Today human civilization is passing through a phase of transition, where the old order of things is changing very fast. The traditional authority of religion is being challenged and finds itself almost cornered by the incontestable findings of science and the heretical verdicts of reason. One finds, again that the co-existence of various centripetal and centrifugal forces along with age old customs, traditions and religious misconceptions not only make the problem of society and its unity more complicated but also retards its progress in same respect.

It is but truism to say that mankind is in the midst of one of the greatest crisis in history. The lack of adjustment of the human spirit to the tremendous developments in science and technology have led man to this predicament. No doubt that the advancement of science and technology have liberated man from servitude to nature but yet man seems to suffer from a type of disintegration, an inward loneliness, all external growth seems to suffer from internal retardation. There is saying today conflicts between the nations and peoples and much so under the fanatic banner of religion.

Although there are quite a large number of people who claim to have same sort of faith in some religion, yet, most unfortunately most of them have very little insight with regard to the fundamentals of religion. More importance is being given to the external rather than the essentials and internal factors.
of religion. Again with the rise of fundamentalism and increasing politicisation of religious many a oppressive social structures are being supported and many such practices are being upheld which go against human values and thus have become an unending source of conflicts in society. Another factor causing a noticeable decline in true religious attitude is the upcoming spirit of scepticism fostered by science, condemnation of religious attitudes in regard to social problems and above all the appearance of the exclusive, intolerant character of religion which militates against the emerging world unity. Thus in the present, dangerous divided state of the world, Advaita religion must either guard itself on finer foundations or admit its inadequacy in the face of the deepest and greatest human need today. Hence what modern man has to fight against is spiritual blindness and lust of his present dogmatic slumber if the future is to be saved.

Today when life is losing its innate dignity and where man is plugging into whole self destruction, a resurrection of Advaitic religious values alone can save man from his present plight. It is the deal of the oneness of Advaita Vedānta which forms the basis for success and fulfilment in all walks of life and only by working towards this realization will man’s life be purged of all impurities making way for love and peace to dwell in.

Religion, for Swāmi Vivēkānanda, is synonymous with 'universalism' of the spirit and it is not until religious conceptions have attained this universalism that religion is
fully realised. It is only when we come to the real, spiritual and universal concept that religion will become real and living. It will come to our very nature, live in our every moment, penetrate every pore of our society, and be infinitely more a power for good than it has ever been before. And such a religion he believed existed in the Advaita Vedanta of India.

There is no reason to foster the belief that there are fundamental differences between the religious beliefs of the East and of the West. Differences are bound to exist no doubt, but then they are far from being fundamental in nature. They are mostly related to external, temporary and social conditions of society. These differences seem prominent simply because we do not seem to know the basic truth of our own religions. Swami Vivekananda also says that the various religions of the world appear as different from one another but if we try to study and analyse them in depth, we would find that it is the same truth that is preached by all of them. The variety of creeds does not in any way repudiate the truth of religion. Men in their search for the Divine have not all followed one beaten track but have been inspired by different types of religions. The great mystic philosopher Nicholas of Cuba penetrated the discovery that "God is sought in various ways and called by various names in various religions, that he sent various prophets and teachers in various ages to various peoples". Hence what is to be realised is that

1. Radhakrishnan S. - Religion and Culture; (Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1987) P-59
the unity of the different religions cannot be achieved at an external level. It has to be realised in an inward and spiritual way without any prejudice to any particular form. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "If one religion is true, others must be true. There are differences in the non-essentials, but in essentials they are all one." There are different paths to reach the Ultimate of the Universe. He who finds truth only in his own religion has no eye for the truth in any other religion is still grovelling in the dark. It is he alone who will find the truth of God who has learned to appreciate the efforts of all religions reaching God. Sri Krishnā says, "whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him, all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me." This universal outlook, the heritage of the Advaita Vedanta and forms the very basis, the concept of universal religion.

If we are to create a spiritual unity which will transcend and sustain the material unity of the new world order, we require a proper understanding of the universality of religions. It need not again be an endless homogeneity but an organic unity where all religions express themselves as forms of the universal religion of knowledge and love. All religions are supplement to each other, for each religion as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth. It has been aptly said, "If God is given to other religions some distinctive apprehensions of truth:

2. Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. I P-4
it is for the purpose that they should contribute towards the fullness of truth." So the spirit of conformity and truth is not the monopoly of any one religion, it is universal. "Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadānti." Truth is one, sages call it by various names. And it is only when man awakes to this truth that unity will follow and religion will in all its universality become truly the binding force which will deepen the solidarity of human society. Swāmi Vivēkānanda advocates that universal acceptance is the basis of bringing unity among the different religions of the world. Universal religion he preaching is not a new religion but combination of all religions preaches the same truth. To quote his words "as so many rivers, having their source in different mountains, roll down, crooked or straight, and at last come into the ocean, so all these various creeds and religions taking their start from different stand points and running through crooked or straight courses at last come into Thee." In fact universal religion runs through all religions of the world in the form of love, humanity and the ultimate truth. It must and does exist through eternity, "I am the thread that runs through all the pearls," (‘Sūtre Maniğupa Eva’) and each pearl is a religion and the Lord is the thread that runs through all of them, only the

1. Dr. Farquhar J.N., The Crown of Hinduism, 1912 P-45
2. Swāmi Vivēkānanda, Lecture on Universal Religion as the Religion of the World, (Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta, 1938) P-581
3. Complete works of Swāmi Vivēkānanda, Vol. I P-390
The majority of mankind is entirely unconscious of it. Thus to neglect the spiritual unity of the world and merely underline the religious diversity would be philosophically unjustifiable, morally defensible and more than all socially dangerous.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda is against all religious barriers and tried his very best to remove all conflicts and oppositions caused by the compartmentalisation of religions. According the Advaitic View religion must be infinite and limitless like God. He says, "It is the recognition of this truth, which has enabled the Hindus to perceive the universal truth of all religions from the lowest to the highest, it has made them the only people who never had religious persecutions." Religion according to the Advaita Vedānta is the voyage of self discovery. It is the attempt of the inner identity to reach its own infinity. Religion is a spiritual change, an inward transformation. It is a transition from darkness to light, from an inregenerate to a regenerate condition. It is awakening of the spirituality in man, a rebornness. A sufi mystic Ayn, at - Audat-al-Hamathāni (d.A.D.1131) says "He who is born from the womb sees only this world, only he who is born of himself sees the other world."

Hence true religion is the realisation of the divinity within one's own inner self, on the fulfilment of which all false notions caused by egoism dissolve and the true self emerges in all its innate glory. "Religion is the manifestation of the

1. Complete works of Swāmi Vivēkānanda, Vol. I, P-396
2. Radhakrishnan S., Religion and Culture, P -57
divinity already in man. It is being and becoming - it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is 1 religion."

Swámi Vivékánanda affirms three aspects of religion i.e. Philosophy, Mythology and Rituals. Every religion has its own unique representation of its philosophy and mythology and the incompatibility becomes highly marked when it comes to the field of rituals. There is beyond doubt no possibility of any unity in this respect between the world religions. The concept of universal religion is not against these differences, but is a firm belief that these differences are non-essentials and what is to be acknowledged is that in the essentials like God knowledge and spirit experience, all religious endeavour in the realisation of the same one universal truth.

Spiritual experience is, the fundamental level on which religions unite. But as a matter of fact the ground of all predictions whether one calls it being or by some other name - cannot become a meeting point unless the experience of it is shared by all. Again spirit experience is the experience of inter-connectedness of beings, it is in fact the very experience of Cosmic consciousness. It is the experience of the inner power or sákti, this again should not be taken as an isolated or disconnected force but it is the Field of Force which we might call 'love force' as is seen in the kshetra of knowledge in the

1. Complete works of Swámi Vivékánanda, Vol. II., P-396
It is the experience of an omnipresent reality in which the one and the many meet, where the universal and particular come together in one whole. An attitude of humility to acknowledge the finitude of one's own religious experience and the openness to acknowledge what is true in other religions is what is fundamental to one who aspires to know the spirit and to have a fuller experience of the spirit. This evolving experience of the spirit, though subject to change, evolution and progress, retains its identity and leads mankind to the notion of the essential complementality and unity of all religious experience and in this way the religions that are based on them.

Unity of religions lies in the recognition of the catholicity of true religion. It implies much more than mere tolerance. Infact all intolerance is eventually due to self love which mainly characterises man. This again is the outcome of ignoring the deeper coherence and insisting upon the truth and indispensableness of the divergent elements. The religious unity that is pursued as necessary would cause people in recognising the one ultimate Reality, the Supreme value behind the different nomenclature and differing paraphenalia of worship. To quote Joseph Gorres, "One Godhead alone is at work in the universe, one religion alone prevails in it, one worship, one fundamental natural order, one law and one Bible in all. All prophets are one prophet they have spoken on one common ground, in one language though in different dialects. As the great civilizations are

1. Bhagawad-Gīta 13, 2
same, the unfolding of one life, so also are the great mythical elements of the whole world the same and the religious genesis one single growth, planted by the very spirit of God, and nourished by him with the airs of heavens and the dews of earth, unfolding itself in joy throughout all ages."

In the present dangerous divided state of the world where the religious situation lies in utter turmoil, what is required is a religious faith which has universality in its outlook, which commends itself to man's understanding and to the spirit of reason. Swami Vivekananda often claimed, "what I want to propogate is a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds. It must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equal mystic and equally conducive to action. And this contribution will be the ideal approach to universal religion."

Many a so called man of religion allows his judgements and actions to be clouded by the murkiness of his national or communal setup, but the essential greatness of the men of true religion lies in casting aside their fanaticism and dogmatism and maintaining a universalism in their outlook. To achieve world unity through universal religion, one must develop a universality of outlook. To bear out the greatness of the words of Romain

1. Quoted from Prof. Friedrish Hailur in the Hilbert Journal (Jan. 1954), P-111
2. Karan Singh Dr. (Ed.), Vision of India, (Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Delhi 1988), P-50
Rolland, "when a man has reached a certain stage in the development of the soul, he knows no nation, he feels the happiness or unhappiness of the neighbouring people as his own. The storm clouds are at his feet. Around him is nothing but the sky, the whole Heavens, the Kingdom of the Eagle." Hence all religions have in them universalism.

This universal religion is one which is predominantly humanistic and intensely activistic and dynamic. Swāmi Vivēkānanda propounds his view of spiritual humanism which advocates identity of humanity with divinity and recommends in all earnestness humanitarian work and service to humanity as the ultimate expression of the truth realised.

It is that religion which unites man in a spirit of fellowship and that which makes them better rather than worse. According to the Advaita Vedānta man's relation to God is inevitably conceived on the ground of a social relationship between himself and other beings like himself. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says, "If you want to find God, serve man." This humanistic attitude breaks down the artificial man made barriers and kindles in all hearts the common principles of love, non-violence and truth. Again Swāmi Vivēkānanda believes that the ideal of true religion should be such as to provide shelter to man in all conditions of his existence. That goes to say, "Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition

1. Wadia A.R., Religion as a Quest for Values, (University of Calcutta, 1950) P-191

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the is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity, everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid. The principles of Vedānta, or the ideal of religion, or whatever you may call it, will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function." Social service, compassion and the feeling of oneness are the chief characteristics of universal religion. The Advaita Vedānta staunchly advocates a continuous performance of selfless work and the constant practice of non-attachment in all actions of life, which enables man to rise above his empirical self and to have a feeling of oneness with all existence. It is Swāmi Vivēkānanda's belief in human purity which elevates the position of man in society and the whole world at large. In such a society all men are free and deserve equal opportunity. The implication of the Advaita unity is clear in his saying that trampling on every privilege and everything in us that works for privilege, let us work for the knowledge which will bring the feeling of oneness towards all mankind. The Rig Veda says 'Ekaiva manuṣi jatiḥ' - Human race is one. Again 'Bhṛtāro mānavas sarve' - All men are brothers. Thus this thought leads men not only towards equality but goes a long way in establishing the feeling of universal brotherhood.

Yet, another universal character found, is that all religions consider values to be of paramount importance in the scheme of life. The ultimate values of Truth, Beauty and Goodness

1. Complete works of Swāmi Vivēkānanda, Vol. II, P: 300-301
give unity to human purpose and bring all faiths under the single sway of universality.

Swāmi Viśvākāntanda holds the view that the moral content of all the religions is same, for the perfection of life and good conduct is emphasised by all. The oneness of religion lies in the fact that individuals must rise above the narrow trivial considerations of this life. The real test of time and universal religion is what we make of one’s life here and now by creating greater harmony and understanding among ourselves. Surely devotion and purity, love and humility, selflessness and service, search for God and resignation to the Divine will are things valued by all pious souls equally, no matter to which sect they belonged to. It is only when men awakes to this bare truth that unity will follow and religion will become truly that universal force which will deepen the solidarity of mankind. The love of God becomes but a matter of mere words unless it develops love for His creatures.

Hence if we are to do away with the present disordered divided state of the religious world, we have to adopt what William Law calls, "a Catholic spirit, a communion of saints in the love of God and all goodness, which no one can learn from that which is called orthodoxy in particular churches, but is only to be had by a total dying to all worldly views, by a pure love for God, and by such an action from above as delivers the mind from all selfishness and makes it love truth and goodness with an equality of affection in everyman whether he is
Christian, Jew or Gentile."

The goal of universal religion is a deep fellowship of the spirit. No one need give up one's own religion and engage in syncretism. We on the other hand can learn from other religions in a spirit of mutual respect and acceptance, for nothing that is true should be alien to us. Here St. Ambrose's saying is no doubt worthy of acceptance, he says, "Every truth by whomsoever it is spoken is of the Holy Spirit."

Theoretically, the concept of a universal religion does sound appealing but to bring to ground its practicality, it is necessary that the established universality of religions as universal religion should be conveyed to the common masses such that it commends itself to their understanding and spirit of reason. It is the psyche of the human individual that needs to grow and expand to accept this and cater the realm of religion with an open mind and the willingness to accept the universal truth of all religions. Universal religion has to blossom in the minds and hearts of people. It should be taught to the youth and practised by our leaders such that it gets moulded into the very texture of one national and international life. Its approach should be such that it emphasises life and its needs and it should evolve itself towards transforming the world and making it a better place for man to live in.

1. Radhakrishnan S., Recovery of Faith, (Orient Paperbacks, Delhi, 1987) P-181
2. Thomas a Celano, Vita II Ed. Alercon P-173
Thus while propounding the Advaita Vedānta Śwāmi Vīvākananda gave to mankind a spiritual meaning in his day to day striving and aspirations. He showed them the way of the Advaita Vedānta which has a message to give in all aspects of life - the universal message of goodwill, love and oneness of Truth. The much sought after concept of 'One World' and universal religion where mutual fellowship and pure love prevails can be achieved if modern man with his pragmatic outlook can make use of the Advaita Vedānta, which is nothing if not universal. In the Advaitic Vedāntic concept which says that in every heart there is the manifestation of the same God, lies the essential divinity of man, that secure foundation for building the edifice of universalism and the one world of all human brethren.

Thus Advaita Vedānta proclaims the entire mankind belongs to one family - the family of God. And all are brothers.

Bandhavahi narasarve Viśwani Chaitadgruham mama.

1. Pandit Prabhānanda - Mukti Daśhana
2. Ibid.,