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Building New Humanity through Faith: Republic Day Message, 2019

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If I recall rightly, in 1974 or so, on Gandhi Jayanthi day, late Fr. Samuel Rayan in his homily in this very chapel said: Bapuji (Gandhi) and Ambedkar are symbols of new humanity. On hindsight today we could also say, Fr. Sam was one of them, showing traits of a new humanity.

Describing the evolutionary progression, Scientist Philip Clayton wrote: “Once there was no universe and then, after the Big Bang, there was an exploding world of stars and galaxies. Once the earth was unpopulated and later it was teeming with primitive life forms. Once there were apes living in trees and then there were Mozart, Einstein and Gandhi.

We have glimpses of a new humanity in people like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Mother Teresa, Albert Einstein, Pope Francis or in millions of ordinary people who spent their lives in self-effacing love and sacrifice for others like Stan Lourdasamy. We have signs of new humanity all around us.

in spite of the many atrocities, violence, mob lynching and hate speeches.

Prophet Jeremiah's Promise

Jeremiah spoke of new law inscribed in the minds and hearts people, instilling the spirit of a new covenant relationship of YWH with Israel. For a people living in exile, this was hopeful promise. Justifiably the Israelites interpreted this newness as one-time event and only for themselves - the Jews the privileged of YWH = 'we are the privileged people of YWH and soon he will bring peace and prosperity'. We recognize today that what is promised in Jeremiah 31 is the constant nature of YWH and his relationship with people: continuous and on-going renewal and newness. YHW is ever new, ever creative and remains a creatively creating God bringing newness for all. In fact, the entire creation is groaning for newness and for full revelation as St. Paul says in Romans. Today science tells us that the universe is unfinished; we live in a still-becoming universe; that the world is new each day, that the cosmos may still be only at the dawn of its creation, and that a vast and indeterminate future may still lie open before it. We are in an unfinished universe, in a becoming universe. God is passionately busy in building and renewing a cosmos, a universe and humankind that is beyond our imagination.

What is promised in Jeremiah is not so much about the future event; nor is it a prosperity gospel, but it is the very creative substance of God, renewing the universe, with quality relationship of justice and peace. This desire and plan of a creative God shaping a new cosmos and humankind is thwarted by the humans as evidenced in the Gospel. The Israelites preferred to look back to Abraham rather than

looking at what was happening to them then and there. ‘We are Abraham’s seed’; we have everything – tradition, law and land. By clinging to ‘Abrahamic tradition’ and excluding ‘the present’, Israelites missed out the creative God and the becoming universe; they held themselves in bondage of blood, law and tradition. Because of their bondage they do not recognize the originality and newness in Jesus. Jesus is depicting for them a universality as big as God but they chose to belong to their clan, tradition, law and temple.

Republic of All Peoples

In this becoming universe, in this becoming God’s people, every believer is invited to grow into the vastness, newness, proximity and universality of God. To come out of narrow domestic walls that we create every day (as Tagore sang) around us. God is to be seen as the ultimate Center of convergence for an unfinished universe ever creating, ever new and yet ever the same. In other words, God is busy building a republic of all peoples with the entire creation.

On a day when we celebrate Republic Day in India, we should not mistake Republic for rigid nationalism; otherwise we would not have African friends singing for us in this liturgy; we should not mistake Republic for exclusive ideology that divests citizenship for many on the basis of religious identity; otherwise we cannot celebrate Eucharist with bread and wine – the fruit of our common labor; we should not mistake Republic for majoritarianism, otherwise we cannot worship the Lord with our sisters who have gathered in good numbers. God is busy building a republic of all peoples with the entire creation. We shall not substitute anything for God’s Republic: neither nationalism, nor religion nor ideology. We shall strive for a Republic of all peoples.

- We shall be a Republic on that day when sunshine and lilies of the field mean more to us than the acquisition of the tallest statue in the world;
- We shall become a Republic that day when we are able to feed and educate our children, rather than protecting cows in our schools and dispensaries;
- We shall become a Republic when children of our country, especially of Dalits and Adivasis, excite us more than our rulers.
- We shall become a Republic on that day when we use hearts to measure the worth of a citizen rather than their Certificates;
- We shall become a Republic not because greed, need, and pride unite us but only truth and non-violence form us into a nation;
- We shall become a Republic when we are joyful because so many are in love rather than initiate a juridical process against love-jihad.
- We shall become a Republic when the sight of our seas and mountains makes us dance more joyfully than the purchase of a Rafale.
- We shall become a Republic when we allow the sages and saints of our land to speak to us through their values than through hate-mongering politicians and their oratories;
- We shall become a Republic when we weep not because we lost an election but because we have such rich, diverse and varied peoples and cultures.

Conclusion

Jesus' offer of true inner freedom to the seed of Abraham provoked bitter hostility and misapprehension. Rather than embracing the freedom and joy offered by Jesus and thus grow into God's Republic, they clung to their tradition, law, nationality, land and clan and missed out the newness and universality of the Father offered to them in Jesus. On this day of India's Republic day, let us pledge to work for the Republic of God where God is laboring through an unfinished universe and a becoming people to realize his creative dreams fashioned for us by the founding Fathers and Mothers of our country. Let us dream with our creative God for the Republic that is beyond our imagination.

[Based on the homily delivered for the community of Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeth, Pune, on 26 January 2019]



Book Review

Ramesh Pai, *Half a Book on God*, Published by the author, Bangalore, ISBN: 9879353 468972 pp 180, ₹ 250/-

This book is a creative and contemporary search for GOD in today's world. It carries an encouraging message from Swami Chidrupananda Saraswati, Bangalore, and is addressed to all the youth, especially of India.

Reason for writing the book is because the author's conscience was disturbed. "I felt that their claim about GOD and nature of GODHOOD to be irrational and flawed. I wanted to know the truth" (p. 9). He listened to spiritual discourse and familiarized himself with the Upanishads. Then, "I had to write down my thought process to know my thought processes" (p. 9)

He gives quite many warnings or "Before Reading Further." In fact 45 of them. The last one is interesting. He holds: Our varying descriptions of GOD, different religious view and conflicts are a result of such minds affected or enriched by: a. greed and awareness; b. Cultural and linguistic differences developed over the human history; c. intelligence and d. Limitations of intelligence (26).

Then he makes three distinctions: a. God, which indicates the general usages in monotheism and personalized faith; b. god, indicating the ultra human energies and mythological descriptions and c. GOD, the ultimate truth yet to be understood, which is the subject matter of this book.

The whole book takes on a dialogical style. The preface has

a dialogue with an atheist on the question, “Does GOD exist”? Then the books takes up various issues like life, prana, soul, religions, miracles, GOD realization, God and Upanishads, GOD in my view and some thoughts about Godhood.

The book is clear, precise and introductory. For example, it says. “BRAHMAN is beginningless and endless, hence hs no attributes like time and space. Experiments are claimed to reveal that the universe started with a big bang... But what was before Big Bang. The author quotes Stephen Hawking’s reply. It is like asking “What is beyond South Pole?”

Hindu philosophy has never been confronted with this question. But the author feels that their answer would have been “another big bang, another universe... reducing everything including time and space to a tiny speck. That tiny speck is BRAHMAN” (p 170).

Insightfully, the author claims that, unlike many other works, this book is written to claim, “I DO NOT KNOW.” When the world is appreciating the non-existent cloth of the emperor, “I have dared to call the emperor naked” (p. 179).

On the whole, I find the book insightful, straightforward and dialogical. It tries to answer the deep questions of life in simple and direct manner. It is a book meant for all those who seek GOD personally and directly in the modern times. It takes into consideration the latest scientific findings, the traditional religious teachings and the modern mentality. It is a book for the youth and for all those who are young at heart. That is why the author is willing to give the book free of cost “to any spiritual guru from any religious background” (p. 180).

I would recommend this book highly to all those who want to discover the meaning of their life: honestly and transparently! This book is an asset to all seekers of the truth! It is truly a relevant and priceless book!

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