

# **Towards a Christian Theology of Dialogue Communication at Grassroots in a Multi-Religious Context.**

*Jointly written by Rev Anugrah Ramble and Rev Joshva Raja*

## **Theologies in India**

Over the years theological thinking in the South Asian Context has undergone many changes. At the beginning Indian Philosophical schools, mainly Brahminical texts and thoughts influenced the theological framework<sup>1</sup>. Later, contextual theologies emerged and critiqued some of the dominant Brahminical influence on Indian Christian theologies because many of the Christians are from non-Brahminical background<sup>2</sup>. Thus on the one hand Christian theologies in India have often not emerged from the campus of the theological seminaries to the churches and to the grassroots Christians because of their sophistication or ideological influence. On the other hand the churches are exposed to charismatic and evangelical theologies from para-church organizations and preachers. It is quite likely that a parallel system of theological institutions, with evangelical and popular support, may emerge (in many contexts have already emerged) to counter established theological colleges, challenging the established churches in their basic theological and ministerial training.

One of the reasons may be due to the strong emphasis on contextual theologies and a narrow academic approach to Biblical texts. The aim of this paper is to go beyond such theologies and to explore a new methodology of doing theology in a South Asian Context. This new approach has to take into account people's experience in multicultural and pluralistic contexts on the one hand and diverse competing narratives and their religious interpretations on the other hand. It takes into account how people can be committed to their own faith, tradition and culture while recognizing, engaging and interaction with the presence of the others' faith, tradition and cultures around them. Thus the aim is to create a dialogic space at grassroots that would enable the communities not

only to coexist but also to work towards a life-together respecting and recognizing each others' religious faith. Taking the present realities of religious conflicts this approach becomes very important and relevant particularly for the South Asian contexts.

### **Inter-religious Dialogue**

Often the inter-religious discussions at leadership and intellectual levels have failed due to a fear of accepting syncretism or of taking an exclusive pluralistic position. What may prevent Christian lay members holding a dialogue with other religious communities is the misunderstanding that dialogue is against their evangelistic mission; or that they may have to give up their claims of uniqueness. Some may believe that dialogue is only for intellectuals who deal with Sanskrit texts and understand the relationship between religious texts and so on. Some may even think that dialogue means to accept the position that all religions lead people to the same God<sup>3</sup>. Inter-religious dialogue is often misunderstood at grassroots level for one or other of the other reasons stated above. This leads us to highlight the need for an alternative method for engaging in dialogue between different religious communities.

My aim is to promote dialogue, at grassroots levels, between people who are strong believers living a simple faith of their own for previous attempts at dialogue have been carried out mainly at an intellectual or leadership level. Inter-religious dialogue at grassroots refers to establishing contact, presence, communication, relationship and understanding between two different religious persons or communities. This could enrich the process that already exists in many contexts such as tea shops where dialogue between people of different faiths is already happening. Such a dialogic process may become the means to address many areas of religious conflicts and social unrest. Instead of confrontation, communities may work together to find a way to live in harmony. It does not mean that other types of dialogue (such as dialogue between intellectuals) should be eliminated. Even the dialogue between intellectuals, professionals and leaders

could also lead to the dialogue at grassroots. These types can coexist and nourish each other in establishing better understanding between religious communities.

### **Genuine Dialogue**

Dialogue at grassroots means communication between two persons, two communities, two caste groups, or people from two nations who are not intellectuals or leaders, but ordinary members of their group. At the church level it is the lay people, who are neither theologians nor pastors nor preachers, who would venture dialogue with lay people or followers of other faiths. If this is the case it does not demand change in the person's or communities' attitude, religion or perception during or after the dialogue. The changes may occur during the interaction only after the relationship between the participants becomes strong. Such a dialogue affirms the life of each other person or community; enables people to share their basic resources; guides people to recognize each other's search for God and leads people to recognize common human values such as justice and human dignity. Every human being tries to search for God in his or her own way, using his or her own religious or non-religious or even anti-religious means and methods. Such a willingness to search for God should be recognized in all persons and thus engaging in each other's search may be seen as dialogue. Religious narratives are supposed to guide people to engage in search for meanings of life and of God in a particular way. Dialogue is a process in which individuals or communities come together willingly to participate in search for meanings of life and of God.

A few scholars have also argued that dialogic communication can address many of the social issues and enable people find a common denominator to address these issues together. The communication process between the participants of the dialogue can happen either through critical learning and praxis (Freire<sup>4</sup>), rational discourse (Habermas<sup>5</sup>), I-Thou relationship (Buber<sup>6</sup>), merging horizons of past and present (Gadamer<sup>7</sup>), dialogic-language (Bakhtin<sup>8</sup>) and through common consciousness (Bohm<sup>9</sup>).

Their emphasis is on the dialogic relationship of one with the other and tends to answer how to develop a dialogic link between people. Without a person deciding whether to participate in the dialogue or not there is no possibility of developing dialogic relationship among the participants. The above concepts in their definitions highlight the process of dialogue between the self and the other and thus dialogue is explained in terms of relationship with the other. Their emphasis on the other is important but its role in shaping the self should also be recognized.

Without a dialogue within oneself from different perspectives it may be difficult to extend it to the other. One may have to recognize within oneself the presence of **different** perspectives, beliefs and views that are in constant dialogue with each other. Though one holds one's own perspective strongly one can still attempt to listen to the voices of the other perspectives that emerge within one's 'self'. It is not essential to change any perspectives or belief within oneself in order to hold the dialogue with the other. The basic aim is to enable people to establish contact, relationship and friendship between people of different faiths at grassroots. As the friendship is established there is a possibility of establishing interaction between people of different faiths. Such interactions can lead to exchange of views, doctrines, faith statements and ideas and thus influence and negotiate certain meanings that are common to them. Such influence may or may not happen at later interactions. Without developing a dialogic attitude within a person's self it is difficult to establish dialogic relationship among the participants. This paper attempts to venture into a theological framework of developing such a dialogical attitude among people.

### **Religious Narratives and Dialogue**

The narratives of religion, caste, political groups often shape, reflect and influence people's relationship, communication and understanding of life and faith. These narratives are supposed to help us to relate ourselves to God and to others. Because they

are diverse we are exposed to a wide range of narratives and perspectives. When we are exposed to these narratives our self becomes active recognizing different perspectives within ourselves. These diverse narratives evolve from diverse experiences of God as human beings. The experience is different for each of us because within the Godhead exist many perspectives, without loss of an underlying unity. This unity is not 'uniformity' but rather a 'oneness' that comes from a dynamic, creative and interactive Godhood in whom many perspectives coexist and cooperate in developing perfection. The oneness is not sameness, but rather an acceptance of multiple perspectives existing in one personhood and linking each perspective with dignity and respect.

For such a dialogue one does not need to change one's own faith even if it is exclusive in nature. For example many Christians believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and there is no other way, truth and life. Christians do not need to change this faith in Jesus in order to have dialogue with other religious friends. If we Christians do not wish to change our faith in Christ, in dialogue, we cannot expect others to change their faith in their respective Gods in order to have dialogue with us. This does not mean that we accept their faith as the same as our faith. We have the experience of our own faith and may know that our faith is the true faith, but we do not experience the other person's faith. Thus we do not know how the other person has experienced God in his or her own life and so we cannot make any judgment on their faith experience.

The other person may believe that his or her faith is the true faith and has similar or different experiences to confirm such claims. Religious narratives and claims were intended to help people to establish a relationship with God and with their neighbour. Nevertheless, they have misled their followers to destroy other people in the name of serving God and defending their own religion and culture. In this way they have often failed to guide people towards God and their neighbour as they should have. Dialogue is a possible way of engaging with the other and thus correcting those destructive characteristics of religious narratives.

## **Dialogue and the Bible**

I wish to develop a theological framework for Christians to develop dialogue with other religious communities without losing their identity, and without changing their faith in Christ, and so to find a way to live together and share basic human values based on justice and dignity. Only through dialogue at grassroots can many of the religious, caste and linguistic issues be addressed and the communities be brought together to work towards peace and justice. Thus a culture of dialogue, of peace and of justice could be established rather than a culture of confrontation - of terror, and of ignorance. In order to develop a theological framework I look at the Biblical narratives, as well as narratives of other religious texts, to see whether the experience of Biblical communities reveals a God who is basically a God of dialogue. There is a need for Christians to initiate this dialogue for bringing people closer to Christ. Any initiative in dialogue may lead them to recognize the divine 'self in them, to engage with the image of God within their 'self' and so to experience God's presence in them. In order to do this the dialogue should be seen as part of the mission of the church.

## **Dialogue in God**

The Biblical God is a God of Dialogue. God is a Communitarian and Trinitarian God. In Godhood<sup>10</sup> there is a community of God. The Book of Genesis (Chapter 1) informs us about God in plurality (Let us create human being in our image). It also provides the picture of God as one who communicates within Godself. This communication involves both listening and speaking. God has to be understood as a community of God in oneness. There is also a dialogue within this community of God at particular times. God holds a dialogue with Satan in the book of Job (Chapter 1).

Within this parliament of God Satanic voices are equally heard and are listened to by God. This does not mean that Satan is part of God as Jung would like us to imagine. Even with the opposite parties, God contacts, listens, communicates and establishes relationship. God communicates with the other and establishes perfect communication even with the opponent by listening and speaking to the other (1 Kings 22). God also lets part of his community play the role of the opponent in the life of human beings. The underlying unity of God does not refer to the uniformity of perspectives and ideas nor to the sameness of personalities within the community of God. The Trinitarian concept explains to us the way different personalities exist within the oneness of God (Dynamic Monotheism).

### **Jung and Opposites within**

Such a concept of God holding dialogue with the opposite and playing the role of the opposite is slightly different from the Jungian concept of 'Opposites within God'. For Jung, God is the archetypal image of the collective unconscious. Jung argues that Christianity is dualistic and if it claims to be monotheistic, then the opposites must be contained in God. In God, insight goes together with obtuseness, and "loving-kindness along with cruelty<sup>11</sup>". The coexistence of these opposites means God is unconscious or just feebly conscious. Both good and evil exist in God so God is a "totality of inner opposites", and God "does not care a rap for any moral opinion and does not recognize any form of ethics as binding." Jung argued that the Old Testament reflects the primitive human beings' concept of God<sup>12</sup>. They conceived God as one who was unconscious and morally primitive. Jung points out that the paradoxical nature of God has an effect on humanity: it splits us into opposites and delivers us over to a seemingly insoluble conflict<sup>13</sup>.

Psychologically, what happens in such situations of conflict is that the unconscious in many ways (dreams, fairy tales, myths, etc.) throws out signs of the union

of opposites as symbolized by various means--the child-hero, squaring the circle, etc. To Jung this is a motif that appears again in the dreams of modern humans and it always has to do with the bringing together of darkness with light. This union of opposites is a problem that the revelation set out, that alchemists have tried to resolve for seven centuries and that confronts modern people. For Jung, God is the archetype of the collective unconscious of people. In my opinion however, religious narrative is a construction of human beings to promote an idea of God.

The concept of God is possibly a construct by human beings but the experience of God cannot be a psychological construction of the collective unconscious. The derivation from the experience to the concept and the narrative is possibly a psychological construction. It is difficult to come to the conclusion that God Godself is the construction of the collective unconscious. If the experience has to be studied it has to be done more scientifically or objectively which is difficult with religious experiences. The narratives have to be considered as construction being developed by faith communities from their experience of God in whatever ways they felt and communicated their experience through whatever words, means and methods that were available to them though they have their own limitations. Within what is narrated and experienced God is seen as one who holds dialogue within Godself.

### **God and Many Voices**

Within God there are multiple voices and perspectives underlying oneness but holding dialogue among them. This shows the nature of God in the Bible as one who is a dynamic and interactive God. The prophets show us that the God is one who accepts all as his people. It means not only are Israelites the chosen race but even others are called and led by God just as the Israelites were. In Isaiah chapter 19, God calls Egypt his people and Assyrians as his handwork and Israelites as his chosen race. In this sense God is shown as a universal God who leads every culture and people according to God's ways

and teachings. No religion and no culture are perfect in describing God and so they can only serve people to relate themselves with God and with one's neighbour.

God is seen as one who establishes contact, communicates, renews relationship and develops understanding with Godself, with others, even with his opponents and with those whom God may not agree with. This is because within Godhood there are multiple perspectives that are in constant dialogue. This is what I call God's dialogue that needs to be recognized and extended to human relationships as well. There are many other examples in the Old Testament that portray God as one who listens, communicates and understand the others (1 Samuel 8). It is interesting to note that the change in God is to be seen as inbuilt nature itself rather than to see God as one who changes from righteousness to unrighteousness. This is because God is a dynamic God and not a static God. God tends to recognize different perspectives that God may understand human beings better.

God can be seen as an exclusive God who does not want his creation to worship any other than Godself (Exodus 20) while God has to be recognized by all. God is working through other people to bring the Israelites, the chosen people, back to God (Judges 12:12-15). So God is also working among and through other people besides the chosen people of God. In this way the Bible projects God as both exclusive as well as inclusive of different people and their faith. God is also seen as one who is engaged not only with Israelites but also with others in their search for meanings of God and of life. The writers of the Biblical texts projected God as one who had diversity within Godhood and so dialogue within Godself between these diverse views and perspectives.

### **Dialogue in Jesus**

Jesus can also be seen as a role model in dialogic communication. He established contact, relationship and understanding with others including those who were identified

as sinners by the community (Luke 15). Jesus engaged in discussion with his contemporaries – such as Pharisees and Sadducees who were often opposed to some of Jesus' radical views (Matthew 19). He created a public sphere by holding dialogue with them and challenging them within their own narratives. He was also critical about their interpretations and their authority. Nevertheless he did not undermine the narratives of faith that they shared with him (Matthew 5: 19-20). Jesus shared many perspectives with his disciples as well as with his listeners. Very often Jesus had dialogue within himself from different perspectives. He shared this dialogue with God whom he called as 'My Father' and also with his disciples (John 17). He was struggling to decide on taking up the cup of suffering and prayed to Father to remove it if possible. This shows a dialogue within himself that he extends to God (Luke 22:41-43).

When Jesus had dialogue with those who were questioning his teachings, he was able to listen, recognize others including devil (Luke 4:3). He often tried to establish understanding with others. Though his expectations to convince the other groups failed he did not give up either. He was in anguish at the cross even with the father to whom he cried 'Why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34) But his mission was to hold contact, dialogue, relationship and understanding with all people with whom he interacted. This is the greatest model for us to hold dialogue with others even those who are opposed to our perspectives and views. Jesus did not change his vision and teaching of the reign of God rather he was trying to enable the opponents to see the problems within their interpretations and approaches (Luke 10:25-37). Through dialogue he continued to interact with people of every type in society regardless of their refusal to accept him and his teachings.

This sets up for us a Christology for our dialogue. Jesus seems to be exclusive in his approaches to others (Matthew 10:5-6). He also asks his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the entire world. He says, 'I am the Truth, the Life and the Way (John 14:6).'

In many ways he is presented as an exclusive person. At the same time there are instances

where he accommodates others as they are. He accepts the Samaritan woman and tells her that God will be worshipped everywhere (John 4:21-24). He also tells the gentile man who was healed from among the graves to go back to his people and proclaim what (his) God has done to him (Mark 5:19-20). He wants his disciples to accept him and him only (Mark 16:15-18). But when it comes to other religions he seems to hold a dialogic and listening style.

For Jesus the religious narratives are secondary to people and their lives when he says the Sabbath is made for human beings rather than human beings for Sabbath (Mark 2:27). He recognized people's faith in God and appreciated them (Matthew 8:10-11). He was even convinced by the gentile woman's faith in him to heal her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28). He recognized and emphasized the importance of people's lives, their faith and the need to share resources among themselves and their relationship with each other. Jesus is presented in the Gospels as inclusive as well as exclusive. Jesus is presented as an exclusive way to salvation. The writer of the book of Acts states that there is no other name besides my name on earth (Acts 4:10-12). He might have been exclusive when he says go to the Israelites only, but was certainly inclusive when he told the Samaritan woman that God would be worshipped everywhere.

Jesus listens to his opponents and contemporary leaders who want to eliminate him and then attempts to interact with them by engaging in their search for meanings. By listening, Jesus communicated and for communicating Jesus listened. Because Jesus communicates within himself from different perspectives as an extension of his communication with God he was able to hold dialogue with anyone with different perspectives. He also creates an atmosphere to have dialogue with the other and thus attempts to lead humanity towards becoming a divine community that is the body of Christ.

## **Dialogue, God and Human Beings**

The Biblical God is working with a particular purpose for this world. At the same time God is also engaging with human beings to carry out this purpose by accommodating human beings' perspectives as well. God holds the dialogue within Godself from different perspectives and so the purpose of establishing relationship with human beings is served by extending such dialogue with human beings as well. In case God finds a perspective is relevant which is against his perspective but works with human beings then God adopts and tests it and uses it for communicating with human beings. From people's experience of God they construct their own religion to enable the future generation to have similar experiences and to relate to God and with other. Each religious narrative is a construction of human beings from their experience of God and of life. These narratives have limitations in terms of linguistic expressions, narration, semantic constructions, and historical accuracies and so on. This does not prevent people from believing and practicing them.

When it is relating people to God and to neighbour the religions seem to be working within a particular religious community. But when it is extended to other religions or cultural groups, then there are issues such as conversion. The problem arises when we provide an adjective to God and neighbour (for example - Christian or Jewish or Hindu God or neighbour). If God is universal then there is no need for any adjective (Christian God or Hindu God or Muslim God) to be added to him. If God is approachable by people, each one's faith in God can be recognized as the starting point rather than religion. Jesus often recognized people's faith in God and appreciated them for their belief in him. Even in the case of neighbour the same conclusion is applicable. There is no need to have adjectives for neighbour such as Christian sister or Hindu friend and Muslim brother and so on to share our love and care with others.

When any neighbour regardless becomes our friend, partner or brother then the dialogic relationship brings God's reign here and now. It means one should be ready to accept any neighbour as a friend and as a fellow faith seeker, for it is then that we express the image of God to others and thus witness God's love to the whole world. If a person does not hold on to a particular perspective it would lead to confusion and chaos. But at the same time without a dialogue from other perspectives within oneself, the self fails to recognize the image of God within and thus loses the purpose of his life. When it comes in terms of different religions, God is also active in every person and his or her culture.

This takes us to the next step of theology where we discover ourselves in the light of God's Self. Each one of us has multiple 'personalities' in ourselves. A person's attitude, speech and relationship are often shaped by the perspectives that he or she has. Such perspectives are shaped and formed by many social institutions including religion, family, peer group, school and media. If one holds more than two perspectives in oneself on a particular issue at a particular historical time then there is a dialogue possible within one's 'self'. If one holds only one perspective without having dialogue with another perspective then no dialogue is possible within oneself and with others. Persons with such single perspectives tend to go to extremes of behaviour and do not mind giving up their lives for the sake of their perspective. This often leads to martyrdom. People may allow themselves to be persecuted or to be killed for the sake of establishing a relationship with God and with their neighbours. Such kinds of martyrdom may be interpreted positively but if the martyrdom is carried out in the name of fixed doctrines or 'single' perspectives then such an act can be interpreted as an act of terrorism or mere suicide as in the case of suicide bombers.

### **Dialogue within Self**

Persons have multiple perspectives within themselves. But they are convinced of one perspective at one point of time and use another perspective at another point of time

and place. These two perspectives may overlap, work on the same principle and operate within the relationship with other persons. At times these two or more perspectives may contradict one another because of the context and historical setting. In this way the person concerned may hold dialogue between two perspectives within oneself. Most of the people have such nature though often they do not accept the fact that they have different perspectives within their 'self's and hold dialogue between them at times. For example someone may talk against drug users but when it comes to their own daughter or son taking drugs, they begin to look at the issue from another perspective taking the reality of adjustment into account. The reason is that they cannot throw their son or daughter out of their house because of the use of drugs though society condemns them. Opposing or different perspectives exist in everyone's mindset. It is the recognition of these perspectives within oneself that enables one to hold a dialogue within.

It is also essential not only to recognize the perspectives within oneself but also to make an attempt to understand the other person's perspective without making a judgment from one's own experience of a particular perspective. Only when there is a dialogue within oneself is there a possibility of expanding such dialogue with the other. It is this attempt to look at other's perspective from within the self that makes people willing to hold dialogue with others. One needs to discover within oneself a Godhood of multiple perspectives. It is because of the image of God in us that we have this multiple perspectives within ourselves and a desire to communicate with opposite views and voices within self. Because God communicates within Godself from different perspectives the image of God within human beings tends to represent such characteristics of dialogue within. Those who try to hold only one perspective and impose on themselves and others tend to suppress other perspectives within and thus subdue them into sidelined-perspective thoughts. At times such sidelined perspectives disturb the person in his or her thinking or behaviour and thus erupt into abnormal or possibly violent behaviour.

## **Gestalt Therapy and Dialogue within**

Such a dialogue within the self is not similar to the practice of self-dialogue in Gestalt Therapy Method<sup>14</sup>. The Gestalt method works towards integration of different parts of the clients whereas this dialogue within enables the person to become aware of different perspectives within his or her self, recognize and establish contact between them and without changing two perspectives can be in constant dialogue with each other. The dialogic communication does not need to make one perspective bad and the other good. It should lead to recognition of the fact that there is a dominant or powerful or majoritarian perspective within the self. Such perspectives are sidelining the less powerful and minority perspectives within. If there is a constant dialogue between these perspectives then there is willingness for the person to explore dialogue with any 'other'. This leads to a dialogical attitude towards others who hold different perspectives than ours. Gestalt self-dialogue is also a practical step (empty chair technique) to help a person to hold dialogue within oneself to get in touch with one's own feelings that one is not aware of and to help one to integrate different parts within oneself. In this dialogue the attempt is not to eliminate one perspective for the other rather to see how best different perspectives within oneself can contribute to the overall personality in different contexts at different historical times with different people.

## **Voice Dialogue and Dialogue within**

Hal Stone and Sidra Stone<sup>15</sup> [1993] have recognized the different personalities and many selves within everyone. Using the Jungian concept they try to practice the voice dialogue therapy through which they identified a dialogic communication between different perspectives within one's self. They maintain the opposites as they are without integrating one into the other. They did not have opposites try to talk to each other because they found that the purpose of having the parts talk to one another was usually to help effect some kind of reconciliation through change and accommodation. Instead, they allowed each self to remain true to itself. There is nothing inherently wrong with having

two different selves talk to each other, however, so long as the autonomy of each self is respected and the therapist's underlying motivation is not reconciliation.

They showed the same respect to each self that we would show to a person. They allowed each self to grow and to change at its own rate and in its own way. Trying to get opposites reconciled seemed to be a way of trying to control peoples' lives, a way of controlling the therapy. They became aware of the tension created in us when we had to live with the reality of opposites in another person. They began to see how the need to reconcile opposites and thus solve problems for others was a function of their own inability to live with the tension of these opposites in themselves.

In this voice dialogue there is a need for a facilitator who would enable the person to hold different voices within the self. This method emphasizes the need to become aware of different selves within us. But it does not inform us how to hold dialogue between these selves while trying to respect each of these on their own merit. This method of voice dialogue is very similar to the concept of dialogue between different perspectives within the self. Nevertheless the main focus in this article is on making aware, establishing contact, holding dialogue and expanding relationships between different perspectives within the self. In such cases we do not need to play different roles at different times in order to recognize different perspectives within ourselves. If one can hold dialogue within oneself between these different perspectives then a dialogical attitude may be created in one that would one to a dialogue with the other. This dialogue enables a person to grow further into a dialogic self with a dialogic attitude to the other and thus recognize the difficulty of coming to a particular perspective within a particular context at a historical time.

### **Perspectives, Self and Dialogue**

Dialogue within the self refers to recognizing different perspectives of truth, views and beliefs that are part of the personhood. This dialogue can be critical, rational, and existential in nature. While holding on to the claims of religious truth and narratives one may recognize the presence of other truths and other views. It means to recognize a number of perspectives and truth claims that exist within everyone's self. Besides a single perspective or narrative that is often subscribed to by the individuals other perspectives tend to have dialogue within this main perspective within the self. When other perspectives are ignored within one's own self, these marginalized perspectives create problems for the self. It may lead one's religious narratives to collide with others and thus become destructive in nature. It demands individuals to recognize the different truth claims within one's own self and thus listen to the minority voices within the self.

Within the truth claims, the Spoken Truth does not need to be the same as that of Objective Truth that is in the mind<sup>16</sup>. The Useful truth may not be considered as truth related to Justice. This dialogue takes place between different aspects of truth happens within the self. At times the self recognizes the limitations, contextual realities and the need for adjustment related to the issues of truth, belief and views. The dialogue between different perspectives within the self has to be recognized in order to enable the image of God active within. Otherwise the self slowly loses the power of the image of God within those who tend to sideline those voices of God within.

### **Dialogue and Image of God**

One should also notice the fact that holding dialogue within oneself between different perspectives does not mean to present a confused or decision-less personality to others. We subscribe to a particular perspective at times but having dialogue within ourselves from another perspective enables us not to continue with the mistakes and wrong-doings of the past and thus to create a present where each one will walk according to one's own faith guided by God but in constant dialogue with other perspectives.

Refusal to hold dialogue within self and with the other is to refuse to recognize the image of God within ourselves and in others.

God establishes contact with everyone including those who tend to reject or oppose God. God tries to commune with human beings by establishing relationship and understanding. If God is of one perspective God would have not accepted people with other perspectives. When the Israelites demanded a King, God let Samuel anoint a king for them and then God later promised that the messiah would also come in the line of King David. Within the limitations of understanding of human beings, within their expectations and within their negation God continues to communicate with them in order that they would respond to him. This dialogue is an extension of God's dialogue within Godself. Having many perspectives and views within his self and having dialogue between these perspectives, God extends such dialogue with human beings regardless of their rejection and opposition.

### **Recognizing the Dialogic Self**

The perspectives within the self consist of frictions; negotiations and rejections but tend to coexist with each other. At times one perspective is given more importance than the other. In a particular context two perspectives collide within the self and still one can neither eliminate nor negotiate with the other. There may not be a consensus; rather an acceptance of both perspectives (and more) as coexisting realities of self. In some contexts one perspective may shape the other and grow together but in other contexts both may hold claims of truth within. We often believe that a pastor must always be a model for others in his or her life. If suddenly we hear that he or she has broken the social norms it becomes a shock to our mindset. It is difficult to accept him or her to be a pastor. But if he or she has been helpful to us in many ways, we look for a way to help out the pastor to get over this and see him or her to be a pastor again. Though it takes a long time to accept him back we recognize the other perspective of acceptance without

compromising our principles. This is where the difficulty of holding dialogue with other perspectives arises.

Many would not recognize the other perspectives within their selves immediately rather they object to others who tend to consider other ways too. Only when it comes to personal experience of accepting our own or with those closely linked with our family that they begin to recognize their different perspectives. When a person begins to recognize his or her own perspectives then it becomes possible to hold dialogue with others. Dialogue within oneself affirms one's life, faith, dignity and also of others and proper relationship within self and with others. When one extends this dialogue within the self to others then it becomes a narrative of dialogue.

Let me summarize this attempt to theologize dialogue at grassroots by highlighting the importance of recognizing different perspectives within God's self. This is reflected in every human being through the image of God. Jesus became the model of recognizing this multiple perspectives within himself. To encourage people to hold dialogue at grassroots we need to recognize God's characteristics in this way. Christians do not need to change their faith or give up their unique claims of Christ in order to have dialogue with other religious communities. Other religious communities may have their own experience of God and narratives and do not need to give up their faith to have dialogue with Christians. We need to affirm together life, dignity, faith and relationship with each other which is being challenged by many of the life threatening and destructive narratives; we need to hold dialogue with anyone who would like to share their perspectives with us.

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin H. S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*. Madras: CLS, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> R S Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, *Readings in Indian Christian Theology*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> J Raja, Doing Theology in a Pluralistic Context. *American Journal of Biblical Theology*, 2007.  
<http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/RajaJ01.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Paulo Freire and I Shor. *A Pedagogy for Liberation. Dialogues on Transforming Education*. London: Macmillan, 1987. and also see Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

---

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas. 1987 *The Theory of Communicative Action* vol. 2 *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston: Beacon Press. And also refer Jürgen Habermas,. 1990. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Buber. 1958. *I and Thou*, 2nd edn. Camelot Press: Southampton

<sup>7</sup> H-G Gadamer. 1979. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed and Ward.

<sup>8</sup> Michael M Bakhtin. 1984b. *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. (C. Emerson, Ed. and Trans.), Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.; M M Bakhtin. 1981. *The dialogical imagination*. (M. Holquist, Ed.) Austin: University of Texas Press; M M Bakhtin. 1986. *Speech genres and other late essays*. (V. McGee, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press; M M Bakhtin. 1981. Discourse in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination: four essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press; M M Bakhtin. 1984. *Rabelais and his world*. (H. Iswolsky, Trans.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>9</sup> David Bohm. 1998, *On Creativity*. Routledge: London. Bohm, D. 1996 *On Dialogue*. Routledge: London.

<sup>10</sup> For convenience sake I describe God with exclusive language that describes God in third person as 'him'. I do not perceive God either as male or as female.

<sup>11</sup> Carl G Jung. 1969, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, C.W. 11. Princeton University Press. 358-369.

<sup>12</sup> Carl G Jung. (1969) *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, C.W. 8. Princeton University Press.

<sup>13</sup> Carl G Jung. 1971, *Psychological Types*, C.W. 6. Princeton University Press and also refer to Carl G Jung. 1961, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Vintage Books.

<sup>14</sup> D Brett, King, and Michael, Wertheimer, 2005, *Max Wertheimer and Gestalt Theory*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

<sup>15</sup> Hal Stone, and Sidra Winkelman Stone, 1993, *Embracing Your Inner Critic: Turning Self-Criticism Into a Creative Asset*. San Francisco: Harper.

<sup>16</sup> In one of the Indian Languages – Tamil, different words are used for describing different aspects of truth. The truth spoken or explained orally is known as Vaimai. The Objective or inner truth is known as Unmai. The useful truth is known as Nanmai and the truth related to Justice is known as Nermai. Each of these words differs in connotation and denotations. They also refer to truth in different contexts and thus highlight different aspects of truths.