CHAPTER 13

From Porous Borders to Cosmopolitan Horizons: Beyond Interreligious Dialogue and Multiple Belonging

Our previous chapters have shown with many examples the porous nature of religious experience in the Global South. Further, while dealing with issues such as new ways of being religious, new religious movements, the religious experience in the diaspora, and public character of religion, we noted how this fluid nature of religiosity in the South is becoming widespread, thanks to the process of globalization. From these premises, we could project the ideal of a cosmopolitan religious existence as the future of the world. In this inclusive world, religions will exist without walls of separation, and to be religious would mean to be cosmopolitan in spirit and practice. Could this become a collective project in which the Global North and South could meet and dialogue? Cosmopolitanism goes beyond interreligious dialogue, multiple religious belonging, and syncretism.1

1We are not going into the issue of syncretism in this chapter. The following literature could be usefully consulted. Anita M. Leopold, and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader. Critical Categories in the Study of Religion* (New York; London: Routledge, 2016); Charles Stewart, Rosalind Shaw, eds., and European Association of Social Anthropologists, *Syncretism/anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1994); Patrik Fridlund, and Mika Vähäkangas, ed., *Theological and Philosophical Responses to Syncretism: Beyond the Mirage of Pure Religion* vol. 7 (Boston: Brill, 2017); William H. Harrison, *In Praise of Mixed Religion: The Syncretism Solution in a Multifaith World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).
More than Interreligious Dialogue and Multiple Religious Belonging

The last few decades have witnessed widespread interest in interreligious dialogue all over the world, something salutary compared to attitudes and practices of past many centuries when other religions than one’s own were viewed as of little worth, even totally erroneous and inimical. Against this dark background, the practice of interreligious dialogue has contributed significantly to greater understanding among religions and to demolish walls of prejudice and exclusion. When I speak of religious cosmopolitanism, I do not mean to undermine the contributions of the project and practice of interreligious dialogue. Its continued contribution is required for the foreseeable future. I mean to say instead that we go beyond interreligious dialogue.

In more recent times, among scholars, there is also much discussion about what is called multiple religious belonging. It means that a person can have a hyphenated identity as Christian-Buddhist, or Hindu-Muslim, Buddhist-Shinto. Such a project does not seem to capture the religious experience of Asia—and Global South at large—which tends toward religious cosmopolitanism rather than multiple religious belonging. Comparative theology which is gaining momentum appears to be a project between interreligious dialogue and multiple belonging. In the words of Francis Clooney, “the comparative theologian ventures to learn deeply in another tradition, and brings that learning back, to include it in some way in a refashioning of her or his home identity.”

Identity is what the above three share. In interreligious dialogue, one is firmly rooted in one’s identity of scriptures, tradition, beliefs, laws, and rituals, but then seeks how this identity could be positively related to other religious identities and practices. In the case of multiple religious belonging as a project, two identities are conjoined (hyphenated) not to create something new and different but to be loyal to both identities and to live in two religious worlds simultaneously. But the multiple identities remain fixed and unintegrated. The discourse on multiple religious belonging seems to

2 Cf Catherine Cornille, Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity (New York: Orbis, 2002); Peter C. Phan, “Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church,” in Theological Studies 64 (2003): 71–76.

3 Francis X Clooney, “Introduction to Comparative Theology in Australia and Asia,” in International Journal of Asian Christianity 3, no. 2 (2020): 129–138.
be even “elitist” and “overly individualistic.” The proposal fails to capture the inextricable connection between culture and religion in Asia, and in the Global South at large. In the Global South, the various religions are, in a way, projections on the familiar screen of a shared culture which binds them all together. Commenting upon the project of multiple religious belonging, the Indonesian scholar Bagus Laksana has this to say:

One can say that these ordinary Asians, for the most part, did not really pursue the negotiation of identity in such a dramatic and self-conscious manner, but rather through complex religio-cultural avenues that have become part and parcel of their natural identity. For them, the term “multiple religious belonging” and the self-proclaimed hyphenated religious identity might sound either foreign, too “academic,” or simply confusing, if not failing to capture the concrete dynamics of their complex religio-cultural identity.

Comparative theology too has the problem of identity in as much as one does not leave one’s identity behind while entering into a comparative theological reading of other religious texts or relating to other religious traditions. There is a going out toward the other religions, but then one comes back home to one’s own religious identity, and again to enter into the identity world of the other religions to learn more. In this back-and-forth movement, one does not want to risk one’s religious belonging much less to leave it behind in quest of something more, which is not yet there. Religious cosmopolitanism points to something beyond. Why this is so will be evident in the course of our reflections in the following pages.

Religions Beyond Their Followers

Bhagavad Gita, Dhammapada, Tao Te Ching, Bible, Qur’an, and Adi Granth are for the entire humankind. Religious fundamentalism has thrived on the idea of exclusive possession of one’s religion which one feels obliged to defend at all costs, even if it means inflicting violence. Our

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4 Cf. Bagus Lakshana, in *The Oxford Hand Book of Christianity in Asia*, 494.
5 Bagus Laksana, *op, cit.*, 494.
6 For a detailed discussion on comparative theology in Asia and Australia, see the special issue of *International Journal of Asian Christianity* 3, no. 2 (2020), with an introduction by Francis Clooney. This issue provides elaborate literature on comparative theology in general, and, more specifically, concerning Asia and Australia.
perception about religions begins to change when we look at them, not as the exclusive possession of any one particular group. Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and many other primeval religions belong to the human family. There is an inherent universalism in every religious tradition. It is crucial to open up the spring of this universalism which is often clogged by a narrow conception of religious identity.

If we were to speak from the perspective of Jewish and Christian resources, we could refer to narrations of the fall in the account of Genesis (Gen 3:1–24), the depiction of the times of Noah (Gen 6:11–13), the construction of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:3ff.)—they all refer to the collective experience of humankind across nations and races. We would understand this better by invoking the Christian tradition regarding the universal destiny of resources of nature or earthly goods. The goods and resources of nature belong to the humankind in a primary sense. The individual possession of goods or private property is subservient to this primordial right of possession of God’s gifts by all God’s children. If so, every religion needs to consider itself as being addressed to the entire humankind, and, consequently, every human being could draw on the heritage of humanity to the extent that it enhances his or her quest for life and spirituality.

Hinduism speaks of the world as a single family of God (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*) to whose welfare everyone across religious boundaries is invited to contribute. The Tamil classical antiquity with more than 2000 years of history expressed the cosmopolitan universalism succinctly, saying “*Yādum ūre, yāvarum kélic*,” which means, “every village is my home; every person my kin.”

Qu’ran speaks of the unity of the entire humankind in these words:

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7 This we find in the scriptures in connection with the injunctions on the Year of Jubilee. All are to get back their original possessions and lands (Leviticus 25: 8–55). Several Fathers of the Church like Basel, Ambrose, and Chrysostom were critical of the rich who amassed wealth at the expense of the poor. In this context, they reminded the rich that the goods of creation are the gifts of God to be shared among God’s children equitably. Drawing on the scriptures and the patristic tradition, Catholic social teaching has underlined the social mortgage on private property. There is no absolute right for private property. *Gaudium et Spes* continues this tradition when it speaks about the universal destination of earthly goods (no. 69), and the same is to be also found in the recent encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*. See Julio de Santa Ana, *Good News to the Poor* (Geneva: WCC, 1977); Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002); Felix Wilfred, “Theological Significance of *Laudato Si*: An Asian Reading,” in *Theology for an Inclusive World* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2019), chapter 8, 152–173.
O mankind! Indeed, We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct.\(^8\)

Precisely because the various religions and their scriptures belong to humankind, they are open to a broad spectrum of interpretations. Let me refer here to an analogy from the classical Indian hermeneutical tradition which compares texts to the beauty of a woman. The father of a girl, because he generated her, need not be the best judge about her beauty. The best judge could be her lover, husband, or her admirer.\(^9\) So, is the case with the authors of texts. The fact of producing a text need not mean that the meaning of the text is exhausted by what the author intended and produced, or within the particular religious tradition which claims it as its own. Even more, the beauty of a religious text may be best admired by someone from another religious tradition. The modern hermeneutics on the autonomy of texts\(^10\) could be profitably applied to religious traditions. Let me cite an example from my own experience. I was invited by a Hindu scholar to contribute to a collective volume by reading and commenting upon \(Ś\)akuntalā, a classical play of Kālidāsa (late fourth century–early fifth century) from a Christian perspective. This exercise opened up a new horizon for me. I commented upon \(Ś\)akuntalā—the Cinderella of the story and arguably the most famous heroine of India—through the narrative of Hagar in the Bible. There is an amazing convergence and beauty in the narratives of Hagar and that of \(Ś\)akuntalā, both depicting similar human predicament.\(^11\)

\(^8\) Qur’an, 49:13.
\(^9\) Cf. Felix Wilfred, “Navigating Cross-Hermeneutical Currents: A Subaltern Perspective,” in Nishant Alphonse Irudayadasan, ed., Musings and Meanings. Hermeneutical Ripples (Delhi: Christian World Imprints, 2016), 1–14; see also, Anand Amaladass, Indian Exegesis. Hindu-Buddhist Hermeneutics (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2003).
\(^10\) Cf. Werner Jeanrond, Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance (New York: Crossroad, 1991).
\(^11\) Cf. Felix Wilfred, “Śakuntalā and the Bible: Parallels and Resonances,” in Namrata Chaturvedi, Memory, Metaphor and Mysticism in Kālidāsa’s AbhijñānaŚākuntalam (London: Anthem Press, 2020), 85–105.
Sense of Mystery

There is a sense of sacred in every religious tradition. It is the reflection of the inexhaustible mystery they try to express in words, symbols, rituals, and so on. Now, this mystery is not the possession of any one religious group. No religion can claim to exhaust that mystery, much less to possess it. Belonging to a religious group does not entitle one to claim possession of that particular religion, because believing is, in point of fact, a witnessing to what one has experienced. It follows that what is experienced by a witness is only a scintilla or spark. The infinite and radiant light it points to surpasses the limited realm of one’s community or religious group in which this witnessing takes place. In the Christian tradition, Paul expressed the inexhaustibility of the mystery, when he stated, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (I Cor 13:12).

Moreover, religions are in the realm of means and not that of ends. Beliefs, rituals, traditions, laws, and injunctions—these are not end in themselves. Saint Augustin considered even the Christian scriptures as a means. He makes an important distinction between use and enjoyment—the latter identified ultimately with the experience of God.12 We use something to attain something else. It is an instrumental approach. Enjoyment, on the other hand, is when something is loved for its own sake, and which can confer us true happiness.13 Scripture is an effective means as long as it could lead us to God, and the enjoyment of the divine mystery. Religion is a penultimate reality, and not the ultimate one. It is simply a scaffolding, meant for something greater—and this “greater” is the mystery that envelops us all. This something all theologies—in whichever religion—needs to hold in mind.

In theological knowledge, expression always falls short of reality, precisely because we are dealing with a mystery which cannot be fully comprehended. Since no expression is perfect, additional expressions are not only possible but beneficial for a fuller understanding of the mystery.14

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12 Cf. Jeanrond, Theological Hermeneutics, 22–23.
13 Cf. Eleanore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, eds., The Cambridge Companion to Augustine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 235.
14 Vimal Tirimanna, ed., Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil. Collection of TAC and OTC Documents [1987–2007] (Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2007), 262.
The mystery is the point of convergence of all religions, and it is that which bestows meaning and provides sustenance to them. The experience of the ultimate mystery to the enjoyment of which the entire humankind is called is nourished with a wide variety of spiritual foods offered by the religions, and no one has full control of the spiritual metabolism of the experience and enjoyment the mystery causes.

**INTERDEPENDENCE: INDRA’S NET**

The religious cosmopolitan approach could also be derived from the primordial fact of the interdependence of all that is. To illustrate it, both Hinduism and Buddhism use the analogy of Indra’s net. In these traditions, one speaks of the world as a vast net woven by God Indra, and it is infinitely wide with nodes of jewels, each one of them reflecting the whole—a microcosm indeed. This analogy wants to convey the web of interconnection the world is. The environmental crisis has brought home the truth that the lives of humans is bound up with the survival and well-being of nature. Not only is everything connected to everything else, but there is life pulsating through the entire body of the world that exhibits marvelous beauty, harmony rhythm, and vibrancy in its interconnectedness. Seeing anything independently from the rest is both distortion and an illusion.

Such being the primordial nature of the world and universe, could religions act as disconnected fragments? The convergence of the visions (dařsana) various religious represent—without diminishing the clarity and beauty of any one of them—is the goal toward which humanity needs to strive today. Each religion, like the node in Indra’s net, would reflect the pluriverse of all other religions. This approach to religion through the lens of organic unity encapsulated in the ideal of religious cosmopolitanism is something to be promoted, especially for the mindset, attitudes, and values it would foster, and the contribution it would make for a peaceful human togetherness and harmony with nature.

**RELIGIONS WITH UNIVERSAL MISSION**

Another important motivation for pursuing religious cosmopolitanism is the realization that there is a common and universal mission for all religions. Heated debates are taking place among the religions on the question of revelation, absoluteness, uniqueness, universality, and other similar
issues. There is, however, little discussion, on the shared *mission* of all religions for the wellbeing of humanity and nature. The converging point of the mission of various religions should be the future shape of the human community and its flourishing. The awareness of being on a shared journey toward a shared future can help build up the community of humanity as one single family. Respect for other religions necessarily includes respect for the *mission* to which people of other religions feel called, especially when this mission has something to contribute to the unity of the human family and its wellbeing. In this context, the claim of absoluteness and monopolistic possession of truth is as much a question of the unity of the human community as it is a question of truth and epistemology.

**Universality from Below**

In order to foster community, religions need to practice what I would call *reverse universality*. Religions require multilateral universality, which happens when a religion lets diverse peoples interpret its message through their conception of good life, their vision of the human family and its destiny. The cultivation of doctrinaire dogmatism and the fostering of stratified religious identity make it difficult to accept incoming universality. Incoming or reverse universality is the movement by which a religion receives from other religions and cultures.

One way in which reverse universality can be kept alive is to ask: What do religious doctrines have to say to humanity at large? This question frees religions from getting entangled in internal discussions and get lost in texts and exegesis. It provokes them all to get out of their doctrinal world and open their eyes to the broader issues of humanity and its future destiny. Let me illustrate this point with an example. Discerning the implications of polygenism or monogenism for humanity is more important than choosing among these two positions in order to uphold the authority of the Bible. Upholding polygenism and yet believing in the unity of the human family is more important than maintaining monogenism and practicing racism as if human beings were not of one single family, as if some peoples and races are somehow more equal than others. If monogenism could coexist with the practice of racism and polygenism could exist alongside the affirmation of the unity of the whole of the human family, this shows us the urgent need of a self-critique of religious beliefs—in this case,
Christian beliefs—regarding what they have to contribute to the creation of human community and its flourishing.

The great Thai Buddhist monk Buddhadasa realized this truth when he said:

If an interpretation of any word in any religion leads to disharmony and does not positively further the welfare of the many, then such an interpretation is to be regarded as wrong; that is against the will of God, or as the working of Satan or Mara.\(^\text{15}\)

No religious belief could claim to be above human dignity and rights. Religions cannot arrogate exception for themselves in this matter. If a belief contradicts the dignity and equality of all human beings, then it is not worth to be considered as a spiritual message which one would expect religions to deliver.

**Cosmopolitanism: Elite and Vernacular**

We need to distinguish two streams of cosmopolitanism. There could be a bourgeois theory of cosmopolitanism\(^\text{16}\) that is at home with transnational projects, Western classical antiquity\(^\text{17}\) and of course, with capitalism. Today, under the capitalistic dispensation, cosmopolitanism has become the virtue of, so to speak, “frequent travelers” dealing with peoples across cultural and ethnic boundaries, involved in the same mode of production, distribution, and aggressive consumption of goods and services.

\(^{15}\) As quoted in Kari Storstein Haug, “Christianity as a Religion of Wisdom and Kamma: A Thai Buddhist Interpretation of Selected Passages from the Gospels,” in Bulletin, *The Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* 35, no. 2 (April 2006): 43.

\(^{16}\) Today in political theory, one speaks of transnational world citizenship, drawing inspiration from Kant’s theory of cosmopolitan right, something that has been reconstructed with new impetus and radicality in the work of Jürgen Habermas. Such theoretical exercises may confer legitimacy to the transnational European Union, but the extent to which they apply to other parts of the world remains a serious, and indeed unanswered, question. J. Habermas, *The Postcolonial Constellation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); J. Habermas, “Kant’s Idea of Perpetual Peace: At Two Hundred Years’ at Historical Remove,” chapter 7 in *Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 165–202.

\(^{17}\) We are here reminded of Diogenes, who, when asked where he came from, replied, “I am a citizen of the world.” As quoted in https://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism [accessed on January 28, 2020].
There is another cosmopolitanism—the vernacular. It is a civilizational and humanistic one and is embedded in the particular and in solidarity with the local. The particular could be one’s nation, ethnicity, culture, geographic region, or language, and these are not necessarily in opposition to cosmopolitanism as is often mistakenly assumed. Cosmopolitan transcendence does not consist in setting aside these primordial realities of human groups, but in searching for alternative modes of life along with other groups, other peoples, and other cultures. This humanistic and community-sensitive cosmopolitanism is not a political theory; it is a praxis that has civilizational roots; it provides the framework to understand and practice religious cosmopolitanism.

While we often hear of emperors and rulers whose support of a particular religion helped it thrive, we rarely hear of emperors who were inspired by the spirit of religious cosmopolitanism and coexistence. Among these are the Indian emperors Ashoka the Great (BCE 304–232) and Emperor Akbar (CE 1542–1605). They represent a counter-paradigm to the cuius regio eius religio (religion of the ruler—the religion of the region). Though a Buddhist, Ashoka’s breadth of vision was such that in one of his edicts he made it known that anyone harming another religion would be harming one’s own. It is the same cosmopolitan spirit that inspired Emperor Akbar, who fostered closer contacts and regular dialogues with Jesuit missionaries, Hindu representatives, Jews, Parsees, Jains, and even nonbelievers.

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18 We already referred to Akbar, the philosopher-king and his cosmopolitan religious vision. Though he did not know to read or write, he surrounded himself with scholars across different religious traditions. He brought them together regularly. Remarkably, it happened at the same time when religious wars were tearing apart Europe. Among his religious partners were Hindus, Parsis, Jains, and Christian missionaries. As a report states, “And later that day the emperor came to Fathepur. There he used to spend much time in the Hall of Worship in the company of men and sheikhs…when he would sit up there the whole night continually occupied in discussing questions of religion, whether fundamental or collateral…Learned monks also from Europe, who are called Padre, and have an infallible head, called Papa…brought the Gospel, and advanced proofs for the Trinity. His majesty firmly believed in the truth of the Christian religion, and wishing to spread the doctrines of Jesus ordered Prince Murad to take a few lessons in Christianity under good auspices, and charged Abul Fazl to translate the Gospel.” WM Theodore de Bary et al., eds., Sources of Indian Tradition (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 39–41.

19 Emperor Ahoka, Rock Edict no. 12.

20 Cf. Amartya Sen, Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 64.
Cosmopolitanism involves the dialectics of the particular and the universal, identity and transcendence, local and the global, nation and the larger world. This could be expressed in the form of two metaphors—root and journey. To live is to strike roots, and it is equally true that all life is a journey. These two metaphors seem to contradict each other; but do not very often the most sublime truths irrupt into our horizons in the form of contradictions? One such contradiction is human existence, which is rooted, situated, and circumscribed and is also a journey. This quality of human existence needs to mirror also in our understanding of cosmopolitanism. Rightly then Kwame Anthony Appiah speaks of “rooted cosmopolitanism,” something which Will Kymlicka has tried to elaborate with reference to the experience of his country, Canada. Homi Bhabha proposes the concept of vernacular cosmopolitanism in the context of minorities and migration into the UK. The different expressions bring out the nuances in relating the particular and the universal. There is no denial of the particularity of one’s religion, nation, civilization. Nevertheless, these could be lived in a cosmopolitan spirit when the religious, the civilizational or the national cease to be the sole point of reference. As Amartya Sen observes:

21 Kwame Anthony Appiah’s expression “cosmopolitan patriot” brings out the dialectics involved. If patriot recalls one’s roots, cosmopolitanism points to the expansive earth on which nation is planted. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” in For Love of Country, edited by Joshua Cohen, 21–29 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). The Canadian political scientist Will Kymlicka speaks of “rooted cosmopolitanism.” Will Kymlicka, and Kathryn Walker, Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Canada and the World (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).

22 An interesting empirical study done in Quebec, Canada, reveals the spirit of cosmopolitanism pervading different religious communities in Montreal city and Quebec at large without experiencing any contradiction between rootedness and cosmopolitan way of believing and practicing religion. Cf. Meintel, Deirdre, and Mossière, Géraldine. “In the Wake of the Quiet Revolution: From Secularization to Religious Cosmopolitanism.” Anthropologica 55, no. 1 (2013): 57–71.

23 Cf. Homi K. Bhabha, “The Vernacular Cosmopolitan,” in Ferdinand Dennis and Naseem Khan, eds., Voices of the Crossing: The Impact of Britain on Writers from Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa, 133–42 (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2000). “It is this double life of British minorities that makes them “vernacular cosmopolitans,” translating between cultures, renegotiating traditions from a position where “locality” insists on its own terms while entering into broader national and societal conversations,” at 139.
Our religious or civilizational identity may well be very important, but it is one membership among many. The question we need to ask is not whether Islam (or Hinduism or Christianity) is a peace-loving religion or a combative one (“tell us which it is really?”), but how a religious Muslim (or Hindu or Christian) may combine his or her religious beliefs or practices with other features of personal identity and other commitments and values (such as attitude to peace and war). To see one’s religious—or “civilizational”—affiliation as an all-engulfing identity would be a deeply problematic diagnosis.24

Cosmopolitanism is not to be an amorphous universal or a “colorless cosmopolitanism” in the words of Sugata Bose,25 pursued at the expense of the particular. History amply bears witness how the universal was invoked by the powerful to suppress the particular and the indigenous. The clearest example is the colonial practice and epistemology. The rootedness saves cosmopolitanism from being treated as an abstraction. One may find oneself in the landlocked Bhutan, Nepal, or the heart of Amazon forests, and nevertheless, be a true cosmopolitan. On the other hand, a person may find himself or herself in the most modern metropolis or “megacities” of New York, Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai or Paris, and still, be parochial. Indigenous peoples practicing cosmic religion come across as cosmopolitan in spirit in contrast to many who belong to the so-called world-religions. In other words, cosmopolitanism springs forth from mind and heart; external spatiality is not a criterion to measure it. Rooted cosmopolitanism is no oxymoron since the two poles of the particular and the universal are mutually enriching.

Having a religious identity and being rooted in it need to go hand in hand with a journey toward the religious world of the other. Creating an enclave to shore up one’s identity is to insulate oneself from the stream of life, and this is as much undesirable as the dissolution of one’s identity in the waters of misconceived cosmopolitanism.

All religions speak in one way or other about detachment or kenosis. But the point is that this detachment should also apply to one’s religion. Many people assume it natural to be rooted in one’s religion and its tradition. It rarely occurs to believers that one also needs, at the same time, to

24 Amartya Sen, Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 66–67.
25 Sugata Bose, and Ira Pande, “Tagorean Universalism and Cosmopolitanism,” India International Centre Quarterly 38, no. 1 (2011): 2–17.
transcend one’s own religion. Religious cosmopolitanism precisely takes place in this dialectic between rootedness and detachment; it is an attempt to construct a collective nontribal self of a particular religious group. Christianity, like other religions, also has a soil to strike roots and times of journey. To the extent a religious tradition can maintain this tension between rootedness and journey, it will be in a position to commune and share itself with other religious traditions and experiences.

The sense of obligation to one’s religion at all costs could be a stumbling block to cosmopolitanism. Here I would like to recall my conversation with Bagus Laksana from Indonesia, who referred to a dialogue he had with a taxi driver at the time of the heated campaign for the mayor election of Jakarta in 2017. In every respect, the Christian candidate stood head and shoulders above the Muslim candidate. The campaign became a matter of Islam versus Christianity, especially after the accusation that the Christian candidate was guilty of blasphemy against the Qur’an. At the height of the campaign when Bagus Laksana asked a Muslim taxi driver whom he would vote for, he replied that he thought, undoubtedly the Christian candidate had more merits than the Muslim candidate. Nevertheless, he was going to vote for the Muslim candidate. When pressed why nevertheless he intended to give his vote to the Muslim candidate, he said: “After all, I am a Muslim” The same kind of attitude could be found with Christians or Hindus in other contexts.

Some Christians and church leaders in Europe did not think differently. Some of them maintained the view that they should admit into their country and the European Union only Christian migrants and refugees. They may have done so out of the conviction: “After all, we are Christians.” In the case of India, the new policy of migration allows Hindu migrants from neighboring countries, but not Muslims. What these examples tell is that there is the inherent faith compulsion to favor one’s own religious group. Hence, opening up to religious cosmopolitanism may not be easy. It needs to touch the chords of faith. The greatest challenge is to cross the internal borders of religion.

**Creation of Community and Cosmopolitan Solidarity**

If there are no common threads among religions and no strands of convergence, and if religions exist in a scattered way with no communication among themselves, then there is little likelihood of creating authentic communities. Religious postures of self-isolation will disrupt the vital
goal of creating a shared community to which all religions are called. For example, if Christians and Christian leaders take offence in praying together with peoples of other faiths as it happened after the encounter in Assisi in 1986 of Pope John Paul II with leaders of other faiths, what kind of community could we expect to foster? This can only discredit Christian efforts for the creation of community and cosmopolitan solidarity.

Fortunately, in the Christian tradition, there is a steady but less known stream of thought that views Christian life and existence as a cosmopolitan experience. To be a Christian is to be at home everywhere. This is the central thought that we find in one of the earliest Christian documents: The Epistle to Diognetus. Responding to the accusation that Christians take refuge in a narrow identity of a “spiritual” community, the anonymous author observes:

The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practice any eccentric way of life… [They] conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits… For them, any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country.

Claims of absolutism and monopoly of truth would go against the spirit of cosmopolitanism, divide the human community, and diminish the prospects of its unity to which all religions declare themselves to be

26 The Assisi initiative of Pope John Paul became a matter of hot debate. Some Catholics found the pope’s praying with other religious leaders as fostering relativism and syncretism. For them, his action compromised the position of Jesus Christ as the unique savior of the world. Ironically, Pope Benedict XVI, who fought against relativism, and even spoke of “dictatorship of relativism” at the funeral of John Paul II, himself came under critique when he called for a repetition of the Assisi event in 2011! To ward off the critique of the right-wing Catholics, who were scandalized at such prayer meetings, an argument smacking of sophistry was put forward. It claimed that the pope was not “praying together simultaneously”; rather, it was an event “to be together and pray.” The argument by the neo-con Catholics is that pope and others cannot pray to the same God, as they do not have the same understanding of God. In this connection, the Indian theologian Michael Amaladoss tells us that, when people of different religious traditions are praying together, they “are experiencing the same God. But they are not having the same experience.” See Michael Amaladoss, Walking Together: The Practice of Interreligious Dialogue (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1992), 58.

27 The Epistle to Diognetus, no. 5. For the text of the letter, see Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers (Aylesbury: Penguin Books, 1968), 176.
committed. Religions play a destructive role when they begin to compare themselves with each other in order to demonstrate their superiority over others. Each religious tradition is distinct and should be understood in its particular context, history, and background. As Kosuke Koyama notes, there is no point in the giraffe finding fault with the zebra because it (zebra) lacks a long neck!\footnote{Cf. Kosuke Koyama, “Observation and Revelation. A Global Dialogue with Buddhism,” in Max L. Stackhouse and Diane B. Obenchain, eds., \textit{God and Globalization: Christ and the Dominions of Civilization} (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 270.}

As in the case of Christianity, in every religious tradition, we could observe two fundamental trends regarding community. The first one emphasizes the community of all those who share the same faith, way of life, religious rituals, laws, and traditions. According to Emile Durkheim, the sacred and the religious are identified here with a particular group or community.\footnote{Émile Durkheim, \textit{Elementary Forms of Religious Life} (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915).} In some religions, such as Hinduism, this community is loose, thereby creating ample space for diversity. In contrast, in Abrahamic religious traditions, the sense of the faith community is profoundly entrenched and robust. In the main, the concern is centered on fostering the growth of the particular community and its expansion. How mistaken it is for a religious tradition to think that the salvation of humanity is identical with the worldwide expansion of itself. We can see this kind of religious ideology at work, for example in the European missionary movement starting from the sixteenth century. This kind of perspective is also found in other religions. Every religion imagines that the future of humanity is reached when everybody else becomes like itself, when the entire world becomes Christian, Islamic, or Hindu.

There is a second trend in all religious traditions which considers the human community in an open and universalistic spirit. According to this trend, besides one’s faith community, there is the broader community of the world and humanity. There is an obligation to foster and promote this universal human community that extends beyond the borders of one’s faith community. We can characterize this as the cosmopolitan orientation. The spirit of religious cosmopolitanism tells us that it is by fostering the world community that one’s own faith community grows. The relationship is not in inverse proportion; on the contrary, the more the world community grows, the more one’s religious community will also grow.
Here, we can recall the words of prophet Jeremiah. “Seek the welfare of the city...for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jer. 29:7).

**CONCLUSION**

It is a collective experience that despite globalization, divisions are deepening day by day. We observe escalation of conflicts, an increase of inequality, and new forms of exclusion. Added to them is the threat to humankind from the growing ecological imbalance and resultant climate change. The backlash of nature is beginning to take a heavy toll. The sudden outbreak of the new virus Covid-19 has stupefied and battered the humankind. The realization that the destiny of human family is bound together has come out more powerfully than ever, beckoning it to greater unity and solidarity.

Globalization that fails in inclusion will be a contradiction, a body without a soul. There are deeper reasons for an inclusive global world in religious terms. No single religion can determine humanity’s destiny. All religions have their role in saving humankind, which is credibly done when they do this jointly. For this to happen, we need to cultivate religious cosmopolitanism which goes beyond interreligious dialogue.

Religious cosmopolitanism is a way of life, and it presupposes a different vision and set of values. As experience shows, interreligious dialogue has remained by and large an endeavor by religions as institutionalized entities to reach out to each other. There is often the preoccupation and even fear of losing one’s identity by entering into dialogue. The points of reference in the interreligious dialogue are sacred writings, doctrinal tenets, symbolic codes, ethical injunctions, ritual practices, and so on. Instead, in religious cosmopolitanism, the point of reference is the other. Cosmopolitanism in this sense is a centrifugal or “eccentric” movement. In interreligious dialogue, we acknowledge religious pluralism. But this pluralism could be merely aesthetic in the sense that we recognize and value plurality. Religious cosmopolitanism instead is a journey to the world of the other. It is to be at home in the religious universe of my neighbor.

The scope and moral concerns go beyond the confines of one’s religious identity and affiliation. One is likely to limit the scope of it when he or she views it through the lens of syncretism or hybridity. Religious

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30 Cf. Marianna Papastephanou, *Thinking Differently about Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Eccentricity, and the Globalized World* (Boulder: Routledge, 2012).
cosmopolitanism is to be understood on its own terms and through a
tinge of mysticism that sees everything in terms of unity. It also involves a
continuous quest for truth that transcends borders and boundaries. This
quest for truth inherent in the process of becoming religiously cosmopoli-
tan does not negate the historically inherited or chosen religious identity
and belonging. Instead, it allows one to see one’s religious affiliation with
new eyes and from a broader perspective, from the perspective of the
entire humanity and the immense universe.

Mission has been often very narrowly defined. It often meant propagating
and expanding one’s religious borders. It has been controversial since it was
seen as a play of power. Those with higher political power and material
resources tended to impose their religion, and its tenets on others and hence
mission have been a matter of serious controversy and contestation. Religious
cosmopolitanism instead involves a joint mission for all the religions—the
mission of saving humankind and nature.