

Come, Let's Be Friends

Friendship with Humanity, Nature & God

- **Fr.Vineeth Koshy**

Humanity today is encountering greater and more unique challenges of violence and hatred than ever before. Today living together as good neighbors, brothers and sisters has become a dream of the distant past, greatly due to the turbulent situations created by terrorism, communalism, nationalism, casteism, economic stratification etc which are creating hostility and enmity among communities and individuals. We live in a world where there is growing violence whether it is perpetrated or those who oppose them. During the cold war era global politics had been 'bipolar' i.e. between the two superpowers, after the cold war it has become 'multi-polar' and 'multi-civilizational'. Today in order to cope up with the identity crisis, what counts for people are blood and belief, faith and family, no longer people are interested in uniting under the ideological or political concerns.¹

Faced with these conflicting situations humans wonder if there is a way out of this spiral of violence. In these times the goal of humanity is not just building better structures of governance rather creating new kind of relationships that would make a healthy community living. It is in this context that the concept of friendship is introduced, where whole world is looking forward for a powerful yet a simple relation which can bind humanity together, heal the broken relationships and help communities of faith to live together. The inspiration of friendship of building friendly relations across cultures, religions, denominations and regions is drawn from Christ himself, because he has beckoned to the whole humanity to be bonded in friendship, he bonded not only humanity but the whole creation in friendship with God the Father (John15:15).

Friendship

Come, Let's Be Friends, could be said as a universal beckoning to the whole of humanity, it is a call to renew and revitalize the tampered and broken relations with our fellow beings, nature and creator. Friendship is offered as a new and inclusive paradigm of relation to ecumenism and interfaith relations for relating with the whole of creation. I strongly believe that, friendly relation alone can bind and unite whole humanity. We know that humanity is connected through various relations, but the one relation that is best cherished by each one of us, is the relationship of friendship. What does it meant by, 'Come, Let's Be Friends'? This call of friendship could be reflected from three broad perspectives:

- ✓ **Friendship with Humanity**
- ✓ **Friendship with Nature**
- ✓ **Friendship with God**

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Friendship with Humanity

To be human is to be in relation, to be involved in the web of connections with others. We should know that we are basically created as relational beings, and cannot live in isolation, and that we all are interdependent and related to one another. One of the main reasons of us being relational beings is because the creator who created us is a 'Relational Being' and who is very much interested in human relationships. The friendly relation of living as good neighbors, brothers and sisters has become a dream of the distant past, due to the turbulent situations created by globalization, terrorism, communalism, economic stratification, nationalism, casteism, etc are adding hostility and enmity among communities and individuals. In these times the goal of humanity is to build new kind of relationships that would make a healthy community living. As God does goodness without any external constraint, man who is the image of God can also work for the welfare of the rest of creation without external pressure or authority.²

We need not understand by the relation of friendship of humanity together as one homogeneous system or universal way of living. Here we are taking a pluralistic understanding of community of friends. This means that people living everywhere in their local contexts, regions and religions interacting and living harmoniously together in communion with each other through friendly relations. Friendly relation is not to be understood as two or more individuals enjoying their companionship; rather speaking and working as committed persons with their ultimate commitments and religious outlook on issues that are common of interests coupled with social responsibility. Mission of reconciliation and healing should also commit in the empowerment of the presently marginalized of society including the minority communities that fosters and cherishes individual freedom and cultural diversity. History tells us that no social change advance has took automatically, every step towards our ideals require tireless striving of committed individuals and groups, who have to involve our communities in cooperative planning, building, rebuilding and planning again, then only communities will grow.³

No person should remain in solitude; each has to become a 'synthesis'. This synthesis takes place through love and is realized in the form of a 'communion of persons'. The human person is a unity; of self and other, of body and soul, the natural and the supernatural, we need the 'other' but our fulfillment in the other will only happen if we choose to give ourselves freely. In modern society people feel emptiness and pain in their life. As the 'original man', Adam experienced the pain of his solitude; he senses a need for God and a helper. In every human being there is the need for the divine, moral and the human help. Humans can therefore be understood only in relationship with other humans and the divine.⁴ While the priest and Levite were preoccupied with preserving their own precious truths and laws, passed by the wounded man lying on the road, it was a Samaritan, despised by the Jews, who extended his friendly arm and let his goodness shine forth by doing something concrete for the poor man. He did not ask the suffering man his religion, creed, race, caste but simply loved and made friendship with him. True friendship will open us up to all things noble-no matter what their origin and roots. The oldest scripture of the world, the *Rig-Veda* says that, "Let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere'. This openness to all things noble enables us to show our friendship in practical ways.

Friendship with Nature

Humans have evolved from the earth and therefore we have a deep relation with the earth. Humans have been known for the exploitation of earth; however transcending that relation can we

think earth as a friend? If we consider earth as our friend then the evil natures of exploitation and abuse of nature will be stopped, for the reason that in the design of evolution nothing has found that there is a hierarchy in the order of beings in the universe. The root cause of problem lies in a serious defect of vision that allows us to be callous to the earth and our fellow human beings. This places a serious re-thinking on the humans to be re-considering the position of humans in the nature. Enhancing the journey in the universe means that we move away from a linear and mechanical understanding of progress, market fundamentalism, and false notions of consumerism to a newer understanding and relation with the nature. By polluting and violating the biosphere the human is going against the unfolding of the universe. This violation is not only against the earth but to all her human and non-humans.⁵

Though it is commonly said that disasters are natural, but scientific studies proves that most of the disasters are human-made. Irresponsible mining of minerals and stones, destroying the existing trees, water sources, and streams are examples of human atrocities on environment. Landslides have become common causing damage to life, livelihood and properties of human beings. Deforestation causes drought, flood, and soil erosion. Floods create breaches on river embankments forcing & flow into the agricultural land, damaging agricultural activities for some years. Destruction of mangrove forest on the coast fails to protect people from disasters like cyclone or tsunami. Through cement industry, atomic reactors, thermal power plants, sponge iron and other industries, their waste materials and urban sewerage including garbage pollutes the ground water and the air, causing a number of health hazards. Politically motivated genetic engineering and bio-technology is another exploitative activity geared to manipulate the entire life process of plants and animals. Another greatest threat to nature as well humanity is the problems created by the use of nuclear war heads and nuclear holocaust. Einstein says that the unleashed power of the atom has changed everything and we are now drifting towards unparalleled catastrophe and essentially a new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive.⁶

Humanity is now aimed to think about the possible alternatives against the contemporary trends of consumerist and greedy culture. In the history of humanity never has been so much talked about the problems of environment as that of our own times. Developed as well as developing nations are being geared up to prevent an impending environmental disaster by programmes of action, ranging from mere planting of saplings to political, social, religious, economic actions. A good example is a special campaign launched by the Commission on Youth of National Council of Churches in India called '*Greening Young Minds*' in 2008, to create awareness among the youth to come together and think about some creative possibilities to protect our friend earth from a great catastrophe.⁷ Churches and Ecumenical movements are now started thinking about methods of environmental conservation. Therefore Jonathon Porritt, Director of *Friends of Earth*, writes that conservation of ecology or green ideas have moved decisively from the fringes of society and talks of few intellectuals to the mainstream, so that now there is really no area of social or political concern that hasn't touched in one way or other the ecological concerns.⁸

Inculcating earth spirituality is the best alternative to overcome the present ecological crisis. It however does not imply that we turn our backs on the scientific and modern world. That would be futile and uncreative, apart from being regressive. But modern science and technology can find their true purpose only when they enhance the journey of the universe. Enhancing the human journey in the universe means that humanity should not only be 'pro-human' but also be 'pro-earth'

simultaneously. Paulos Mar Gregorios Theologian and a Philosopher speaks about inculcating an ascetic way of living against the contemporary models of consumerist and culture of living.⁹ Although the term 'sustainable development' has been variously used, the best vision for eco-concerns could be found in *Our Common Future*, as development which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.¹⁰

According to Lynn White a American Historian from University of California, Christian mis-interpretations bears a huge guilt of ecological degradation, because the Christianity not only interpreted a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that God's will is to exploit nature for his personal necessities by humans.¹¹ However this is due to the misconceptions, we have good examples speaking of eco-concerns, like In the Orthodox tradition, the sacraments and the liturgy have immense ecological significance, for example the liturgy of *Palm Sunday*; the prayers offered are not just for human beings but for the whole creation.¹² One may argue that the origin of the present global crisis does not stem from inherent human weaknesses or human evil. It is not that population growth or utilization of resources are creating ecological problems, rather it is unfriendly environmental life style by which we live is the danger to the nature. The wealthy nations and poor are both guilty of this offense, because the wealthy consume and waste much on the other hand poor are pre-occupied with their immediate survival than long term care of the planet.¹³

Friendship with God

Human beings are a wonderful piece of God's work. At the same time, they are an enigma, somehow a synthesis of the created and the uncreated. They are being and becoming at the same time. Their very existence has deep foundations, which can be understood only after discovering what humanness means. The true relation and nature of God with humans is beyond human understanding and experience. However, we strongly believe that God is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent, eternal, unchanging, holy, perfect, and personal. Throughout the scriptures the type of loving relationship wanted between God and humans is represented by various images, for example sometimes as the relationship between master and disciple, sometimes as that of father and child.

However the relation of friendly relation between humans and God is something radical and wholly different, because plainly it will not be easy and difficult to understand the friendship between omniscient, omnipotent perfectly good person and a fallible, finite, imperfect person.¹⁴ In the high priestly prayer, towards the end we hear Jesus calling his disciples as his friends. Thus the model of relation between his followers has been now shifted and now characterized as Friends. S Radhakrishnan the Philosopher understands the incarnation of Christ in a twofold manner as indicating both the descent of the divine and the ascent of human.¹⁵ In the words of Mar Gregorios, he speaks about the example of Moses who was a friend of God, however denied the complete vision of God. The death referred in the passage need not be taken in literal sense, but it speaks to a great mystery i.e. a simple assertion of the fact that the Infinite cannot be comprehended, for that which comprehends has to be greater than that which is comprehended.

The idea of friendship with God has deeper and wider implications and meaning. As Christ himself says that friend knows everything, is equal, intimate etc. In daily human relations too we can find that the friendly relations are deeper and lasting than the bloody relation. Thus we could see that whoever follows Christ in their life knowing or unknowingly are the friends of Christ. However the

common myth is that evangelization and baptism are only pre-requisites for the Christian discipleship. Raymond Paniker speaks about the Un-known Christ of Hinduism, today's context mission demands to identify the unknown friends of Christ in the world. And we know ourselves in our work place and neighborhood there are many living unknown friends of Christ, though they don't know an iota about Christianity. The world now is seeking new forms and models of spirituality and religiosity, which is less dogmatic and doctrinal of being a Christian, Jew, Muslim or Hindu'.¹⁶

The theology of creation states that through two points, one God took the risk that the freedom of creation will produce moral or natural evil, consequently what women and men do with their freedom is of the utmost importance. Furthermore in making friendly relation with all that is, God not only open to the joy and flourishing of creation but also vulnerable to pain of disasters. So no matter what problems may arise out of the freedom of creation, God is not breaking the friendly bond with humanity. Secondly, although humanity may have no choice but to suffer when the world in its freedom injures them, God has chosen to continue the friendship and accompany his creation in all the changes of its precarious networks, seeking finite response of creatures to the divine love.

Christ during his life had openness to people of all kinds, without any barriers of religion, race, class, gender or creed. He befriended with everyone, telling them that they were loved by God even if they had not been able to keep the law meticulously. He had friendly relation with poor, healed Jewish lepers, cured Roman soldier's child, dined with rich Pharisee, were in the company of women, didn't neglected the touch of a prostitute. Therefore Hans Kung says, if Christianity renounces its exclusive claims in its relation to other religions, then Christianity can become a new model for the post-absolutist era.¹⁷ The revelation that we received tells us that when we extend ourselves to do well to the least of God's brethren, then we are in fact credited just as though we had done those same things to God personally. This shows that a relationship with God must expand beyond internal spiritual thoughts and express itself in an attitude of outgoing social concern and compassion for one's fellow beings by external physical actions.¹⁸ This warm, personal friendly relationship builds new paradigm of relation and revelation, it gives the peace of mind, spiritual confidence and faith that can only come from knowing that one really has contact with the Designer, Sustainer and Ruler of the entire universe.

Bible portrays a God of love who was immensely in love with the world and beseeches women and men in their turn to love God and to walk in God's ways. Jesus makes it very clear that the community which he envisions among the humans and with God is rooted in friendship and love.¹⁹ No creature is excluded from the divine friendship and love of God. Humans are unworthy of the friendship of God, since it is offered and given, every humans is included in the friendly circle of creator. All those who tend to be forgotten, excluded, denigrated or marginalized in every society in this world are never abandoned, because the divine friendship is constant and unchanging. Even those who refuse this friendship with God are not cut off from the omnipresent friendship of God.

Conclusion

Thus, friendly relation is the new and inclusive paradigm to ecumenism for relating with the whole of creation. This generation therefore firmly believes that friendly relation alone will bind and unite whole of the humanity, creator and nature together. However the reconcilers and peacemakers

who are trying to build friendships might face tremendous pressures and problems for practicing peacemaking and reconciliation. Achieving the desired results should not become the mission of few peace activists. Modern world needs whole of the human force to radically change the existing dominant violent social order could be reversed if sincere efforts of peacemaking and healing are made to put into practice. The present society perhaps will achieve the tag of civilized and modern society only when it learns to extend its friendship to whole humanity crossing the narrow boundaries by including the animal and plant kingdoms.²⁰ Once a tourist inquired a native Indian “how far it was to Himalayas, and how to get there?”, then the native replied, “It is a long way to Himalayas but you can get there only by doing all walking in that direction”, which gives us an insight that initiating to walk in friendship and walking to the goal is not less important than reaching there.

Mission of reconciliation and healing should humanize and develop individuals and communities of character, compassion, competence and conscience, committed to contribute to the creation and evolution of a counter culture to the present ruthlessly competitive models. This could be achieved by promoting collaboration and cooperation for the growth of all with mutual trust and sharing of available resources. The ancient epics like Iliad, Odyssey, and Mahabharata were about the heroic deeds of the strong against the weak. Modern epics have to be written about the courageous struggles of the weak and oppressed against the strong. A time is coming, and it is here, when we shall enact and write together the grand epic of ‘Reconciliation & Healing’ with stories of friendships, healing and peacemaking for our future generations.

End Notes

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