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Inter Ritual Relations in India

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I am not an orientologist. My interest in Indian studies, especially in Indian spirituality, which ofcourse I consider an "oriental" heritage, is very sincere and committed. This spirituality of our country has helped me very much to come closer to Christ whom I have received through the mediation of the Oriental Church of India. I always look forward to a church which can deeply assimilate the rich spiritual wealth of India to her genius of spirituality and life. I do consider that the Oriental Church in India with its spontaneous affinity to the Indian culture can easily achieve this cherished goal, once it is freed from her slavish addiction to the externals of tradition and develop a master morality capable of making creative synthesis of life.

In dealing with the problem of inter ritual relations my interest is not so much from the angle of the Apostolicity of the ancient Oriental Church in India, which ofcourse I do not deny, but simply from the point of view of justice in the church which alone can bring harmony and wholeness to the church of christ. More than representing a particular group I would rather like to speak for the welfare of the whole church, for the peace and mutual acceptance of all involved within the church.

Since I do not side with the hard core Orientalists who want to re-live the bygone times without any meaningful

adaptation, nor with the dominant Latin group who refuse to accord equality to the Orientals. I have found sometimes myself without a camp to reside in or a party supported by. But I hope truth will embrace all of us, today or tomorrow as it unveils more and more its unseen dimensions.

Call for an attitude of co-existence

Where the world has not been broken-up into fragments by narrow domestic walls; into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake. (*Gitanjali* XXV).

This prayer of Tagore should be the prayer of every one of us and we should envisage a church not broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls, but a church in which everybody is welcome, equal and co-operative. As regards the Indian church, providence has placed it in a peculiar situation and whether we like it or not we should accept it. The Indian Church today is a community comprising three churches. The Indian Church we envisage for the future, whatever be the form of evolution it may finally have, should emerge from the happy co-existence of these three churches. Each individual Church has to contribute to the building up of the Indian Church we would like to have in the future. In order that this may be possible we need mutual understanding, spirit of acceptance and peaceful co-existence. The individual churches, each with different traditions, can be regarded as a blessing because each tradition may reveal certain aspects of reality and religious realization of the same which the other may not have experienced. Thus these various traditions can be complementary. The co-existence of different individual churches can, on the other hand, be looked down upon as a curse if we are determined to see only disharmony and internal dissension in these churches. Hence it is not so much the co-existence that is the problem, but the attitude with which we look at co-existence. Because the fact of the individual churches is already there, I do not think we have any alternative but to learn to co-exist and work for

greater harmony and understanding. The prime condition for such a harmonious co-existence is the basic freedom of existence and expression of every individual church. Only in such a humanized situation dignified cooperation and working for higher unity is possible.

Attitude of Being over against that of Having

Modern secular studies have thrown much light on man's attitude towards life. Gabriel Marcel's famous book *Being and Having* and Eric Fromm's *To be or to Have* deserve special mention in this context. There are two basic attitudes towards life: an attitude of being or that of having. Attitude of Being is an attitude of accepting and respecting being everywhere, the being in all its expressions, the being of myself and the other. Hence a person in this attitude gracefully allows others to be, joyfully acknowledges them as equals and willfully renders his service to them. Attitude of having is an attitude of possessiveness reducing the being of the other to an object in one's possession. Hence the person characterized by this attitude refuses to acknowledge the other as equal, but tolerates him as long as the other serves his self-interest. This dynamics of attitudes very often seen operating in human individuals has wider realms of application. We see the same dynamics in colonialism where one nation dominates over others making them objects of its self-expansion. We see the same dynamics in master-slave relationship, whether exercised in individual or group level. When the women in India or all over the world accuse men for chauvinistic dominance, they too point to man's spirit of having which refuses to recognize the being of women and their integrity, equality and freedom.

Unfortunately we see the same dynamics operating in the heart of the church. When two rites or churches exist the only way for peace and harmony is co-existence with perfect equality, with no slavish dependence of the one on the other, but of course with a spirit of openness to the other and readiness to recognize the dignity of the other. As long as this equality is not a reality there can be no lasting peace in the church, though we may fancy a sort of

peace when one is dominating the other putting him into utter silence. But this peace is very superficial and is ever under the threat of conscientization of the oppressed.

Being and Having in the Indian Church

Coming to the Indian ecclesial scene the church which came to this country along with colonialism participated also in the colonial mentality of having and built up a structure (laws regarding jurisdiction) discarding the being of the ancient apostolic church that was already in this land. Since this is simply unjust no lasting solution can ever be found unless this situation is rectified. Rome, though ultimately responsible for making this situation, has time and again tried to rectify this as well. Equality of Rites and all rights that follow from it are well recognized in the decrees of Vatican II, especially in the decree on the Eastern Churches (cfr. Art 3 & 4). Since the execution of the provisions envisaged in these decrees lagged behind, Pope John Paul II after his historic visit to India, addressed all the Bishops of India with a new pastoral letter, reminding us once again of our obligation to bring into reality what has been envisaged in Vatican II. We are still waiting for the actual execution of the programmes envisaged in Pope's letter.

After experiencing for many years the bad consequences of national expansionism Europe has ultimately given up the spirit of colonialism and has opted for mutual recognition and co-operation, even to the extent of opting for a European common market. Consequently Rome also has given up the idea of Latin empire as the real Catholic Church and has decided to recognize the dignity and individuality and equality of all Rites or individual churches. This new vision and mentality is reflected in the new Latin Code of Canon Law which demands separate Bishops' Conferences wherever there are separate individual churches. Effectively it means that no individual Church, however small it is, can be put under the tyranny of a majority belonging to another church. This shows the growth and evolution of a consciousness ready to recognize the individua-

lity of every person or of a legitimate moral person such as an individual church. A refusal to acknowledge this in India shows only that those who refuse are not grown up to that degree of co-existence and co-operation in which the concerned parties can be ultimately free and independent, yet open, understanding and serving each other. What the Oriental Churches ask for is nothing but a simple acknowledgement of their being, not as an object of any other having, but as a subject freely relating to another subject with no spirit of domination from either side.

The Attitude of Problem and Mystery

Gabriel Marcel presents the attitude of mystery and problem as associates of the attitudes of being and having respectively. For the man of being variety is beauty and co-existence is easily possible. For a man of having that which is different from him and his life style is an irritating presence and hence is to be avoided. Naturally the decrees of Vatican II present the Church of Christ as a community of individual churches, differing in their cultural and liturgical traditions and yet united in the mission of proclaiming their experience of Truth in Jesus Christ. The man of being with his spontaneous openness accepts and acknowledges the being of the other and sees the variety of existence with a spirit of mystery in and through which God reveals the inexhaustible depth of his wealth and beauty on and on. The man of having on the contrary looks at the being of the other as a problem that annoys and irritates him. The inter-ritual relations in the church also can be seen from this angle of mystery and problem. Co-existence of different Rites should be looked at not as a problem to be solved but as an aspect of the mystery of the Church of Christ which is to be lived and relished. Only problems are to be solved; mystery unveils itself in course of time. Naturally the attitude of mystery demands deep faith whereas the attitude of problem is led by self-centered assertiveness. If the arrival of Oriental church into the North of India or the Latin Church to any Oriental region is considered to be a problem, this is because we are not grown up to be people of being-attitude, capable of relishing the mystery of existence.

The Task of the Oriental Church in India

The Oriental Church in India has also to grow and come out of its archaic traditionalism. The church in Kerala seems to be a church which refuses change, especially in its ecclesiastical and religious structures and life-styles. This is partly because of long standing tradition and partly because of its liturgical formation which makes people too much of the past than of the future. Our looking to the past event of Christ and the *anamnesis* there of is not meant to be an empty remembrance, but a remembrance by becoming, namely by allowing to realize in us what happened in Jesus Christ. The mystery of the death and resurrection which is the essence of the remembrance of the Lord should characterize the dynamism of the Oriental Church in India. She should be ready to die to certain archaic traditions if she wants to rise up with a new life. A seemingly false and superficial value system, very often symbolised by the clergy-cassock and religious habit has to give way to more authentic evangelical values such as charity, unity of hearts and sense of justice to the poor and the oppressed. Often we find that these latter values are ignored while the former are carefully observed. The fact that the Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church could not come to an agreement with regard to liturgical matters by no means brings glory to the Oriental Church, but makes it all the more dependent on Rome for matters that could be settled here and thus fosters a slavish morality of passive reception than a master morality of creativity and self-respect. The Oriental Church in Kerala should also be ready to strip herself off her Kerala traditions whenever it is necessary to be one with the culture of a new locality where the church is planted anew.

Conclusion

1. We all look forward to the birth of an Indian Church in which every individual church is free, equal and honoured and is open to the other. Every individual church, while keeping her own identity with a legitimate pride, has also to transcend her own limitation which alone will make her capable of participating in the fullness of the Church of Christ.

2. For this we all should be characterized by an attitude of being rather than of having. We should be ready to acknowledge and accept the presence of the other which is always a call demanding a response. Unless and until this response is given with a heart of openness and joy, the church in India will never be happy or peaceful.

3. In the light of the Holy Father's letter we have to work out a plan to implement what has been envisaged there that we may in the near future realize in India that marvellous mystery of the Universal Church which is a mystery of churches or Rites living in variety and unity (Pastoral letter of John Paul II to the Bishops of India, 28 May 1987, No. 6).

4. Once fears are removed, freedom is granted, with open mind and heart each church should help the other by all means possible to such an extent that, in course of time, the difference of Rites becomes simply a matter of fact but not a problem of life.

I have written this with the fond desire of a vision that should characterise our being, whether belonging to Oriental or Latin Rite. As regards the structural injustice in the Indian church and the mechanism of its operations. I have dealt in detail in my booklet *Justice and Reconciliation*. I do not repeat it here. Once we have seen what is wrong and willingness is shown for mutual understanding and acceptance, all of us have to move from the spirit of individualism characterised by the attitudes of having, problem and self-assertion to a more Christian spirit of participation characterised by the attitudes of Being, mystery and faith.