

ECUMENISM

We have entered into the new Millennium with hopes and expectations of a better world for the entire humanity. We are hopeful that the ecumenical initiatives undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church and other churches and ecclesial bodies under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit during the second half of the 20th century will bear ample fruits in the new century. The third Millennium appears to be an era of convergence. Today nobody sees religion as opposed to science and progress. On the contrary there is emerging an earnest religiosity throughout the world. There is a special quest for the spiritual in the new world. There is a renewed interest in matters religious and spiritual. Man, the image of God, is becoming more and more human. Here one realizes more and more the inner necessity and the innate nature of man of recognizing and proclaiming the Paternity of God and the fraternity of humankind. It becomes very evident recently when almost the entire humanity, all nations and all men of good will, joined hands in the fight against organized crime and terrorism and turned to the Creator for divine assistance.

Human beings have experienced the lie and falsehood of atheism and its collapse. Atheistic communism is a dead thing of the past. There is no more the cold war among nations. The tendency everywhere is for globalization, interdependence and plurality. Man is today more and more dependent on man; nations cannot survive without the other nations. No population or nation can live in seclusion and isolation or as closed entities. The whole world is growing together to be one. The world is today a global village.

The divided Christian communities and churches are realizing more and more the urgent necessity to come to full visible communion as the Lord wishes. They want to fulfill their God-given mission in the world in the new Millennium: to unite the whole mankind in the

New Man, and to be the salt and light of the world. They know that, this can be effectively achieved only by a united Christianity. The mission of the Church is compelling the divided Christians to be united. Even in the divided situation they are seeking ways and means to collaborate, co-operate, co-exist and commit themselves to be one and to dialogue with the other religions in the world.

Recent ecumenical and inter-church meetings have enabled the churches, especially the Apostolic Churches to realize that, what was considered to be points of disagreement and divisions are no more valid reasons to be separated, rather they are merely plurality of expressions; they realized with joy and surprise that the content of faith in several churches is the same, the difference being in the form of expressions. The churches can now accept the “hierarchy of truths” and the plurality in theology. The typical example is the consensus arrived at the Christological faith. Today the Chalcedonian position (one Person in two natures), the Oriental Orthodox position (one nature -one person- of God the Word Incarnate) and the Assyrian position (two kyane-natures in abstract-two qnome -concrete natures-and one parsopa of Filiation-person of the Word) are equally valid and complementary and not contradictory. All the three explain the mystery of Incarnation affirming the oneness of the Incarnate Lord Jesus Christ and his divinity and his humanity without confusion, without separation, without division and without mingling. Ephesus and Chalcedon were points of contention for centuries. They are no more issues of division. If the Churches can mutually recognize the dogmatic formulations, especially of a very important issue such as Christology, the other points of contention are easier, especially the administrative issues. The churches should find a way out and a way of living together. Ecclesiology need not be an insurmountable issue in the ecclesial relationship. But alas, it is the stumbling block of the moment. Not Christ but the Churches themselves. God has given us the grace in our time to be his ambassadors of unity.

The recent agreement between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East regarding the participation of the mysteries between the Chaldean and the Assyrian Church is a great step forward in the path of the ecumenical pilgrimage. The document recognizes the original anaphora of Addai and Mari as it is. It is also a great breakthrough. The Catholic Church took the courageous step to enter into ecumenical dialogue with the Assyrian Church of the East and we find that God is blessing these humble ecumenical pilgrims of these two sister churches. On the whole the tendency everywhere is for mutual love, mutual recognition and mutual trust. The tendency of uniformity is a thing of the past.

There is always a tendency in some churches to be traditional and be on the defensive. It can be seen in any church. But it is seen more and more in those churches which are relatively less numerical, or churches which did not have sufficient opportunity for wider contact with the other churches and ecumenical developments. Some continue the prejudices of the past and harbour on them and it retards their ecumenical pilgrimage. Some may even take a hostile attitude which is in no way conducive to any fruitful dialogue. They appear to be afraid of any change and reform. They seem to follow a blind traditionalism. They consider the essence of Christianity in a petrified traditionalism. Perhaps they think that such an attitude is necessary for their survival. Some churches, in fact, had a bitter past history and are not fully freed from the bleeding wounds from the past. In such cases there should be a process of purification of memory. Unless this purification takes place any amount of bilateral dialogue or ecumenical activity will bear no fruit. Unless the memory is purified and freed from prejudices against one another, the churches will be imprisoned in a frozen dogmatism, petrified institutionalism and blind traditionalism. The other sister churches have a grave obligation to enable such churches to be freed from such pathetic situation and strengthen them in the authentic faith of the Lord.