

CRITICAL COMMENT ON THE ACADEMIC ARTICLE, “CHRISTIANITY AS THE ABRAHAMIC FAITH: RE-DISCOVERING THE MEANING OF ‘METANOIA’”

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Abstract: This academic paper deals with the discussion on the term “‘metanoia’” and its different aspects. The author Sebastian Velassery, the author of the academic paper entitled, “Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of ‘metanoia’” describes “‘metanoia’” in new terms. He says without “‘metanoia’”, Christian faith and Christian understanding of love cannot account for its conscientiousness and answerability to God. This academic paper is a critical study of the same.

Key Words: Abrahamic Faith, Faith, ‘metanoia’

1. Introduction

The term ‘metanoia’ is derived from the Greek prefix meta, meaning over, after, or with and ‘nous’, meaning intellect or mind. Translating literally, ‘metanoia’ means a change of one’s mind or purpose. The Christian scholar Tertullian (c. 160 – c. 225 AD) argued that, in the context of Christian theology, ‘metanoia’ is best translated as change of mind. The academic paper entitled, **Critical Comment on the Academic Article, “Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of ‘metanoia’”** deals with the discussion on the term ‘metanoia’ and its different aspects. The author Sebastian Velassery, the author of the academic paper entitled, *Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of ‘metanoia’* describes ‘metanoia’ in new terms. He says without ‘metanoia’, Christian faith and Christian understanding of love cannot account for its conscientiousness and answerability to God. All these ideas are scrutinized in this study.

2. About the Author

Sebastian Velassery was born in Kerala state of India on the 27th June 1955. After graduating from his home state, he joined for M.A. program in philosophy at the Central University of Hyderabad under Professor Ramachandra Gandhi and pursued his doctoral studies in philosophy at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India. He has published many scholarly articles in national and international journals and written six books.³ Professor Velassery is interested in Critical Comment on the Academic Article, *Christianity as the*

Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of ‘metanoia’ Indian philosophy, Social philosophy, Phenomenology, Existentialism and philosophy of Culture.

3. Summary of Essay, “Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of ‘metanoia’”

This section of my academic article consists of the summary and my reflection of the scholarly paper entitled, **Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of ‘metanoia’** written by Prof. Sebastian Velassery. The author tries to rediscover the meaning of ‘metanoia’ and tries to find roots of Christianity in Abrahamic Faith. He begins his essay by quoting from the book of Genesis (Gen.12:1-3)⁴ about the call of Abraham. He says that the call of Abraham has broken the silence of both self and the universe.⁵ It is a call of transcendence. Abraham was told to go out from all what he considered as his own. In other words he was forced to leave all types of belongings upon which his identity was built on. Actually it was a call to realize his real potential.⁶

Now the Lord had said unto Abraham, get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Gen: 12. 1-3) The call of Abraham taken in its own terms broke the silence of his self as well as the universe. The call is the divine utterance whereby the Deity intervened in the previously created cosmos. Whatever the shape of the



original Abrahamic event, the call became an embryonic, yet ambiguous, metaphors in the ensuing march of Christendom.

Hence, Abraham was told: Get you out' – from all that has been, from your old ways and inherited patterns of disobedience and self-indulgence. Get you out from your human assumptions into a new and divine sensitivity. Get you out from the restraints of mental slavery and discover to live beyond yourself; get you out from your apprehensions and lead a life in and toward your ultimate potentials. Go from where you are to where you can be. Move out of the stasis and share the divine life of inexorable becoming.⁷ Critical Comment on the Academic Article, *Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of 'metanoia'*. Abraham's call was an invitation for realizing the real essence as well as self-transcendence. It was a call to move beyond what he was into what he is in his potential.⁸ What is considered irrationality becomes sensible to Abraham. It is the place of birth, relatives; friends and so on make what we are. This traditional concept is challenged with the call of Abraham. He is directed to an unknown place and context. It is a challenge for Abraham to come out of the given identity to the real identity. The fact acted behind the decision to take a sudden shift from one to another is known as faith.⁹

He was directed to a particular place as the destination for his journey. The place is unnamed. This deliberate omission points to the central requirement of faith. Abraham trusts God. This is not faith in a much later sense –belief in what one has not experienced; Abraham's faith was centred on what one has experienced, in this case, the call of God. Abraham does not believe in God. The divine reality for him is hardly a matter of dispute for he does not require a rational proof for the existence of God. He believes' God. He accepts the promise and the commission on trust.

This invitation of self-transcendence revealed the divine-human relationship. This relationship has got its completion in Jesus Christ.¹⁰

Accordingly, the New Testament is replete with familiar images of the universal, transcendent quality of Christendom. For St. Peter, Christians constitute on the aggregate a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. Paul re-defined the Abrahamic-Christian faith.¹¹

It is how the author (Prof. Sebastian Velassery) affirms the figure of Abraham as the forerunner of Christianity. Abraham is presented as the primordial Christian who realized and experienced the meaning of 'metanoia'.

Here the word 'metanoia' means Change in one's way of life resulting from penitence or spiritual conversion.¹² Therefore, 'metanoia' is not only a conversion of hearts and minds but it also points to a relationship of trust and faith and of seeking His divine pleasure of participating in the „good“ life through deeds that brought one closer to one's God.¹³ Hence the call to come out indicates the total transformation of heart and mind through right actions at right time. Critical Comment on the Academic Article, *Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of 'metanoia'*. Professor has also mentioned the challenges of 'metanoia' in the second part of the essay. According to him Christian revelation has the form of a man'. Here God reveals Himself in mortals. Here we experience a God in search of man.¹⁴

Christianity in India poses an existential question: whether religion arises from the human search for God or as in the Abrahamic instance, God's search for the human. The claim that Christianity as the Abrahamic faith rests on God's search for man rather than the reverse is itself a religious claim which is manifested in Christ and his central teaching on the concept of love.

According to Christianity, God's love is a covenanted and not a contractual love. A covenant implies a promise of unconditional love, a promise that is never cancelled. Covenanted love is not earned or won by the person to whom it is given. It is always a free gift; it happens' out of god's grace. Hence, Christianity is identified as the religion of incarnation. This covenanted aspect of God's love to humanity and God's search for man is explicitly shown in the 15th chapter of St. Luke's Gospel.¹⁵

Here we are actually challenged and each one of us is asked to practice transcendent love. Therefore an act of coming out is essential. The author points out pride' as the first challenge for this type of 'metanoia'. And this is not Christian.¹⁶ God reveals Himself in the fullness of love. The author points out two types of gifts of love: 1. Self-disclosure (the gift of myself) and 2. The affirmation of the other person's worth.¹⁷ It is a call for appreciating the uniqueness of the other. Therefore the concept of love is a universal value in the Christian tradition.

4. Critical Comment and Conclusion

The Greek root of the word 'metanoia' means "a transformative change of heart; especially: a spiritual conversion."¹⁸ Abraham was called by God and he was asked to leave everything by what his identity was constructed. Abraham, without thinking much, followed



the divine call. Therefore we can find the traces of Christian 'metanoia' in the Abrahamic call. Abraham was forced himself for the self-imposed transcendence. Why the call of Abraham is very important in the history of salvation? It is nothing but his response to the divine call transcended natural laws, because the identity of person is dependent on the culture, family, religion and society to Critical Comment on the Academic Article, *Christianity as the Abrahamic Faith: Re-Discovering the Meaning of 'metanoia'*. He was born into. This given identity is questioned in the call of Abraham in order to realize his real potential. Therefore it was journey for truth. Another thing is that Abraham was open enough to respond to His call. This type of 'metanoia' is again seen in the New Testament. We experience the same with the historical event of incarnation where God has revealed His love towards humans. 'metanoia' is not only a conversion of hearts and minds but also points to a relationship of trust and faith and of seeking His divine pleasure of participating in the good life through deeds that brought one closer to one's God. We may state that such a metamorphosis of the human spirit is possible only through the Christian conception of love, which is a universal value.¹⁹ Every human being is called to respond to this type of inner call by which one's real identity can be traced.

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6. End Notes

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