the preceding two points, or simply state it as a fact. Of course, as seen by the forms of religious experience categorized as "animism" or "animatism" god is more in some points of nature than others. It is not so difficult to make guesses as to exactly where those points of density might be located.⁶ But the basic point is a general besouling of everything, all, animate and inanimate nature, giving to all parts of our existence some, and even relatively equal, amounts of status, significance, inspiring awe.

The basic consequences of this would be a universal principle of unity-of-man, and also a universal principle of unity-of-man-and-nature. And from these principles of unity follow, immediately, two rather important consequences: non-violence to fellow human beings

(incidentally, including oneself!), and to nature. In short: peace, as peace should include not only the relations between man and man, but also between man and nature. Let me just in that connection point out how vegetarianism is a very logical consequence within that type of thinking, not to mention feeling, about religion in general and the construction of union/unity in particular.

Then, on the other hand, there is what I think could be called distorted religion. Distorted religion divides, by excluding somebody or something from its construction of union, unity. Of course, there is some union also within distorted religion otherwise it would not be religion. But a principle of exclusion, in other words divisiveness, is equally important, and becomes the salient characteristic relative to what has been called genuine religion above. The question to be asked is: how can religion divide, and the following is an effort to provide some answers to that question.

First, instead of God-in-man-in-nature the leading principle becomes God-above-man-above-nature. Instead of a system of concentric circles the geometry of the construction of union becomes that of a pyramid, or cone to stick to the metaphor of the circle, with nature at the bottom, God high up there at the summit and man somewhere in between. God has now become transcendental rather than immanent. But that means first of all that nature has become desouled, simply being too far away from God. The consequence for this in ecological matters can hardly be over-estimated. And then there are some other consequences, even far more important

for any concern with peace as ordinarily conceived of, in terms of inter-human relations, although "peace with nature" should always be part of our peace concept.

When God is no longer in us but above us it stands to reason that some men are closer to God than other men. When God is immanent, in everybody, meaning precisely that, every body (and not necessarily only human body) is chosen. If God is transcendental, above, a divine stratification is already introduced and some might be more chosen than others as there is no guarantee that god is in us all. In principle all are equal in the eyes of God; in practice some are more equal than others.

Let us look at some of the possibilities; at how religion can be distorted, can go wrong.

First, by definition: man is chosen above nature. Man is besouled, nature is desouled. Strictly speaking we could also imagine a religion with God above man but man nevertheless in nature, at the same level as the rest of nature. But since that construction seems to be rare or non-existent it may concern us less here. What concerns us is the idea of man as the Chosen Species. At the end of this idea we find the endless slaughter and cruelty to animals, and depletion/pollution of both lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere.

Second, men are chosen above women. In other words, the idea of the Chosen Gender; religion as a justification for patriarchy. At the end of this type of thinking we find witch processes and all kinds of cruelties done by men to women, up to our days, and beyond.

Third, an ethnic group is chosen above other groups, they are the Chosen People. In the contemporary world I would mention

two examples: the way judaism constructs the Jews as the Chosen People, by Yahweh,⁷ and how shintoism constructs the Japanese as the Chosen People, by Ameterasu-Okami.⁸ At the far end of this we find not only militarism and conquest but the justification of them as a duty to the God above, and even in the interest in the longer run of the victims:⁹ the divine mission, the mission civilisatrice, the crusades and jihad against those who have chosen something else, the infidels.

Fourth, even when in principle any human being can be Chosen some may nevertheless be more Chosen than others by intrinsic rather than such extrinsic criteria as gender and nation. Social scientists tend to divide intrinsic criteria in two simple types: attitude and behavior. Both may serve as a basis for holier-than-thou'ism: the True Believers and the Do Gooders. In either case we are dealing with categories of Chosen Persons; a principle which may also operate within a Chosen Gender and/or within a Chosen People. In other words, the three principles of differentiating human beings do not exclude each other. And at the far end of this type of divisiveness and we find all kinds of discrimination and cruelties against non-believers, including inquisition against heretics.¹⁰

Fifth, some professions may be chosen above others; the Chosen Profession, the calling. The religiosi in the professional sense, the clergy, the monks, the nuns. Those engaged in holy wars. the "Gott mit une"¹¹ military. The capitalists, according to Max Weber;¹² the scientists, according to Robert K. Merton.¹³ I am sure there are many other examples. The role of engineers in the marxist mystique as those who are closest to the centerpiece of History (=God), the means of production, could also be mentioned; they also needed a chosen profession.

Second, there is the principle of monotheism. The God above, the transcendental God is the only God there is. Under polytheism there is a recognition that there are also other gods, the God above oneself is not the only one. He may be the only one valid for me, but others may have other gods valid for them. But under monotheism there is only one god with whom there can be union, meaning that the Chosen Ones, whether in terms of gender, nation, personal or professional attributes are the only Chosen Ones in the universe. But that means, by implication, that the others are unchosen, and for that reason become like nature, like matter, desouled, not besouled by any supreme principle. To have union with God because of being chosen gives, in principle, strength. To believe that there is only one God capable of endowing anybody with that type of strength might be a source of additional strength, bordering on arrogance. It is also a major inspiration for single-peaked, authoritarian/totalitarian regimes.

Third, added to this might come the joint operation of the two principles of singularism and universalism.¹⁴ Singularism means that there is only one valid faith, one's own. Universalism means that the faith is valid for everybody, for the whole world or the whole universe for that matter. To believe in a singular valid faith is in itself not dangerous provided this is seen as my faith, the only one valid for me or us. The moment that validity is extended, by definition, to the whole universe the holders of the faith become, by implication, missionaries. Similarly, to see a principle as universally valid is not so dangerous. The problem arises the moment that principle is seen as the only valid principle existing. Monotheism does not necessarily fall in this category. By definition monotheism is singularist, but does not have to

be universalist: both judaism and shintoism are examples. Christianity and Islam, on the other hand, are examples of monotheistic religions that fall in the singularism-with-universalism category; and they are also the only aggressively proselytizing religions in the world today. A Chosen People under particularism may certainly become aggressive, but not proselytizing. Why should they share their God?

Fourth, with one transcendental God comes one transcendental Satan. That there is evil, or evil inclinations or capability for evil in all of us I think most people would readily agree to.¹⁵ In other words, there might be a general belief in the concept of evil-in-man and also evil-in-nature, the latter being related to all the violence nature does to itself and to human beings, including all threats of violence. However, on purpose I use the term "evil" rather than Satan to indicate inclination a tendency, something not necessarily intended, as the basis of a theory of immanent evil.

However, what is hinted at here is a theory of transcendental evil, in other words of Satan. Since the word or preposition "above" is usually reserved for God the formula would be Satan-below-man, without necessarily incurring the idea of man-below-nature, in other words a theory of nature as pristine and man as below nature with his capacity for intended evil. But if Satan becomes the counterpart, so to speak, of God he could also be endowed with the same characteristics. In other words, he may also have his Chosen Partners, maybe even in terms of gender, nation, person, profession. And what would be more natural than assuming that the gender not

chosen by God is exactly the one chosen by Satan--in other words an important conceptualization of women by men in christianity?¹⁶ Or, that the people not chosen by God could be chosen by Satan, perhaps not all other peoples, but some of them or one of them, for instance the one with which one has otherwise problematic relations. Thus, relations between genders, given the strength of the forces of eros and sexus, are problematic! And, would not monosatanism be a logical consequence of monotheism, of course not by strict implication, but simply by having something equal in form and of approximately equal strength on the other side so as to conceive of man as being exposed to the forces of good and evil, located between them, having to choose and being capable of choice exactly because of their approximately equal strength? Moreover, why not assume that this singular Satan is operating universally? And at the far end of this type of thinking lies, of course, an enormity of violence in the name of God against Satan, where Satan would be the force behind anyone of the unchosen persons, singularly or combined.

Fifth, Armageddon Theology. The theological is also logical: the final battle between the forces of Good and Evil, God and Satan, involving the whole universe, with everybody judged according to that singular criterion; where do you stand, for God or for Satan? Destruction and death unlimited. But God will sort-out the righteous, the just and they end up where they should: in Paradise.

Of course, I have prejudged the issue by referring to the two types of religious experience, or religions, as "genuine" and "distorted". How could a distorted religion be an effective, positive factor in the quest for peace? The holder of the belief in a distorted religion, if all five kinds of distortion (and sub-types under the first one!) are operative, would be trembling face to face with the Almighty, God the Judge, the god who chooses by rewarding good, and "unchooses" by punishing evil. Would he not tend to see what happens in the world as a struggle not between good and evil inside ourselves, but between good and evil

genders, peoples, persons, like two armies, headed by two generals, God and Satan respectively?¹⁷ And if he believes that there is only one god, valid for the whole world, would he not tend to see himself as a part in a permanent crusade, out to crush the center of evil in the world wherever it might be? In other words, would not religion be a force over and above ordinary animosities between people, crystallizing, aligning forces on either side depending on the religion of their choice? And--I would add--could it not be that even if the faith in a distorted religion with a transcendental God/Satan wanes that religions might leave their stamp on ideologies and that the secular successors to distorted religions might be equally distorted ideologies?¹⁸ And also suffer from an Armageddon complex as the ultimate distortion, making the ultimate war awesome, but inevitable as a part of transcendental design?

In the same vein, could it not also be that the holder of a faith described above as genuine religion would be inspired by the strong conviction that there is "that-of-god" in him, that he is basically good? And that this applies not only to him, but also to others; not only to human beings, but to all sentient beings, even to all nature? Could it not be that he would strongly believe that the basic point is to bring out what is good and try to fight evil inclinations inside all of us, maybe also helping each other across borders of age, gender and race, nation and class in that eternal struggle?¹⁹ The basic point would be that genuine religion recognizes no border. Everybody is included, nobody is excluded; nobody even seen as an agent of Satan. There is no Armageddon to end the world, but endless prospects for improvement.

I think the distinction between genuine and distorted religion does not run between the religions of the world as we know them today, but within every single one of them. There are genuine and distorted elements in all of them. Or, as I would perhaps prefer to say: there are soft and hard aspects of judaism, soft and hard aspects of christianity, of islam, of hinduism, of buddhism, of shintoism. This is not the place to spell it out, however. Rather, I would like to conclude by making five points.

First, the relationship between religion and peace is complicated, complex. Genuine religion, I think, can be seen as a peace productive factor; distorted religion as counter-productive. I do think non-choosing, pantheistic religions tend to be more peace productive and monotheistic religions more belligerent, with polytheistic religions somewhere in-between. And then there are the other four factors referred to above: monotheism, universalism/singularism, beliefs in Satan in addition to God, and the Armageddon complex.

Second, I think there are genuine and distorted elements in all religions, that all religions have soft and hard aspects, or versions, interpretations. Religions as such cannot be classified in peace-and war-productive; only aspects, interpretations.

Third, for religion to be a productive factor in the struggle for peace, itself a soft relation among human beings, and for peace with nature, soft religion has to dominate. Concretely, those who struggle for peace have to carry out that theological debate, and

inside their own religion. Nobody from the outside can do it for them. If they try chances are that the believers will harden rather than soften. This means that one of the most important struggles for peace today is the theological debate within any one of the religions in the world, I could say in favor of genuine religion, trying to weed out the distorted or the distorting elements.

Fourth, in so doing there is one great advantage: the soft versions of the religions of the world are very similar, the hard versions being rather different. In the soft versions all human beings are chosen and there is no Evil, Devil, Satan somewhere. In christianity this is the religion of Francisco d'Assisi, similar to for instance soft buddhism and soft shintoism. But the hard elements or varieties are by definition different since they are precisely the versions that divide, usually based on the histories of particular peoples (nations), and colored by their experiences, prejudices, conflicts throughout the ages. The people/persons chosen by one religion will tend not to be chosen by another.

Fifth, the quest for peace would be greatly served if religionists and theologians of all kinds could try to bring forth, as clearly as possible, these genuine religion elements all over the world, the soft varieties, so that we can compare them, see them side by side, and conceive of them as variations over one general theme. And that theme would be something like this: God is Love and Truth, and since God is inside us we are all infinitely capable of love and truth. As Gandhi said, non-

violence rather than violence then becomes the "law of human beings". Violence is a distortion.²⁰ In this perspective we are entitled to have infinite faith in human beings; whether we are religionists or humanists, entitled to optimism. That optimism is certainly a necessary condition in the quest for peace, ultimately perhaps even a sufficient condition. Condemning man to an "instinct of aggression", like condemning him to "original sin" plays into the hands of distorted religion and should itself be condemned. We shall be tolerant, but not tolerating all kinds of intolerance, including intolerance of ourselves.

Concluding, maybe it should be pointed out that we are not only faced with a distinction between hard and soft religion. There is also a line between ritualized and organic religion. Only organic religion comes in hard and soft versions; the ritualized is bland. The same holds for secularized religions, the ideologies. Of course, ritualized religions may cooperate--there is no longer any flame burning. Cooperation between ritualists may be considerably more peace productive than between hard-liners. But inferior to cooperation between holders of genuine religions of all kinds--possibly a major force keeping our world together in spite of all divisiveness. Only a strong belief in the sacredness of all life, not only human will ultimately constitute a sufficiently strong bulwark for peace--among ourselves and with nature.