**SCIENCE AND RELIGION AS THE FOUNDATION OF
EDUCATION FOR PEACEFUL SOCIETY**

**by**

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**Introduction**

Current Academic methods are often perceived as scientific and the most reliable path to ascertain truth. Much of the spirit and practice of this grew out of opposition from Religion and as a reaction to the ecclesiastical dogma of religious philosophy. As a result, reactive attempts were made to explain all phenomena without reference to religion or God. Experiments test hypothesis, and if can be replicated and validated, theories emerged. New theories are built on old ones to produce increasing knowledge, widening the dichotomy of science and religion. There is apparently a determined effort to subject all fields to this same method, although some to a lesser degree than others.

Religious exhortations, on the other hand, are often misjudged as arising from a desire to obscure unpalatable information or a reversion to Dark Ages or Mediaeval practices to suppress scientific research and conform followers to subordinate culture plagued by superstitions and rituals.

There appears an attempt to divide science and religion, as if they are two ends of the pole, as mutually exclusive spheres. This division long ruled 'modern' especially Western academic studies. Thus, resulting in a greater and greater divide between religion and science with the notion that science and religion are in conflict. This divide, increasingly influences now Asia, Africa and Latin America where the people were primarily spiritual.

During this series of Discourse on " Science, Religion and Development", all participants have been questioning this duality? Do we accept this duality i.e. science and religion are in conflict? Does religion belong to humanity's past, irrelevant to today's world? Is science then the guide for today?  Should religion be abandoned and to be regarded merely as a private affair with no real relevance to today's society?

Throughout the discourse, most of us have agreed that there is no real conflict between science and religion. We have agreed that science without religion is a cruel instrument of materialism and religion without science falls prey to superstition and fanaticism. There must be harmony between science and religion.

Both science and religion, however, need to be re-examined and make certain re-adjustments. The role of science and religion in the field of education, similarly, require a long hard look – a fresh look at the entire corpus of human knowledge and how it can be studied in a holistic manner.

**Analysis of Current Situation**

It is undeniable that in Education, the divide between science and religion is just as wide as in other fields of human endeavours. Central to this split is the basic assumption of the reality of the human being. Is human being a spiritual or material being?

Current approach to education is very much economic-centred. Much is focused on gearing the education institutions to produce the right human resources to meet production demands. Unemployment is often deemed as a failure on the part of the planners. This perception of education for job is prevalent among the students. In a survey conducted by Social and Economic Development Services (SEDS) in collaboration with Centre for Civilizational Dialogue (CCD), involving 584 upper secondary and tertiary students, 56% expressed the purpose of education was to achieve success in life and 30% said it was to get jobs. Only 8% expressed that education is for intellectual development.

This over emphasis on the practicality of education is also evident in the courses offered. Parents and students tend to select courses, which will offer good job prospects especially those with high salary. Agriculture, education and social work, while crucial to social advancement, are unattractive due to low remunerations.

Money, more than service or contribution to community life, seems to be the main motivator. Parents and teachers pressure students to achieve better and better results ( 18 'A's in SPM ? ) to join the elite. Competition instead of co-operation dominates, inculcating in children from early age to be self-centered and self-interested rather than being generous and sharing.

This self-centerness and self-interest manifest itself in disrespect for others including those in authority, bullying behaviour and when coupled with violence, turn into hooliganism and gangsterism. Recently, the Minister of Education has proposed that military officers should be sent to schools to enforce discipline. Should it not be religious leaders who should help ? Have religious leaders lost their credibility?

Education currently also appears to cater for the lower instead of higher passions. Assuming children and youths to be incapable of deep thinking and generous actions, education skews towards superficiality, catering for a generation who are used to commercial breaks and instant fixes. Focus is on fun

and learning through play till this attitude towards fun goes beyond childhood and becomes the popular culture, which treats life as a game and flees from discipline, responsibility and hardship. Computer games and entertainment continue to permeate every aspect even into adulthood.

**Our Challenge**

The challenge now facing our nation in this millennium of intensive, primarily material, advancement, the search for a balanced approach to educate and develop in our next generation those qualities and capabilities that will contribute to advancement of civilization.

We need to pay more attention to moral and ethical motivation and the cultivation of those attitudes which foster the desire to promote constructive inter-personal and inter-community relationships and that we do NOT remain the economic animal focusing on our material self.

No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of humankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and co-ordinated will happiness be assured. Religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world. When the lamp of religion is obscured, chaos and confusion ensues and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquility and peace cease to shine.

Economism has to be more strongly challenged. Where the spiritual is taken into account, the ecological is an accepted constraint and the economic is reduced to its instrumental role. Thus, while recognising that the cancer of poverty is a potent destroyer of peace in a society, fundamentally, unity is derived from the ideals, shared beliefs, culture and values that give cohesion to society especially a plural one like ours. Such shared beliefs and ideals results in the development of qualities and attitudes that foster constructive patterns of human interaction. True prosperity - a well- being founded on peace, co-operation, altruism, dignity, rectitude of conduct and justice - flows from the light of spiritual awareness and virtue as well as from material discovery and progress.

Our challenge, therefore, is to redesign and develop our communities around those universal principles - including love, honesty, moderation, humility, hospitality, justice and unity - which promote unity, and without which no community, no matter how economically prosperous, intellectually endowed or technologically advanced, can long endure.

**A Proposal for A Peaceful Society**

Let us expand on some of the attributes of a community conforming to and envisaged by those principles. The emergence of a Peaceful society, flourishing and perpetuating itself; distinguished for its abiding sense of security and faith

and marked by the spirit of love among its members and for the spirit of trust and confidence between its members and its institutions is only possible if we link material progress to fundamental spiritual aspirations.

It is only possible if the people in the community are educated to take into account the spiritual dimension of human reality and seek to foster a culture in which the moral, ethical, emotional and intellectual development of the individual are of primary concern. Not when our young believe it is alright to pay and take bribes.

The material aspects of community development - environmental, economic and social policies; production, distribution, communication and transportation systems; and political, legal and scientific processes – has to be driven by spiritual principles and priorities rather than largely determined by material considerations.

## Formal Education

The development of a new process of education cannot be devoid of science and religion. However, the traditional views of the relationship between the two must be reexamined. Science is the system of knowledge that allows humanity to understand material existence and religion the system of knowledge that assists humanity to understand its own spiritual nature. Moral behaviour is an expression of man's spiritual nature in the realm of material existence; therefore moral education calls for collaboration between religion and science.

This collaborative approach to curricula development indicates exciting directions for scientific inquiry illumined by religion in its pure form, free from bigotry and superstition. The systematic studies will elucidate both the nature of desired moral capabilities and their component qualities, attitudes, skills and concepts. Through scientific research and experimentation, educational contents and methods can be discovered to help develop these components at various stages of individual growth. Research cannot be isolated from educational practice. Systematization of experience and conceptualization will have to be built into the process so that the results of actual practice by educators working in diverse cultural settings can be incorporated into the accumulating body of knowledge on education.

Education has to endow the young with a two fold moral purpose to take charge of their own intellectual and spiritual development and to contribute significantly to the transformation of society. The children and youths are then cultivate a set of capabilities in three stages - firstly building character in pre-school years emphasizing acquisition of spiritual qualities and clear thinking and eloquent speech;

Secondly, integrated basic education in sciences and arts in primary school to enable a child to make a clear-cut transition from childhood to youth; realizing that service to humanity and dedication to peace and unity are foundation of his honor and happiness; and

Thirdly, a qualitative high school program imbued with ideals preparing the youth to be a purposeful agent responsible for his own development and contributing to social transformation of his society.

The university and colleges, on the other hand, should offer itself as a space for learning engaging the people in their social spaces, in the generation and application of knowledge of integral development to create a materially and socially progressive community. Central to this conceptual framework of integral development is involvement of the local population in learning about their paths of development. It is based on the recognition of the nobility of human being and the respect for human honor. Thus the population of a region is honored and empowered to set the direction of its own development.

**Informal Education**

In any society, paramount are the protection of the family and the promotion of its well- being. The family is the primary institution of society and the principal incubator of the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors, which will strengthen the fiber of a spiritually healthy society. Its members has to naturally understand that the interests of the individual and of the community are totally linked, and that the advancement of human rights calls for full commitment to corresponding responsibilities.

The role of women, especially women of faith, in promoting unity is an essential though less acknowledged pre-requisites. I believe that the denial of full equality of women and men, perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to workplace, to political life and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge. Women will be welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor, while at the same time their role as the bearer and first educator of children will be recognized and accorded full honor. The elderly will continue to participate in the affairs of the community, their experience and wisdom sought out and valued.

While education prepares individuals for work, work should not be perceived as a mere factor of production. Work is both a means of livelihood for the individual and a way of contributing to the prosperity of the community as a whole. Work in the spirit of service, adds meaning to life and contributes towards the elimination

of extremes of wealth and poverty. The science and technology now available can be harnessed to serve the material, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of the entire human family.

## Conclusion

Meaningful social transformation from the current state towards a united and peaceful society especially a plural one like Malaysia, cannot come from political prescriptions or technical recipes alone. The approach to integral development necessitates incorporation of moral and spiritual principles in education, both formal and informal, within and outside schools, which will imbue individuals with values to ensure enduring attitudes and collective behaviour to contribute to construction of society. Therefore religions and spiritual values need to be seriously and systematically examined to lay the foundations for united and peaceful society.