

Addressing the Polarity Notions of 'Oneness' and 'Trinity' from the Contexts of Metaphysical, Judeo-Christian Concept of Mizos and Spinoza's Monistic Philosophy

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Abstract:

The idea of God inextricably pervaded the Mizos as old as their existence, the genealogy of which may be traced through the inherited oral and written traditions. Relying on something supernatural or embracing of suprasensory world is not something unusual unequivocally. The exhaustive human capacity desperately invites a higher being, the aegis and transcendental power for a guardianship, sustenance and of the well-being of human kind. This uncanny and mysterious search for being eventually culminated in a formal discipline of studies named as Metaphysics and Ontology in philosophy.

Ever since, a new religion of Christianity is adopted among the Mizos, what permeates the belief is nonetheless, the concept of God. Of all the qualities attributed to the concept, what catches the attention is nothing other than its transcendental eerie power over the hitherto frightened malevolent spirit of the people. Adding to the excitement of a new believers, concepts like Omnipresence (present-everywhere), Omnipotence (all-powerful), Omniscience (all-knowing), and Omnibenevolence (perfectly good) are so impressive, and it consequently persuaded them to have wholeheartedly welcomed it as an eternal solace and highly exalted it thereafter. However, the abstract qualities such as transcendence, all-pervading, spiritual, everlasting, timeless, etc. attributed to, leaves a wide room for subjective and theoretical speculation. The theological contemplation soon circles on a question of whether God is one or God in three persons, imbued the belief.

A sectarian Christian community then, promoted two contrasted concepts – a binary opposition of the notion of Oneness (God is one) and Trinity (God in three persons) which draws our attention here for our intellectual pursuit. This difference in interpretation became the determining factor for dividing into two broad sectarian groups or denominations. As such, nothing other than a philosophical intervention is hereby sought for, amidst our state of puzzlement and perplexity, hoping a little spark is getting ignited. An attempt is made in this paper to re-iterate the metaphysical historical evolvment of thoughts leading to the contrasted notions manifested in a the contemporary Mizo concepts of God, and intends to culminate with a philosophical comment of Benedict Spinoza. So that it may lead us to a more encompassing notion refrain from stereotype and prejudices.

Benedict Spinoza in advocating his concept of Monism once asserted that a thing is not consistently be defined by what it is and vice versa, especially in the case of Absolute being. For according to him, "Every determination is negation", meaning the determination of a thing as something

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definite, indirectly tells automatically the opposite, and vice versa. Using this as our parameter we go on saying that a single definite view may not suffice a justification for Infinite concept like God, unless there is a wider context of philosophical dialogue.

Key Words: Oneness, Trinity, Transcendence, Metaphysics,

1. Introduction: Tracing the Root of Highest Being in Metaphysical Tradition

With the inception of Philosophy there began curiosity, a quest for ontological questions like highest being, supernatural reality, something immutable, unmoved mover, which over and above transcends the world of humans and entities including the unlimited cosmos. These countless series of explanations undoubtedly aligned, deviated, overlap, and arguing to one another in the history of scholasticism. This highest being mostly addressed in the contexts of Form, Substance, and Reality, in the otologic-metaphysical tradition eventually evolved and narrowed down to the conception of 'God' – the impetus of every religion.

Aristotle calls metaphysics as “first philosophy” basically concerns with the search for ultimate reality or “what is being?” in general. At the opening of the metaphysical inquiry, he argues that being a human we wanted to ask this question; the inquiry which looks into the most fundamental realities, a part from our day-to-day sense perception, our embedded nature, which distinguishes us from animals and the lower-level of existences instinctively guided. “To be human is to be subject to puzzlement (aporia) about particular puzzles and problems (aporiai)” (Politis 7). Therefore, in general Aristotle argues that it is simply because we are human and by virtue of which developed in us the search for scientific and explanatory knowledge (episteme). He also argues that such explanatory knowledge requires us to know the essence of things, and hence raising of the question – what is primary being, directly takes us into the verification of the fundamental principle of things. In the process of giving an answer, Aristotle considers prote ousia (substance) – ‘that which lies under’ – hupokeimenon, as the primary being by tracing to the root of existential hierarchies. Hence, the whole of his metaphysical query is culminated in the ousiological reduction” (Sadler 46-58). This signifies something there exists inevitably at the end of the day.

This trend of philosophizing, lingered within the domain of a metaphysical paradigm is what characterized the streak of historical development from Hellenistic to modernity. Until the call of overcoming by thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century with his infamous pronouncement of ‘dead of God’ and Martin Heidegger’s calling as ‘onto-theological’ in the 20th century, it remained a dominating tradition. By onto-theology, it signifies narrowing down or resolving every debate of reality to ‘One’ – the ultimate goal of mystical realization understood as God in all cultures and religions. In line with this, Thomas Aquinas achieves complete integration of ontology and theology in the doctrine of “analogia entis,” the “analogy” of divine and dependent being (Halbfass 4).

2. A Judeo-Christian Narration of God: Metaphysical Deviations and the Foundation of Mizo Christianity

Broadly speaking metaphysics understood within the context of narrative takes place within a western culture constituted as the entwined parallel journey of two dominant linear narratives - the biblical text and metaphysics. On one hand, the Judeo-Christian biblical narrative precedes and writes history as the word of God. It is a linear narrative beginning with Genesis and culminating in the Last Judgment. As such the temporal world is a broken world,

condemned to sin and desire, finding redemption only in a turn away from flesh to the spirit. Thinker like Martin Heidegger calls this metaphysics an onto-theology; what begins in the writings of Plato and Aristotle reaches its climax in the dialectical journey of the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, which though circular culminates in a closed system.

The Judeo-Christian concept of God is rooted in monotheism, emphasizing God's unity and transcendence. In this tradition God made a covenant, the eternal moral order with which humans are communicated. This point of deviation is where traditional metaphysics ends taking the course of melting down all the queries and perplexities to the everlasting God. In short, Mizo's concept of God has its foundational root in this kind of metaphysics, culminating all doubts and queries into the notion prioritizing God.

3. Mizo Pre-Archaic Perception of God: A Manifestation of Human Nature

Following the metaphysical quest for the search of 'Reality' and the ontological understanding of 'highest being' embedded in the minds of the primitive Mizo tribe before the advent of Christianity, undeniably is certain. Interestingly J. Shakespear articulated that, "practically all divisions of the Lushai-Kuki family believed in a spirit called "Pathian", who is supposed to be the creator of everything and is a beneficent being, but has, however, little concern with men". (J) Although the conception does not suffice the need of the then hour in terms of immediate savior over the dominant evil spirit that caused them harm and insecurity, the idea of 'supreme being' - a model of perfection and guardian of the cosmos is what preoccupied the minds of the people. General Mc Call also recorded that, "old Lushais believed naturally in the existence of one supreme God, a god of all humanity and goodness". (AG) A post Christian definition of God given by early writers surely had more resemblance with the metaphysical notions, but it hardly depicts however, the original archaic understanding of highest being as JH. Lorrain made a description of God as, "the giver and preserver of life" (CL). In short, the original Mizo concept of God may be summed up as a "Deists' God", a distant architect who seemed to have done his work a long time ago with eerie power, but less intervention in the daily world of living. (Hicks 25) One may give an argument that Mizos do not have difficulty in accepting the Judeo-Christian God on two notable points that it resembles their pre-archaic understanding and on the other of being supreme control over the then frightened evil spirit, believed to have caused them doom and sinister in daily practical world.

4. The Polarity Notions - Oneness versus Trinity: Post Christianity Deviations in Belief

This centuries-old complex discussion worldwide soon became the debate among the Mizos with the adoption of Christianity religion. By the term 'Oneness of God' it primarily refers to two things, the former concerning primarily of monotheistic faiths like Judaism, Islam, and Unitarianism, whereas, the later implicates the 'essence of God'. Pertaining to the question of unity, transcendence, and attributes, God is nevertheless a one God. It stands for a unified and straightforward description of God's nature, always has the image of 'ONE' and manifested as a singular God without further complicated nature attributed to Him. And the paper undoubtedly focusses more on this essence of the Judeo-Christian God as a typical 'singular God' throughout, than focusing on religious faiths grounded upon monotheism. Deuteronomy 6:4 of the Bible "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" is the foundational confession of this doctrine. Israelites identified it as Jehovah – the everlasting God to whom all of their sacrifices and prayers are only addressed to Him. The Judaic nomenclature of 'the Schema', 'YHWH' proclaims that the LORD is our God, the LORD is one, however, is used interchangeably between the monotheism of faiths and the doctrine describing the essence of God in the long

line of religious practices and denominational understanding. Our main intention however, is not to generate a debate among inter-religious faiths of whether God is one or other, but about inter-denominational debate within Christian community on the essence of God.

Another streak of Christian theology asserted that in order to unveil the mystery of God's existence, the concept of Trinity is what inevitably defines the essence. Basically, trinity is the notion that God's infinite essence is revealed in three personalities – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the reciprocity of which formed the uncanny and infinite nature of God. More than the hegemonic monotheism of emphasizing the singularity notion, a stress is hereby made on plurality of God possessing of three intertwined personalities. Although, the alliance of three distinct natures so as to form a single God is conceived to be ambiguous, but the foundational verses of the scripture in Old Testament like Genesis 1:26 where it says, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have domination over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of air, and over cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth", and Isaiah 6:8 which says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" sounds like God by addressing His essence conveys the multiple nature of His, that eventually is interpreted as 'Plurality of God' or 'Trinity'. God in three persons is what defines basically the concept, the three natures being co-equal, co-eternal, and distinctive in its own nature. In addition to this, some New Testament verses like Matthew 28:19, known as the Great Commission, saying, "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", John 10:30 which reads, "I and the Father are one"... Chapter 14:16-17, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever: Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" confirms the plurality. (Edition) Alongside other relevant verses of the Bible, Trinity concept substantiates, equipped, and fenced itself off with these verses and proclaim that God nevertheless possesses of three distinct personalities of being the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit, a combination of which formed its essence. By representing the One God however, each personality mirrors the true nature of God, and revealed in different epochs of dispensation or time-zone in history. Worships and prayers are offered to each of the personality as they all represents the manifold and mysterious nature of God.

The debate retrospectively indicated that two sections of Christianity strongly argue with each other over the obscure identity of God. A rift is made amongst the believers and streamlined their respective denominations according to the theology inculcated by their own interpretations. It is no wonder however, that God in defining his name remained ambiguous as it reads in the Bible, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" John 4:24 reads, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, John 1:1 KJV. Exodus 3:14 says "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you". Isn't it enigmatic? Isn't it obscure? This abstract, ambiguous, theoretical, word-centric anyhow invites a biblical interpretation. It is no surprising to witness these two debates of "God is one", and "God in three persons", broadly summed up as "Oneness" and "Trinity" respectively.

Very unlikely, but a wider and relevant argument of a Jewish philosopher – Benedict Spinoza may be invoked on this issue, hoping that it may loosened our dogmatic straps fasten tightly that catapulted to each other.

5. Inviting Spinoza's Concept of Monism: Introducing a New Level of Debate on Deviation of Understanding of God

Benedict Spinoza a 17th Century Jewish philosopher, whose works were essentially banned for at least 100 years after his death, whose concept of Monism disheartened Jews, led him excommunicated from Judaism in his early twenties, is however, worth-bringing up to have a meaningful dialogue on this issue. His philosophy began with the unity of all that exists called Monism technically. He commences with something from which everything can be shown to follow necessarily. This something he calls substance, which he defines in the tune of Descartes, "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e. the conception of which does not need the conception of another thing in order to its formation" (Masih 225). A substance, he says, cannot and should not depend on anything else, as is clear from the definition itself. With this formula there can only be one substance; this one substance, he calls God whom he defines as a "Being absolutely infinite" (Masih 225), that is a substance consisting in infinite attributes each of which express eternal and infinite essences. God is existence, and if we want to know God it is existence itself; and everything around you is God.

By infinite, he understands that which is uniquely individual, for substance can be conceived only by referring to itself. In a normal pattern, the tendency of knowing a thing is possible only through comparison or qualifications. Unless it is being qualified by something, no knowledge of it is attained, for there is nothing to be compared of which knowledge is bound to be possessed. A teacher for an instance, is known by his quality, punctuality, sincerity, etc. Similarly, a dark red rose may be described by its scarlet color which is applicable to all roses bearing scarlet and so on. However, the same tendency cannot be applied in the case of the Absolute or Infinite, for all the qualifications are limiting its consistency. Ascribing God to be something say moral or possessing of definite quality limits the Infinite God, for these terms limit Him. Thus, Spinoza points out that "every determination is negation" (Masih 225). For as soon as we determine or qualify substance by describing it, we limit it. Similarly, if we say God is one, literally it cannot be two so on and so forth. Any description of what substance is, indirectly tells us what it is not. Spinoza had logically defined substance that it cannot but be Infinite, since if it were finite, it would bound to be limited by something else. Substance must be self-determined, self-contained, which nothing can affect or modify it. He calls it 'causa sui,' for everything follows from substance in the same way in which all the angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles follows from the definition of a triangle. Hence, by calling it causa sui, Spinoza means that the reality is a self-explanatory, all-inclusive, inter-related whole. Substance and God are used interchangeably in this context, refers to the ontological source of entities, the locus of manifold of existences. Spinoza consistently advocated and maintaining monism, but denied the concept of a creator God. He further asserts that the term 'creation' pre-supposes that there was a time when there was no world and there would be a time when there would be no world at all, despite the fact that substance is eternal or non-temporal. As the substance is self-contained and is infinite, so it has an infinite number of attributes. His famous way is to call this *Natura-Naturata*, i.e. sum-total of all that exists (Masih 228).

6. Conclusion: A Philosophical Dialogue

From the light of what have been discussed, employing philosophy as a means to address things as such, free from presuppositions and preoccupations, unbiased, always taking a neutral stance, with a particular spectacle of Spinoza we realize our impotent capacity and inability to know truth when it comes to the Infinite essence of God. Immanuel Kant by initiating

a counter-movement to modernity, made a distinction of phenomena (things as they appears) and noumena (things-in- themselves), stressing that modernity only accepts a logical and scientific description of God, whereas, reality of God is unknowable by human reasoning. The uncanny nature of God is concealed in the realm of noumena, the unknowable dimension. He was crystal clear about his answer. Reality, understood here as God - noumenal reality is forever closed off to human reason, and this reason is limited to awareness and understanding of its own subjective products. It does not go beyond the phenomena or something that is empirically justified as when the front side of a thing is unconcealed before us, the flip side essentially is concealed simultaneously. To sum up, God encrusted with the nature of Infinite, Absolute, and Transcendental, cannot definitely be defined, for no description can ever divulge the mysterious dimension of God.

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