

LSI as Social Web of Committed Entrepreneurs

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Abstract

“The old men shall see visions and the young shall have dreams.” (Joel 2: 28)

Modeling on two recent significant phenomena (World Social Forum, which held its meeting in Mumbai on January 2004) and the Indian Software entrepreneurship, this paper tries to see the importance of networking, creativity and vision in enabling a new way of life. Like WSF and software entrepreneurship, LSI is a unique phenomenon that fosters

- Intercultural approach
- Creative vision
- Youthful entrepreneurship
- Dialogical openness

LSI and science-religion dialogue are motivated by openness to the world, a dynamic vision of dialogue and commitment to both science and religion. It encourages people who are passionate (‘fire in the belly’) and committed to a cause. Their enthusiasm, purposiveness and openness to change can contribute significantly to better the human society.

LSIs do make a positive contribution to the society. Some of the key elements of LSIs may be summed up as below:

Fostering the dynamics of dialogue

LSI fosters not just dialogue between science and religion. Because of the multi-cultural and multi-religious background, it functions also as a mediator for dialogue between religions and cultures.

Promoting peace and prosperity

The religious fundamentalism (after 9/11) and consequent violence can be tackled better with scientific temper and openness to the new. So peace, which is the basic essence of religions can be better brought about by a creative interaction between science and religion that cross national and cultural boundaries.

Critiquing technological creativity

While appreciating the marvels of today’s technology, LSI can take us back to the human face of technology. It can usher in creative technologies that are ecologically friendly and is not guided solely by profit motive.

Promoting human values

The perennial religious insights give humans meaning in life and provide them with lives of values, commitment and purposes. For our modern world, we need to rediscover these values and adapt them suitably, so that contemporary humans can relish the perennial wisdom and retain their humanness. At stake today is the very survival of humanity.

Constructive Engagement and Creative Commitment

Within this background, LSI groups can function as entrepreneurs, visionaries and dreamers, who can combine their efforts to

- To better the world
- To alter the system
- To focus on the human values

Their scope is beyond academia and so they try to reach out to people who make a difference in the world. LSIs can respond to the scientific, religious and social issues critically, creatively, constructively and compassionately

Conclusion

LSIs do offer a network and platform to bring together science and religions as well as people of different mentalities. They provide opportunities to be creative and committed, to be enterprising and purposive, to be visionaries with a practical bend. While encouraging dynamism and accountability, it promotes concrete LSIs who can indirectly help us to open ourselves to a possible “leap in religious insights” (comparable to the technological leap that we experience today) so that humans can live more happily and purposely.

Keywords: LSI, WSF, entrepreneurship, science-religion dialogue, creativity, creative commitment.

Biography

Kuruvilla Pandikattu (b. 1957 in Kerala, India) teaches science, philosophy and religion at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, India. He has three Master's Degrees and two doctorates, both from the University of Innsbruck. He has won Templeton Course Award (1998), Development Grand Award (1999) and is the director of Jnanam, a Local Societies Initiative. Three of his articles have won special awards from CTNS and Templeton Foundation. He is a founding member of Association of Science, Society and Religion, the first of its kind in India. He is the moderator of Jnanam Discussion Group, an LSI grantee. He is a catholic Priest and a member of the Society of Jesus. His areas of specialisation are dialogue between science and religion and between religion and hermeneutics. Among his numerous books are: Dialogue as Way of Life, Idols to Die, Symbols to Live, It's Time! Science, Religion and Philosophy on Time; Tamas [There Are Many Alternative Stories], scientist@religion.com; Promises of Life. He has edited seven books, including Hopefully Yours, Meaning of Mahatma for the Millennium, Human Longing and Fulfillment. He has written more than thirty scholarly articles. He had a regular column in the local newspapers on science and religion. He is the secretary to two scholarly journals. He has organised five international conferences and seven national ones and is regularly invited for conferences and symposia in the area of science and religion and has participated more than twenty international conferences. He is a visiting professor in many universities and colleges. He is an active member of various learned associations and societies related to science, religion and philosophy.

“The old men shall see visions and the young shall have dreams.” (Joel 2: 28)

0. Introduction

Modeling on a recent significant phenomenon (World Social Forum, WSF, which held its meeting in Mumbai on January 2004), this paper tries to see the importance of networking, creativity and vision in enabling a new way of life. Like WSF, Local Society’s Initiative (LSI) is a unique phenomenon that fosters

- Intercultural approach
- Creative vision
- Youthful entrepreneurship
- Dialogical openness

LSI and science-religion dialogue are motivated by openness to the world, a dynamic vision of dialogue and commitment to both science and religion.¹ It encourages people who are passionate (with ‘fire in the belly’) and committed to a cause that is larger than themselves. Their enthusiasm, purposiveness and openness to change can contribute significantly to better the human society.

In this presentation, we first see the symbolic significance of the world social forum as a motivating factor for change in the society. Then we shall study some of the prominent features of LSI like dynamics of dialogue, peace and prosperity and creative promotion of human values. This enables us to propose a paradigm for the constructive engagement of science and religion that leads to a deeper religiosity, feasible science and better world.

1. A Symbol: World Social Forum

World Social Forum (WSF), which is established to counter the World Economic Forum (WEF) is just three years old. Going against the powerful economic forces, WSF aims at creating a better society and providing a better alternative to today's economic system. “If the WEF consist of movers and shakers, of captains of industry and high flying businessmen, the WSF consists of humongous mass of faceless, voiceless millions, represented by a motley crew of well-meaning grass root organizations, with no money and no brand equity, but with fire in their belly to fight an unjust economic order.”²

This was evident from the 100,000 people who gathered at Azad Maidan, Mumbai on 16-21 January 2004.

It is easier to understand what WSF is not rather than delineate what it is. It is not well structured, neatly worked out fraternity. There is no one individual or group is

¹As the LSI website asserts LSI “emphasizes building organizations, dynamic associations of people who explore the implications of the science and religion interchange.” See www.metanexus.net/local_societies/default.html (Accessed on February 2004)

² Jayanthi Natarajan, *Jivan*, March 2004, 3.

responsible to organize the WSF. Therefore, WSF is not a political platform which issues statements, let alone directives, about collective action. So it is obvious that WSF does not represent any one trend of responding to emerging local and global issues, but a broad-based group with somewhat converging visions.³

To sum up: WSF

- is an open forum to respond to the globalisation collectively
- has the collective endeavour to search for alternatives
- has the aim of establishing networks and strengthening existing ones.

In other words, it is a *Mahamela* or social *kumbh* (conglomeration) of NGOs with the following features:

They are scattered groups with "fire in the belly." They are passionate visionaries who are creative and ingenious. Without much financial recourse, and mostly consisting of the motivated youths, who are also deeply committed. They do change at least the world around them. And clearly its motto is: "Another world is possible"⁴

2. Features of LSI

There are many features of WSF that are common to LSI. "LSI is a multi-disciplinary, multi-faith, and multi-cultural educational project, intended to promote a balanced and exploratory dialogue between the discoveries of the natural and social sciences and the wisdom of the world's faith traditions."⁵ LSIs can make a positive contribution to the society. Some of the key elements of LSIs may be summed up as below:

Fostering the dynamics of dialogue

LSI fosters not just dialogue between science and religion. Because of the multi-cultural and multi-religious background, it functions also as a mediator for dialogue between religions and cultures.

Promoting peace and prosperity

The religious fundamentalism (after 9/11) and consequent violence can be tackled better with scientific temper and openness to the new. So peace, which is the basic ingredient of religions can be better brought about by a creative interaction between science and religion that cross national and cultural boundaries.

³ *Jivan*, March 2004, 5.

⁴ Indian Software Entrepreneur is another symbol for us. Very similar to the LSI is the group of software entrepreneurs from India. Obviously they are hard working and highly motivated. At the same time, there are both creative and constructive in their outlook. Further, though they do not need so much of financial investment, they tend to belong to the younger generation and highly enthusiastic. That has been the secret of both their venturing entrepreneurship and success.

⁵ www.metanexus.net/local_societies/default.html accessed on February 2004.

Critiquing technological enterprise creatively

While appreciating the marvels of today's technology, LSI can take us back to the human face of technology. It can usher in creative technologies that is ecologically friendly and is not guided solely by profit.

Promoting human values

The perennial religious insights give humans meaning in life and provide them with lives of values, commitment and purposes. For our modern world, we need to rediscover these values and adapt them suitably, so that contemporary humans can relish the perennial wisdom and retain their humanness. At stake today is the very survival of humanity

3. The Future of LSI: Constructive Engagement and Creative Commitment

Within this background, LSI groups can function as entrepreneurs, visionaries and dreamers, who can combine their efforts to

- To alter the system
- To center on the human values
- To better the world

Their scope is beyond the academia and so they try to reach out to people who make a difference in the world. LSIs can respond to the scientific, religious and social issues critically, creatively, constructively and compassionately

Such groups of young and energetic individuals who are deeply interested in science and religion can bring about a dynamics of dialogue where human creativity is at its best and collective synergy at its highest, leading to more healthy complexification and harmonious evolution of the human spirit.

In such an atmosphere religious fundamentalism with its terrorism, violence will give way to a scientific temper and tolerance. The euphoria towards scientific progress is tempered by a healthy technological critique which will lead the humanity collectively to peace and harmonious tension.

This calls for a deeper and inspired understanding of

- ecology awareness both at the personal and social level
- interdisciplinary approach to social, religious and scientific issues
- openness to global issues of violence, peace, future
- deeper understanding of reality which includes the four-fold of Heidegger (the earth, sky, humans and the gods)

Since they are dreamers with a mission, visionaries with a purpose and utopian with zeal, the young entrepreneurs of science and religion dialogue can be expected to do it:

- creatively

- constructively
- critically
- compassionately

So that the emerging world will be more open to religion, tolerant of diversity,⁶ imbued with scientific spirit and passionately committed to human values. Imbued with a purpose, having a vision for the whole, such entrepreneurs will be passionately motivated by the well-fare of the whole (*lok-sangraha*) and ingeniously committed to fellow humans beings, including the future generations.

4. Conclusion

LSIs do offer a network and platform to bring together science and religions as well as people of different mentalities. They provide opportunities to be creative and committed, to be enterprising and purposive, to be visionaries with a practical bend. While encouraging dynamism and accountability, it promotes concrete LSIs can indirectly help us to open ourselves to a possible “leap in religious insights” (comparable to the technological leap that we experience today) so that humans can live more happily and purposely. Such a venture, it is hoped will be a small step in ushering in a human society that is more humane, joyous and creative. In such a society religion will flourish, science will thrive and society will progress in creative dialogue and interaction. The "lived tensions" of the society will be the driving force towards a society that is ever more creative. Such a vision gives LSI, like the World Social Forum, a cause to commit itself

to and an openness to dialogue.

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⁶Such a society will be open to the contemporary postmodern propensities, without sacrificing its rootedness to human values and vision..

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