

# Building communities across faith boundaries

We need to create an environment where we can also celebrate diversities while pursuing the Truth. Otherwise anti-religious and communal forces will gain the upper hand and will undermine the moral and spiritual fibre of the human family at large. The best in all faith systems can create an unprecedented transformation of peoples' lives for a sustainable future for all.

MARTIN ADHIKARY

LIVING faiths teach that God takes human life seriously. According to Christianity, He took the human form to show this. Christ invested in people so that they could be agents of transformation of this world into a place where God's love, peace and justice would prevail. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40 see also 7:12)."

Our real prayer ought to be: "May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." To quote an ancient Chinese proverb: "Where the vision is for one year, cultivate flowers; where the vision is for a decade, cultivate a tree, where the vision is for eternity, cultivate people." God created man in His "image" and "likeness." This implies that He shared with man His moral attributes of love, holiness, justice and the ability to commune with Him. Although, as a consequence of sin, that divine image has been tarnished but not entirely erased. As Pascal said, "Within each of us there is a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill."

Christ's mission was to restore God's image in the human person. Even Nietzsche could say: "Man is the reason for the world." Leonard Verduin aptly said: "The plain implication is that from the earliest beginnings the divine interest

was to reach its climax in man. All that goes before is anticipatory, propaedeutic to the dominion-haver known as man. Man is pictured as the crown and capstone of the entire creative enterprise of the Almighty; man is the goal towards which the whole undertaking moved. Verily the Bible does not speak meanly of man."

Today, the lives of peace-loving people appear to be hostages in the hands of a few with narrow theocratic vision. Is religious dogma above the sanctity, dignity and glory of Man? Christ announced: "The Sabbath (i.e. religion) is for man, not man for the Sabbath." He revealed God's unfolding and outreaching love for all mankind, irrespective of religion, caste, nationality, sex or social strata.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like (James 1:22-24)." Much of the religious practices and functions today are true to what James said in this verse. Animal sacrifices, pilgrimages and routine lip service to religion abound, but not an honest longing for right relationship with people.

Our attitude to wealth and social positions reflect our spiritual state. People of all religions must accept the truth that no

ceremony or dogma will avail unless genuine soul searching and attitudinal change take place. Authentic spirituality must make us ask what God requires of us. This question was asked by Isaiah, Amos, and Micah during the 8th century B.C. "What does the Lord require of you, but justice, love and kindness and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)."

The lofty moral values of religions can surely transform life. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated and poorest countries in the world, and has a high rate of illiteracy. Governments come and go, and developmental and pro-people schemes are designed with no lasting change. Corruption, injustice, sham democracy -- all combine to frustrate peoples' hopes for progress. The poor remain poor while the rich gets richer.

Hardly any day passes by now in Bangladesh when we do not have the sad news of murders, rapes, dowry-deaths of young wives, husbands divorcing wives for trifling reasons, bribes, inconsideration for others in diverse forms and modes, acid throwing on women and girls, violence to women and children, gross violations of basic human rights and acts of gross inconsideration for others in diverse forms and modes. Yet we claim to be religious!

Some theological tenets favouring diaphanous relations are given below:

Firstly, God is the Creator, Owner, Redeemer and the Judge of all men: This theme runs through the Bible right from Genesis 1:1-2:4 to Revelation. The Bible declares: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And He is not served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and

the exact places where they should live (Acts 17:24-25)."

Secondly, our eternal destiny cannot be separated from our temporal life. We must have a paradigm shift in theology: from the traditional theological outlook to the one that will lead us in relating the message of transformation in our day-to-day life. We need to leave the theological dichotomy between the material and the spiritual at the cost of sacrificing the value of life. An authentic holistic view of reality and the discovery of the inherent connection between the material and the spiritual, the personal and the social, the so-called holy and the unholy will dispel many errors. All problems in our lives have a holistic nature, and they need to be dealt with holistically.

John Went, Bishop of Tewkesbury (England), said in his foreword to Body and Soul (papers presented at the Second World Vision Christian Forum): "In the history of the Christian Church a preoccupation with people's eternal destiny has led to a neglect of the injustice and suffering of this world. Too often, the church has been perceived as a strong defender of the status quo at the expense of the needs of the poor and vulnerable."

The global issues and problems, for most of which the then Christian colonial powers are responsible, must make us change our traditional theological perspective and understand the Christian message of liberation. We need to promote inter-religious dialogues for common good, socio-economic justice and equity, and create a holistic vision for a new humanity. The most important step in a diaphanous journey is to be able to identify the matters of common concerns that affect life.

Christians need to appreciate the contributions towards human progress made by believers in other faiths. Sincere dialogue creates an environment where divine values can be manifested in mun-



Respect for diversity.

dane life. We will do well if we sincerely try to join hands with our brothers and sisters from other faiths to promote an environment that will contribute to solidarity for the greater interest of identifying, facing and transforming realities of this present world for mutual enrichment and meaningful life.

The whole tenor of Christian perspective on salvation for the lost world is linked with the spiritual theme of sacrifice, sacrificial giving out of selfless love. This is revealed in God's love for Christ in dealing with the human predicament. We speak of "the offence of the Cross." This is a spiritual truth and can only be understood through guidance by the Holy Spirit.

I am sure that all of us agree that to be authentic every religious activity of whatever faith must be spiritual. We need to be led by the Holy Spirit, only who can enlighten and illuminate our minds and

hearts to discern and accept what is divine, true and everlasting.

We need to create an environment where we can also celebrate diversities while pursuing the Truth. Otherwise anti-religious and communal forces will gain the upper hand and will undermine the moral and spiritual fibre of the human family at large. The best in all faith systems can create an unprecedented transformation of peoples' lives for a sustainable future for all.

I conclude with this anonymous quotation:

*I sought my soul, but my soul I could not see,  
I sought my God, but my God eluded me,  
I sought my neighbor and I found all three.*

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# Challenges for Asia in post-crisis 'new world'

The current crisis has demonstrated the resilience of Asia's economy, but it has also posed challenges. Now is the time to implement policies that can make domestic demand a second engine of growth, thereby paving the way for a strong and durable expansion.

ANOOP SINGH

ASIA is rebounding fast from the global financial crisis. Initially, the impact on the region was extremely severe, with output in most countries contracting by more than even those nations at the epicenter of the crisis. But now Asia is surging ahead as the world pulls out of recession. What explains this remarkable comeback? And what challenges does the recovery pose to Asian policymakers?

Asia's impressive recovery from the global downturn has prompted some observers to revive the notion that the region has "decoupled" from the rest of the world. The International Monetary Fund's latest Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and the Pacific examines this hypothesis and finds that the opposite is true.

Just as the US downturn triggered an outsized fall in Asia's gross domestic product due to the dropoff in international trade and the financial collapse, now the return to their normal condition is generating an outsized Asian upturn. For this reason, the collapse and subsequent rebound in economic activity has

been fastest among export-dependent Asian economies that were hit most severely at the end of last year.

The other key driver of Asia's recovery has been the region's rapid, forceful and comprehensive policy response. In many countries, government fiscal positions were sounder, monetary policies were more credible, and corporate and bank balance sheets were sturdier than at any time in the past. These conditions gave Asia the space to cut interest rates sharply and adopt large fiscal stimulus packages.

What lies ahead for the region? As detailed in the Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and the Pacific, global conditions are expected to continue to improve in 2010. But the recovery is expected to be tepid.

According to the IMF's latest forecasts, output in the large G-7 economies is forecast to grow by just 1.25% next year, insufficient to compensate even for half of the 3.5% contraction estimated for 2009.

In essence, households cannot spend and banks cannot provide credit since they must focus on repairing their balance sheets after the sizeable destruction of wealth that occurred during the recession.



Exports boost our economy.

sion. G-7 consumption is consequently likely to remain weak for some time, limiting external demand for Asia's products.

As a result, the region's GDP growth is forecast at 5.75% in 2010, well below the 6.66% annual average recorded over the past decade.

Overall in Asia, policymakers consequently face two major challenges. In the near term, they will need to manage a balancing act, providing support to economies until it is clear that the recovery is sufficiently robust and self-sustaining. At the same time, they must ensure that

programs are not maintained for so long that they ignite inflationary pressures or concerns about fiscal sustainability. Striking the right balance will be difficult.

Bangladesh faces a somewhat different challenge. Despite the slowdown in its major export markets, growth has held up remarkably well during the crisis due to continued strong remittance growth and good export performance. However, consequent robust inflows of foreign exchange have resulted in excess liquidity in the financial system.

Thus far, excess liquidity has not led to acceleration in inflation as private invest-

ment has been sluggish. But when investor sentiment improves, inflationary pressure may quickly rise. The challenge for policy makers is to encourage private investment -- indispensable for Bangladesh to achieve higher growth -- while keeping inflation contained.

The issue will become pressing from the middle of 2010 when we expect a return to higher garment export growth, and rising public and private investment as global uncertainty wanes. We commend the efforts being made by the Bangladesh Bank to absorb excess liquidity, and we support an enhancement of these efforts.

The other major policy challenge facing Asia in general will be to devise a way to return to sustained, rapid growth in a new global environment of softer G-7 demand. In this "new world," Asia's longer term growth prospects may be determined by its ability to recalibrate the drivers of growth to allow domestic sources to play a more dynamic role.

This type of successful rebalancing will require reforms on a broad front, a willingness to live with smaller current account surpluses and a more flexible exchange rate management.

Bangladesh is very fortunate in this regard: it has dual engines for growth already. While exports expanded rapidly in the years preceding the crisis, the lion's share of Bangladesh's growth has come from domestic demand.

To sustain this twin-engined growth in the period ahead, the key issue for Bangladesh is to further improve efficiency in financial intermediation. In

addition, an increase in public investment in infrastructure will be key to enhance the country's growth potential.

The IMF has been helping countries to meet the challenge of boosting growth. For example, the IMF has responded to the needs of its low-income members by reforming its lending instruments to provide more flexible and less costly financing that is sensitive to individual country circumstances.

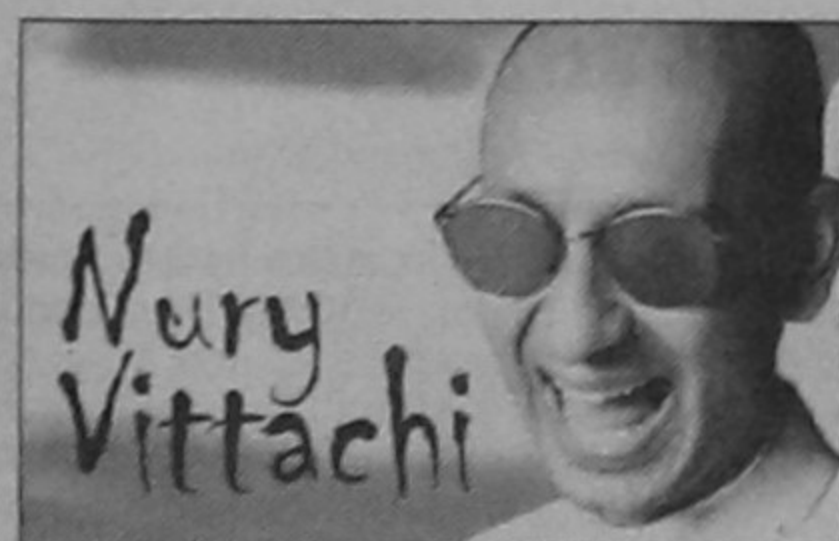
The IMF has also recently provided Asian central banks with \$54 billion in resources, \$700 million for Bangladesh, through our recent allocation of Special Drawing Rights, an artificial currency that serves as a supplement to official foreign reserves of the member countries.

Equally important, we are working hard on a global level to try to prevent such a crisis from happening again. For example, we are helping launch a mutual assessment exercise for the G-20 forum, so that the world's largest advanced and emerging countries can analyse the consistency of their policy frameworks with the requirements of balanced and sustained global growth.

The current crisis has demonstrated the resilience of Asia's economy, but it has also posed challenges. Now is the time to implement policies that can make domestic demand a second engine of growth, thereby paving the way for a strong and durable expansion.

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# The wrong number of death



TRUE story: a single misdialled phone number last week led to angry words which escalated to an armed battle, I heard from reader Sunita Chau.

It all started when a man in his early 20s accidentally phoned a man of the same age. Hostility broke out. Nasty text messages grew into a row in a car park and then to a gunfight. Police jailed one man and sent the other to hospital in a "serious condition". The incident happened a few days ago in the US state of Georgia, but similar trivial errors have escalated to shootouts in the Philippines and Vietnam.

These incidents tend to follow similar patterns.

A: "Hi, can I speak to Susy?"  
B: "You got the wrong number, dude."  
A slams down the phone.  
Buses caller ID to dial A.  
B: "Hey. Don't slam the phone down on me without apologizing, you rude moron."

B then slams the phone down on A.  
A then dials B again.  
A: "You calling me a rude moron? I should kick your butt."  
B: "Oh yeah?"  
A: "Oh yeah."  
A: "OHYEAH?"  
B: "OHYEAH."

An hour later, the city is littered with dead bodies.

If only people listened to King Solomon, who 2000 years ago anticipated misdialled phone calls when he wrote: "A soft answer turneth away wrath."

If you can't manage a soft answer, answer the phone thus. "This is a recording. You have reached Pay-Per-Second

Phone Services. You will be charged our \$200 minimum fee for this call, plus \$10 per second." They will slam down that phone and never dial your number again.

One reader got vast numbers of irritating voicemail messages meant for a guy called Steven. Eventually she left a recording on her phone saying: "If you are looking for Steven, this is not the right number for him." Now she gets even more voicemail. They are from her friends and family, and say: "So, who's Steven?" Everyone is convinced she has a secret boyfriend. Beyond irritated, she is saving up to buy a gun.

But most annoying are people who send you unsigned text messages meant for other people. I had a text message exchange, which went like this.

Him: "Meet you are 4.30 by the clock."  
Me: "Who are you?"  
Him: "This is Jamie."  
Me: "You got the wrong number."  
Him: "Oops. Sorry, dude."  
Me: "Stop already. It costs me money

every time you send me a text."  
Him: "Yeah, I know. I just wanted to apologize."

Me: "Okay. Shut up already."  
Him: "Okay! I'm shutting up!"  
Me: "SHUT UP!"  
Him: "I HAVE shut up."  
Me: "No you haven't."  
Him: "Yes I have."  
Me: "NO YOU HAVEN'T."  
Him: "YES I HAVE."

I showed this conversation to a friend of mine and told her that this was clear, black and white proof that the world contains idiots.

She read through it and said, "No, this is clear, black and white proof that the world contains males."

What an insult. After brooding on this for a while, I sent her a text telling her to meet me at the car park at midnight with a weapon of her choice. I sent it to the right number. I think.

For more curious cases of misdialled numbers, visit our columnist at [www.vittachi.com](http://www.vittachi.com)

