

Ecumenism and Reunion

Two Basic Issues

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After the Second Vatican Council, at least some raise doubt about the relevance of the *Reunion Movement* of 1930; some even falsely think that Reunion Movement is against the Modern Ecumenism envisaged by the Second Vatican Council. Hence it is useful to clarify the issue. Archbishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios of venerable memory(1882-1953), as a priest in the *Metran Kakshy* (Bishop's faction) of the Malankara Jacobite Church initiated a reform Movement in the Church through the establishment of the Bethany Monastic Order in 1919 at Perunad. He turned the attention of the faithful away from litigation and strife and led them to sacramental and more authentic Christian life. In 1925 he was ordained bishop of Bethany and then he started the Bethany Order for women at Tirumulapuram(1925) and established Bethany parishes independent of the jurisdiction of both the Catholicos and the Patriarch. Vattasseril Mar Dionysius, the Malankara Metropolitan, encouraged him and the other two bishops of his faction to enter into ecumenical negotiations with the Catholic Church. Since Mar Dionysius was engaged in civil litigation with the *Bawa Kakshy* (Patriarch's faction), of the Jacobite Church, he did not personally take part in the meetings. But the bishops had his full support. It was when the High Court judgment of Veera Raghava Ayyankar was against Mar Dionysius, that he encouraged the bishops of his group to think about the possible communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

When the ecumenical negotiations crowned with success, Mar Dionysius withdrew, because by 1929 he won the civil litigation. The Second Catholicos died in 1928 and Rome was not prepared to recognize the position of the Catholicos and the Synod. So the third Catholicos could not take the leadership of the ecumenical activity. So Mar Ivanios was alone left in the scene. He entered into full, visible and canonical communion with the Catholic Church on 20th Septemebr1930.

The communion established in 1930 was in accordance with the ecclesiology of those days. Now we have a post-Vatican ecclesiology. The Malankara Catholic community grew into a Particular Church. Since 1930 it was witnessing to the unity of the Church and the necessity for communion with the Pope, the successor of St. Peter in the ancient See of Rome. All those who were convinced of the necessity of full and visible communion with the Roman Catholic Church followed Mar Ivanios.

It is true that with the Second Vatican Council there is a tremendous change of attitude of the Catholic Church towards the other Churches. But the Council recognized that both, the entering of the individuals into the Catholic Church and the visible communion of the separated Churches with the Roman Catholic Church, are the result of the working of the same Spirit.

The Council Decree on Ecumenism says:

“It is evident that the work of preparing and reconciling those individuals who wish for full Catholic Communion is of its nature

distinct from ecumenical action. But there is no opposition between the two, since both proceed from the marvelous ways of God”(UR 4 # 4). When an individual is convinced of the necessity of entering into canonical communion with the Catholic Church according to his conscience, he is free to enter into it. If persons, out of conviction enter into the Catholic Communion either as individuals or as groups, Catholic Church does not hinder them. But it does not encourage any coercion and, in fact, it is against proselytism. Catholic Church respects the freedom of individuals. But it earnestly seeks the communion of Churches.

Modern ecumenism encourages the canonical communion of Churches with the Roman Catholic Church and work for it. This communion has to be visible and full. That means Catholic Church considers that it is in partial communion with the ancient Apostolic Churches. It has to be perfected. With them the Catholic Church is in *almost* full communion. With the Western Protestant Churches and their filial Churches and ecclesial communities, the relationship is different; but all the same they are also related to the Catholic Church of Christ, in varying degrees. The communion has to be visibly manifested. Catholic Church calls the ancient Eastern Churches *Sister Churches* and recognizes their sacraments, apostolicity and ecclesiality. It considers that the Holy Spirit has appointed their pastors to take care of a portion of the flock of Christ. The Catholic Church entered into ecumenical dialogue with these Churches to perfect this partial communion. It is committed to that sort of ecumenism, envisaged by the Second Vatican council and the post Vatican documents, especially, the *Ecumenical Directory* and the Papal document, *Ut Unum Sint*.

Catholic Church does not consider other Churches as mission fields of the Catholic Church. Nor does it believe that for the sake of salvation one has to change his Church allegiance. On the contrary, it believes that division among the followers of Christ is a grave sin and it has to be remedied and communion should be reestablished. All the Churches in the Catholic communion are irrevocably committed to the unity of all Christians. They consider it as one of their chief priorities, not as one among the many commitments of the Church, but the most important commitment. Catholic Church wishes that the other Churches also realize the change of attitude of the Catholic Church. They should no more maintain a pre-Vatican attitude towards the Catholic Church: an attitude of prejudices, antagonism and confrontation.

The Reunion Movement of 1930 is a Movement originated in the Malankara Orthodox Church. There was no external force behind it. The Movement came from within the Church. All those who came under the *Bethany Revival Movement* entered into this communion, or rather, when there was a spiritual renewal through the activity of Bethany, God showered his blessing of unity and all those who were prepared, entered into visible communion with the Catholic Church. It has grown into a Church in the Catholic communion.

The Malankara Catholic Church also has imbibed the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the post-Conciliar documents. Still there is the old accusation of *sheep stealing*: by the Pope, by the bishops and priests of the Catholic Church. Some dare even to call the Pope *a terrorist and a proselytizer*. The Malankara Catholic Church respects the Sister Churches of the non-Catholic tradition, but it has not taken upon itself the obligation and responsibility to keep the non-Catholic

faithful in the non-Catholic fold. We have to remind humbly our non-Catholic brethren, that they themselves have to undertake that obligation. We have a God given obligation to accept them, if they willingly and freely enter into the visible and full communion with the Catholic Church. We do not believe in proselytism. We have never done that and we will never do that. We are even prepared to make an agreement with any Church on the question of the change of membership from one Church into another. We are prepared to make an interim agreement for inter-Church marriage, without forcing any body to abandon his/her Church membership at the time of marriage. But we cannot take care of the faithful of the non-Catholic Churches, in order to keep them bound in their non-Catholic Churches. Our purpose is to bear witness to the unity and communion of all the believers in Christ and having united look forward to the evangelization of the world.